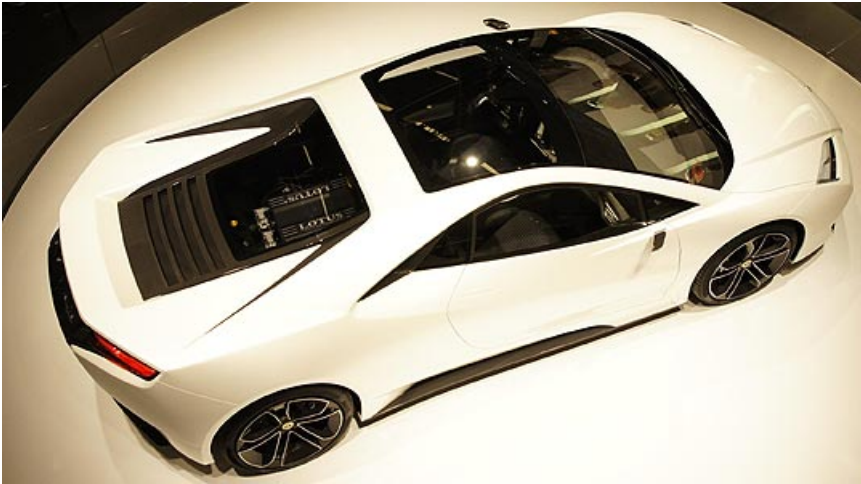


CLASSIC DRIVER

Lotus: Design Analysis



It is a natural development in the automotive business, says Chris Hrabalek, and arguably in any business, that the appointment of a new CEO usually leads to a gigantic domino wave, where all the top-management pieces crumble, one after another, only to be replaced by new ones.

The launch of **Lotus's** new models at the recent **Paris Motor Show** should, therefore, not have come as completely unexpected news, given the change in strategic and design direction. What did come as a surprise, though, was the sheer number of models that were launched – and how similar and historically non-coherent they all appear. It's a bit like pulling a series of Russian dolls out of a magic hat, when everyone only really expected (and wanted) a bunny.

Quite why **Lotus** then had to stick with such historic names as '**Elan**', '**Elite**' and '**Esprit**', and re-use the contemporary '**Elise**', is beyond me.



I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that it took more than a second to realise that the **Lotus** line-up was not a presentation of a '**New Celica**' with different colour and trim options, but a whole new product range. I dare anyone, bar the guy that had to paint them, to instantly spot the difference. It's a bit like having triplets and giving them all the same name. And as for the contemporary Elise owner, when confronted with the successor to his current model – it must be like going to bed with a supermodel wife and waking up next to the neighbour's couch potato. Although I must admit that I find the volume and proportions of the yellow one nice, and appreciate the graphic details of the white one.



Nevertheless, I can't stop thinking that they feel like a significant mutation of **Lotus DNA**. One could argue that the constant re-heating of the **Elise** formula or the daily launch of yet another special edition couldn't have been a long-lasting solution either (and that previous incarnations, such as the current '**Europa**', were inexcusable), but one must respect the previous management's ability to make the most out of a no doubt very limited budget.

Which leads me to my next point. The enormous cost of launching five new models – six, if you count the new track-only **125** – and, even more importantly, the investment needed to actually develop them and take them to production, must be proportionally similar to the **VW Group** going to next year's **Geneva Salon** with 101 new concept cars, all intended for the road.

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