

## VGJ4 – "One of the finest Lotus Sevens made"

In the October issue, I mentioned the limited production and special Sevens that were made by Lotus. The one-off 'Three-7' clubmans racer of 1965, the thirteen Twin-Cam SS road cars of 1969, the only Lotus Seven S of 1969 and the Coventry Climax engined de Dion Series One cars of 1957/8. With their de Dion rear suspension, alloy o.h.c. engine and disc brakes with aluminium calipers all round, the latter were really just Le Mans specification Lotus Elevens with Seven bodies.



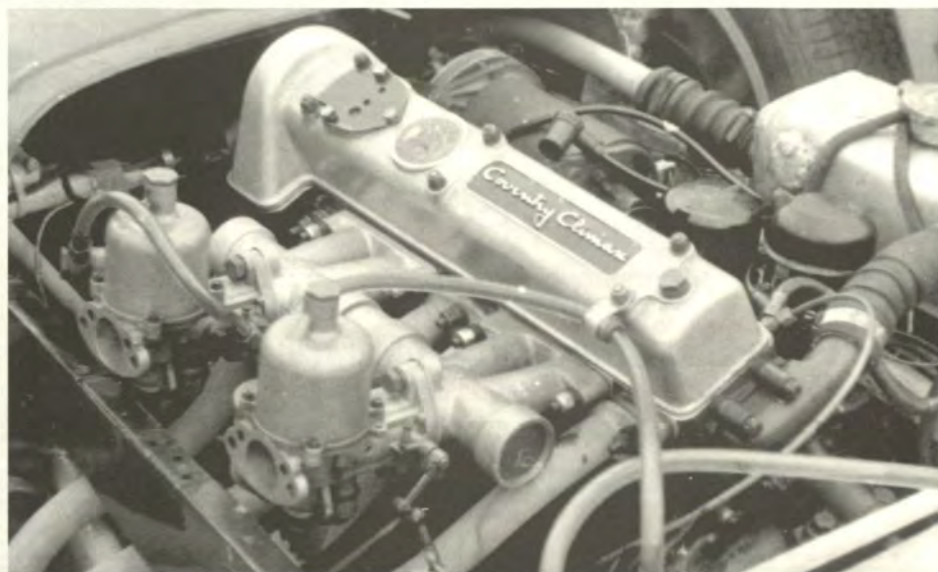
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According to the records only five of these left the Lotus factory of which four had 1098cc. FWA engines and were:- The first Lotus Seven, #400, which was supplied to Edward Lewis, a long standing Lotus customer and successful racer who, by making his own 'Edward Lewis Special' and embarrassing Chapman, was instrumental in pushing the Seven into production. It was in #400 that Edward competed so successfully, first time out, at the Brighton Speed Trials on 7th September 1957. This car was last heard of somewhere in Africa.

#404 which was supplied to Jack Richards who, as well as being a long standing Lotus customer and successful competitor, was also Competition Secretary of Club Lotus. This car was described in Ian H. Smith's book as "one of the most beautifully finished sports-racing cars ever to be seen - every possible part on the engine was chromium plated, even down to the dipstick." The car is still in the U.K.

#462 which was sold to Eric Pantlin, a motorcycle racer who had raced an Eleven and a Jaguar XK150 during the 1957 season. Eric specialised in short circuit racing and in 1959 had three 1st and two

2nd places from eleven races. The car was found wrecked in a quarry in 1980 and was restored and is now believed to be in Japan. #479 the last of the Series One de Dion cars went to James Obeysekere in Ceylon







(now Sri Lanka) where it is believed to still be with him or his family today. At this point it is worth noting that #436, Reg: 7TMT, the car that I featured last month, was actually a 'live' axle car like other production Series One cars, using Nash Metropolitan BMC parts at the rear. It was the factory demonstrator and first of the Climax powered Lotus Super Seven models, later dubbed the Lotus Seven "C", that made up about 10% of the Series One production.

The other Climax de Dion car, #421, was very much a one-off having, not only the bigger 1460cc. FWB engine, but, according to a letter from the engine manufacturers, one of the last from a batch of engines that in 1956/7 were made for Cooper and Lotus to develop their Formula Two cars in readiness for the FPF twin cam racing units when they were delivered.

The story of this car and how it came to be was apparently to do with Colin Chapman needing a Porsche and the fact that it was cheaper for him to do a swap with someone who had what he wanted than to buy one outright from a dealer. The reason that he needed a Porsche varies depending what you believe. One story goes that it was because he wanted to find out why they were still using drum brakes and how they worked so well. The other more believable version was because Dennis Jenkinson the famous motoring journalist had one and raved on

about how wonderful it was for driving between the European race circuits! Either way a man called Paul Fletcher had what Chapman wanted and a deal was struck: "your Porsche for a very competitive sports racing car". Paul was supplied with the car in the middle of February 1958; he tells me that whilst it had to be in kit form for purchase tax reasons he remembers that the engine and gearbox was already fitted and that outwardly there was very little to do. However, he had problems getting the engine started and in the end telephoned the factory who sent Mike Costin and Keith Duckworth along to sort it out. Then when up and running, it was taken to Brands Hatch where Graham Hill did some laps and setup the suspension. What Paul got in the deal was arguably the finest Lotus Seven ever made. The engine, as I mentioned, was a leftover unit that was originally made for testing Formula 2 chassis' whilst Lotus and Cooper waited for the twin-cam FPF units to arrive. Coventry Climax said that the FWB engines were highly sought after both new and second hand as they were more suitable for hill climbs and sprints than the smaller FWA versions, as only 3,000 rpm was required for the optimum take-off. They also gave 6,400 rpm as the redline, saying that more was unnecessary and risky. Even as late as 1960 they shunned the use of twin Weber carburettors as giving

less torque than the two 1fi" H4 SU's. The gearbox was a BMC A30 unit with close ratio straight cut gears which was found to be troublesome and was, in 1960, changed for a ZF unit, similar to that used in a Type 14 Elite. The clutch was a twin plate one and the differential was also a ZF unit of 4.5:1. The de Dion was identical to that used in a Series Two Le Man Eleven and the wheels were all 15" 6-bolt magnesium wobbly webs. Indeed a high specification for a 1958 sports car, registered for the road!

Paul "turned the thing over very slowly on the bend just before the pits" whilst racing at Mallory Park. "I think the diff locked solid" he says. Very soon after, Paul was persuaded to sell it by his new wife and it found a new home with Graham Warner's Chequered Flag Garage. In September 1958 it competed at the Brighton Speed Trials and Graham campaigned the car throughout the 1959 season with great success. In 1960 it was bought by Miss Betty Haig, granddaughter of Earl Haig of WW1 "Your country needs" you fame. Betty had the gearbox changed and the engine rebuilt by the young Cosworth Engineering Company at a cost of £65 before winning the National Ladies Hillclimb Championship two years running in 1960 and 1961. At the end of the 1961 season it was sold to John Brown who hill climbed it for a couple of seasons. After that it's ownership went to Edward Worswick who sold it to the current owner Eddie Jenkinson of Preston in Lancashire in 1966. According to the factory records, of the 243 Series One cars built between September 1957 and July 1960, approximately 60% had 1172cc. 100E side-valve Ford, 30% 948cc. BMC "A" Series and 10% Coventry Climax engines. Of the latter only one is shown to have had the larger Coventry Climax FWB 1460cc. unit. A very rare car indeed!

Of the previous owners: Paul Fletcher is living on the Kent coast, Graham Warner is restoring vintage aircraft at Duxford, Betty Haig has alas passed away and John Brown and Edward Worswick are still living in Lancashire.

**JWW**