

FULL STORY OF THE ESPRIT

In November of 1972, Lotus introduced the Silver car concept based on the Europa chassis. The design of the vehicle was courteous of Ital Designs Giorgio Giugiaro's. Giugiaro, who had led an illustrious career as a stylist beginning at Fiat and later moving on to Bertone, then Ghia. He began his own business, Ital Design in 1968. The idea behind the concept came from Tony Rudd, Lotus's Technical Director who joined the company in 1969. The idea was a mid-engine two-seater vehicle that could serve as a replacement for the Europa. The concept, named the M70 project and Kiwi in some circles, evolved into the Esprit a year later when it debuted at the Geneva Auto Show. The vehicle was visually stunning with its wedge shape and clean flowing lines. It was hailed as 'Star of The Show' at the 1975 Paris Motor Shows. By 1975 production began for the Esprit S1 with the first customers receiving the vehicle in 1976. Mounted mid-ship was a 2.0 liter engine capable of producing 160 horsepower. It was given super-car status due to its horsepower-to-weight ratio and its performance characteristics. In 1977 it was given a starring role in the James Bond Film, 'The Spy Who Loved Me'. The Esprit S1 was produced from 1975 through 1978 during which 714 examples were produced with most being exported to the United States. The S1 was replaced by the S2 in 1978 which stayed in production until 1980. The S2 was very similar to the S1 with modifications that resolved many of the issues that plagued the S1. The suspension and engine were improved and minor aesthetical updates transpired in the interior and exterior of the vehicle. There were 100 Special Edition S2 variants created that were adorned in black and gold colours produced as a celebration of the 1978 Formula 1 World Drivers and Constructors Championships and the successes achieved with the F1 Type 79. The S2 was replaced by the S2.2 in 1980 which was basically a S2 with a type 912 2.2 liter engine. With fewer than 100 examples of the S2.2 produced, it is considered extremely rare in modern times. Performance was exceptional with a zero-to-sixty time of around seven seconds. This British sports car was exciting to drive and carried the tradition of Colin Chapman's Lotus cars and followed in the legacy of successful Grand Prix winners. February of 1980 saw the introduction of the Turbo Esprit Type 82 at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The engine was a 910 unit that when coupled with the turbocharger produced 210 horsepower. The chassis of the vehicle was modified to handle the extra horsepower and reworked to accommodate the larger engine configuration. A new splitter and front bumper were added to the vehicle. The first 100 examples were adorned in Essex Lotus racing livery. A year later Lotus introduced the affordable Esprit S3 Type 85. During that same year James Bond, a.k.a. 007, drove a Turbo Esprit in the movie 'For Your Eyes Only'. The S3 and the Esprit Turbo were built on the same chassis and suspension. The reasons were to eliminate overhead and reduce the cost of both vehicles. The Esprit received an active suspension in 1983. The Active suspension was later be used in the Type 99 F1 car which, driven by Ayrton Senna in 1987, would prove the cars performance on the racing circuit. During the years 1984 through 1986, 1427 examples of the Turbo Esprit were sold. In 1987, to commemorate the 20th Anniversary of Lotus at Norfolk, Lotus introduced a limited edition Turbo Esprit HC. The acronym HC represented High Compression, in reference to the modified 2.2 liter engine that produced 215 horsepower. In October of 1987, the Peter Stevens designed Lotus Esprit was introduced. The design featured a new body that was smoother and round in appearance. The interior was modernized. 1988 was Lotus's 40th Anniversary and to celebrate a 40 Limited Edition Esprit Turbo models were produced. The vehicles were distinguished by their white pearlescent paint with matching wheels and blue interior. In 1989 Lotus introduced their fastest edition of the Esprit, the Esprit Turbo SE. Powered by a 2.2 liter engine and producing 264 horsepower, the vehicle could race from zero-to-sixty in just 4.7 seconds. Top speed was achieved at nearly 165 mph. Leather interior, air-conditioning and tilt/removable glass sunroof was now offered as standard equipment on the Esprit. In 1994 Lotus introduced the Esprit S4S at the British Motor Show. The new Esprit had a 285 horsepower engine, modified suspension, and a new wing, wheel and tire package. For 1990, Lotus returned to racing with 3 factory supported Lotus Esprit Turbo SE models. Competing in the USA 'Showroom Stock' series, the vehicles captured four of the nine races they entered. The 1992 Esprit received interior improvements which provided the passenger with more room and better access. Safety was enhanced by improving the rear visibility for the driver. This trend continued in 1993 when the Lotus Esprit S4 was given power steering as standard equipment.

In 1993 two Lotus Esprit Sport 300 models were entered in the gruelling 24 Hours of LeMans race. This was the first works-supported entry for the Lotus factory in more than 30 years. A year later the Lotus Esprit Sport 300 was driven by Thorkild Thyrring when it captured the British National GT series. In 1996 Lotus introduced the Esprit V8 at the Geneva Auto Show. The twin-turbocharged, 32valve, 3.5 liter V8 produced 350 horsepower and went from zero-to-sixty in around 5 seconds. Improvements continued throughout the vehicle with an improved braking system with a new Kelsey-Hates ABS controller and vacuum servo system. A year later Lotus introduced the Esprit V8GT at the London Auto Show. Void were some of the luxurious amenities found in the V8 version as a means for reducing the overall weight of the vehicle. The interior was new, complete with updated

instruments and layout. In 1998 Lotus introduced the Esprit Sport 350 at the Birmingham Auto Show. Improvements included brakes, carbon fiber wing, and magnesium wheels. The result was the most technologically advanced road-going Esprit supercar to date, with a top speed of 175 mph. Due to rising emission regulations, Lotus decided to abandon the four-cylinder Esprit, making 1999 the final year of its production. The Esprit has been featured in movies such as *Pretty Woman*, *007*, and *Basic Instinct*. Introduced in the early 1970's, production began in 1976 and concluded in 2004. A new version of the Esprit is set to be released in 2007. Based on the Lotus Europa, it was given the name Esprit in keeping with the traditional Lotus 'E' naming standard. The original powerplant was a 2.0 Liter engine but quickly advanced to a 2.2 liter unit in 1980. A turbocharger system amplified the output with horsepower skyrocketing to over 300. In 1987 Peter Stevens redesigned the Esprit giving it a modernized shape but keeping the tradition of the Giorgetto Giugiaro's 'folded paper' designs of the original 1970's Esprit. An eight-cylinder was fitted into the engine bay and the zero-to-sixty time sank to the mid four-seconds. The Esprit is a wonderful example of form and function. The Lotus Esprit was an amazing vehicle. Its aerodynamic design, light weight material, advanced technology and potent engine made the vehicle a successful and attributed to its nearly thirty-years of production.

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