



More grown-up than its predecessor, the Elise delivers an exceptional driving experience for enthusiasts

At a glance

Price range: £22,995

Engine: 1.8-litre petrol

Body style: 2-door roadster

Favourite model: There's only one!

How much? £22,295

How fast? 125mph; 0-60mph: 5.7 secs

Featured in: Issues 631, 637



LOTUS ELISE

Commended

Porsche Boxster

THE Boxster S saw Porsche's baby roadster steal the top spot last year. Decent practicality and one of the most elegant roof mechanisms ever devised mark the soft-top out as a brilliant all-rounder, while its flat-six mid-mounted engine and sparkling chassis deliver a memorable driving experience.

Toyota MR2

IN its own way, the Japanese roadster is almost as focused as the Elise, with sharp handling, precise steering and a fantastic 138bhp 1.8-litre VVT-i engine. Add a well designed, generously equipped interior plus a bargain-basement price and you have one of the finest roadsters ever built.

Best roadster

WHEN the original Elise was launched in 1996, not only did it send a shockwave through the lightweight roadster market, it turned Lotus's fortunes around as well. So a lot was resting on the latest evolution of its groundbreaking sports car.

The result is a roadster that surpasses the original in almost every respect. Despite being based on the same extruded aluminium chassis, it is wider and longer than its predecessor. This gives the newcomer a squat, aggressive appearance in keeping with its new body style. Gone are the cutesy headlamps and cheery rear end to be replaced by harder, more muscular detailing inspired by the marque's M250 concept.

The fiddly roof mechanism which blighted the original's appeal has also been reworked, making the lid far easier to fit and remove. And climbing into the spartan, brushed aluminium cockpit isn't quite the humiliating process it used to be either, thanks to a lower, narrower door sill. With a miserly boot and no cubby holes to speak of, the Elise is a dictionary definition of impracticality, but few other vehicles can

emulate that race-car feel. The driver is perched only a couple of inches above the floor with the wheel and pedals staggered perfectly in front. A 1.8-litre 16-valve engine with 120bhp might not sound like a recipe for high-speed thrills but, mounted in the Elise's featherweight chassis, the K-Series unit gives breathtaking performance. Reaching 60mph from standstill takes only 5.7 seconds, and the car will go on to achieve a top speed of 125mph. But the secret of the Elise's attraction isn't its maximum speed; it's how it gets there.

From the scalpel-sharp steering reflexes to the perfect rear-drive balance, the Lotus is a delight to drive. And revisions to the suspension have made it more supple and forgiving on the limit, so drivers can explore its potential without risking life and limb. If you crave a raw, uncompromising and affordable driving experience, the Elise is surely all the car you'll ever need.

“The steering wheel gives so much intimate feedback that the whole car feels alive”

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