

LOTUS FOURTEEN INTRODUCTORY

The hit of the 1957 Earls Court Motor Show was the Lotus Elite. It was considered then as it remains today one of the world's great automotive designs.

The Elite was conceived in the autumn of 1956 and first shown at Earls Court but it was nearly two years before it was in full production. As the Lotus Cars facility at that time operated out of a small workshop at Hornsey production it had to wait for the larger facility at Cheshunt, Hertfordshire to become operational. As a result the first buyers began receiving their cars in late 1958.

The last Elite rolled out of Cheshunt in September 1963. Thus ended five years of production yielding a total of 986 cars (actually there were fewer than the 986 "total" automobiles produced as approximately twenty body/chassis units, sans power train and running gear, were supplied for "written off" examples). The Elite's obituary was appropriately written by Road & Track, "Gone it is, the way of the Allard J-2, the L-29 Cord, the Mercedes SS-K and other designs of sacred memory. A beautiful design was the Elite, one of the great designs of the post WWII era, one that seems certain to be looked back upon as a landmark of some sort in automobile design. Without question, it was one of the best, if not the very best looking Grand Touring car ever built. The body, all fiberglass, was designed entirely in the Lotus works at Luton, England, and was not only an immediate and lasting success but also an example, perhaps the only example, of the fluid plasticity of speed/motion to be captured in the glass fiber and resin medium."

To this day the Elite shares little with other cars but its significance when introduced was even more apparent because it was the first Lotus designed for series production and intended primarily for road use rather than racing and it was the first car ever to use glass-reinforced plastic as a major structural element. It was also, at the time of its introduction, the only small British sports car with an overhead camshaft engine, four-wheel disc brakes and fully independent suspension.