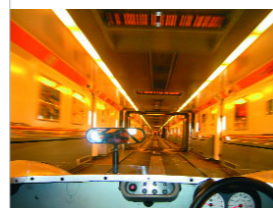




English mustard in Dijon

Lotus Sport Vehicle Development Manager Nick Adams and Vehicle Development Engineers Louis Kerr and Simon Andrew recently wowed Dijon with a little of our own Norfolk mustard! Instead of Nick's usual Technical Tips he tells us just what he's been up to the infamous Lotus Circuit Car.



Due for limited production in 2007, the Circuit Car made its debut at Shelsey Walsh in the summer of 2005.

First shown to the public as a concept back in the summer of 2005 at the Centenary Celebration meeting at Shelsey Walsh Hillclimb, the Lotus 'Circuit Car' is scheduled to go into production in limited numbers early in 2007. Development of the car is coming along very well and recently reached a stage where almost all the ride and handling work had been completed by the Lotus Sport team and the next step was to test the car out at a number of tracks around Europe to finalise the geometry and damper settings - as well as prove the car's durability under hard track use. Where legal, the Circuit Car is capable of being driven to and from track days on the road, so it was decided to fit the necessary lights, exhaust catalyst and other equipment and drive the car to each event rather than take it on a trailer.

Given that it was by now late September and Autumn was starting to make its chilly presence felt, it was with some sense of foreboding that Nick Adams and his team decided that the first event they should attend in their roofless, doorless, heaterless car would be the Lotus Cup Europe round at Dijon-en-Prenois in the west of France, some 600 miles away. In best Lotus Sport tradition the car was ready to take its first trip on the road the night before they were due to depart, and so Nick donned his full face crash helmet and took it home that night to see how it went.

The answer was bl**dy fast!

With a kerb weight of just 720kg including all road equipment and a full tank of fuel, together with more than 240PS of torque supercharged power to haul it along, the usable performance was beyond anything Nick had experienced on the road before. In his own words "Although I was by then used to driving the car hard on our test track, the wide open spaces and familiarity with the track tends to reduce the perception of speed, whereas the narrow country lanes leading away from Lotus really emphasise just how fast you are going. Pulling onto the A11 dual carriageway required a great deal of restraint to avoid breaking the national speed limit by a large margin before even leaving the slip road..."

"The reaction of other road users to the car was hilarious; I don't think I have ever seen so many camera

phones in action when driving any other car on the road before - and I have certainly never had a police car pull alongside so the uniformed passenger could take a picture! This car is not for the shy and retiring type. I put about 70 miles on the car that night and the only issues that came to light were the lack of rear vision from the side mirrors at speed and excessive buffeting of the head due to having too low a wind deflector screen fitted. I was very pleasantly surprised at how usable the car was at normal road speeds, with a more compliant ride than I had been expecting and very little noise below 60mph."

Back at Hethel the following day, Nick and his team quickly rigged up a taller wind deflector and popped on the centre mirror from Nick's Type 23 as a temporary measure until something more suitable could be sourced. They then slung a spare set of tyres and some tools in the back of the Corsa support van and headed off into the sun.

Nick's two partners in crime for the trip were Simon Andrew and Louis Kerr, both Development Engineers working for Lotus Sport. With Louis selflessly taking the first stint in the Corsa and Simon riding shotgun in the Circuit Car, they headed off rapidly from Hethel in the direction of the Channel Tunnel crossing at Dover. Simon and Nick soon decided that it was quite possible to run road speeds with just sunglasses on for protection, with the higher wind deflector doing a good job of pushing most debris and wind above their heads (although they had to watch out for the occasional bee or stone zipping past them...)

Running around the M25 during the peak of rush hour proved painless, the limiting factor on how quickly they could negotiate the traffic being how long Louis could keep his foot flat to the floor in the van! As one might have predicted, the car attracted a high degree of interest from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at the border. It took quite some time to persuade them that the bonnet wouldn't open and Nick finally had to resort to waving at the officers from one side while they looked through the wheel arch on the other side to prove there was no contraband within.



The team set out to prove the car's versatility on both track and road.

For the benefit of this trip, it had been decided to run the car at a conservative 110mm ride height all round rather than the ultra-low 90F/100R the car has been designed for; as a consequence, there were no problems getting onto Le Shuttle and within no time the team was in France.

The 100 or so mile run from Calais to the overnight stop in Rheims took an uneventful two hours, with the van, by now in Nick's hands, managing 38 minutes on continuous full throttle at one point. The process of finding somewhere to stay proved less straightforward, with the two cars grinding around the centre of Rheims for an hour or so before a safe place to leave the car was found. By this stage they had attracted quite a lot of interest from the hot hatch cruisers and were extremely grateful when the very kind receptionist at the Holiday Inn allowed them to park the Circuit Car, although she had no rooms available. They did eventually find the rather unusually titled 'Club Musica Latino' Hotel at around 1.00am - and also found out why it was so titled when the music finally stopped at 4.00am...

September, Saturday 16th started badly with the café next door refusing to serve breakfast, so it was decided to start the last leg of the journey to Dijon straight away. Unfortunately the lack of brain food caused the Circuit Car and the van to go their separate ways just north of Chalon en Champagne, one along the A26 south and one along the A4 east. Whoops! With the van phone battery dead, and Nick and Louis in the Circuit Car now well ahead of Simon, they chose to stop at the first service station they saw and trust that Simon would have the same idea. As the Circuit Car roared into the

service station, they spied an S2 Elise - then panned left and saw a further 25 Lotus of all shapes and sizes. Quelle surprise! These were the returning survivors of the 'Stelvio or Bust' run, who were likewise rather startled to see the Lotus Circuit Car prototype and two Lotus Sport engineers, windswept and grinning from ear to ear, rather randomly in the middle of France (ten minutes later the party was complete when Simon and the van made an appearance!) Once a Stelvio or Bust sticker had been applied to the front wing of the car (where it proudly remains to this day), it was decided that everyone would make the most of the coincidence and an impromptu photo shoot was arranged around the petrol pumps.

After a bit of breakfast (to prevent any more tours of French motorways and slip roads), they continued on route towards Troyes. Once at Troyes, it was onto the N71 and the scenic route to Dijon, running alongside the Seine most of the way.

As we thundered along the country roads and through such scenic villages as Saint Parres Les Vaudes and Bar Sur Seine, it was inevitable that the Gendarmes (the French National Police) would take an interest in the Circuit Car. Just south of Charrey Sur Seine, two motorcycle patrolmen caught up and proceeded to pull the Circuit Car and the van over! Merde!

Gendarme: Les papiers de véhicule s'il vous plait
 Nick: Oui, ici ils sont. Je suis très désolé pour ma conduite
 Gendarme: Non, ce n'était pas vous. C'était la camionnette
 Nick: Simon, it's the van they want! Hee hee hee hee!
 Gendarme: Pénalité de 90 euros, ou 22 euro si nous pouvons prendre quelques images
 Nick: Bien sûr. Simon, cough up!

The trio escaped with a reduced fine of 22 euros, some photos and a rather red-faced Simon.

Onwards onto Dijon and the road became fantastic. Rapid changes in camber and altitude leading down towards St Seine L'Abbaye and Val Suzon showed the amazing pace of the Circuit Car - Nick commenting that with its open cockpit and supercharged soundtrack, the experience from the driving seat must have been very close to the glory days of the Targa Florio. Slowing down to negotiate each of the many small villages along the route there were thumbs ups and appreciative waves from the villagers, adding to the Targa like experience!

Powering up the valley roads at twice the rate expected and disappearing out of sight of the poor little van, only the deafening note of the exhaust reverberating off the valley walls remained to give away the direction taken. The van certainly earned its money that day. Twenty glorious minutes later they were at the circuit and drove into the paddock to light applause; nobody thought the crazy Rosbifs would make it.

Sunday morning saw the first qualifying run for the Regularity event in which the car was entered. Preparation was limited to sticking the race numbers on, crossing out the "272" numbers left over from its Shelsey Walsh debut and checking the tyre pressures and oil level. Never having driven at Dijon before, Nick only knew the circuit layout from the famous TV footage of Gilles Villeneuve and Rene Arnoux banging the wheels of their F1 cars all the way around the last two or three laps of the French Grand Prix there back in 1979.

As a consequence, Nick took things steady for the first few laps of the twisting, undulating circuit before starting to let the car off the leash. The car was impressively fast and very

easy to adjust, even at the limit, and Nick soon set a time which secured provisional pole for the afternoon's race. The club organisers had arranged some additional open sessions, so full advantage was taken to better learn the track before the second qualifying session - where Nick improved his time to claim pole by a comfortable half-second.

There are two approaches to the Lotus Cup Europe Regularity event. Regularity is won by the car which runs the most consistent lap times throughout the event, so theoretically even the slowest car in the field can win. In practice, the field is divided into two camps; those who try to win the Regularity and those who just enjoy a flat out scratch race to the flag, ignoring the Regularity aspect. Nick was firmly in the latter camp, and used all of his racing experience to bunch up the pack during the latter stages of the rolling start lap before using the tremendous acceleration of the Circuit Car to outdrag everyone to the start line from the last corner. The race went precisely to plan for the first six laps, with Nick holding back a little and keeping a respectful two second lead over the second placed car. Interestingly, during this period the Circuit Car's lap times were so consistent that it was also looking a strong contender for the Regularity prize, which wasn't part of the plan.

Things changed rather on the seventh lap when a Porsche 911, running in a Porsche scratch race at the same time as the Lotus Regularity event, dropped the contents of its sump on the approach to the first corner - and got a further half a lap around the circuit before blowing up its engine completely.

Approaching the corner at some 150mph, Nick was amongst the first to find the oil, with the car at one stage pointing at 45 degrees to the direction he was travelling. It was here that the ABS made its presence felt and, with its help, Nick was able to get the car back straight and scrabble enough



Although the car was favourably received by everyone who saw it, the guys were still pleased that the Mayor wasn't in...



'As we thundered along the roads, it was inevitable that the Gendarmes would take an interest in the Circuit Car.'

speed off to make an entry - albeit an undignified one - to the corner. Thankfully he also just managed to stay on the black stuff on the exit.

Thereafter both Nick and the Circuit Car's traction control had to work overtime. The oil was soon spread on the racing line over almost the whole lap and Nick had to use all his wily racing experience to stay ahead of the second placed driver, whose circuit knowledge was far superior.

The Circuit Car's agility and driveability enabled Nick to stay ahead to the flag, but the fast pace that he had maintained up to the point when the oil went down proved impossible to match once the track conditions deteriorated, so (thankfully!) Overall Regularity honours went to Bernard Fuchs for Red Motorsport, with his Cup 240 car. Second was Bernard Barrille in his 111R, an entry from Lotus Dealer host, Marcassus Molesti Sport, with Luc de Cock taking third for Team Verhiest. Rounding out the top six in order were Didier Hermans (Cup 240, Team Verhiest), Nick in the Circuit Car and Christophe Lisandre (Cup 240, Team Verhiest). With such a great result on the car's first circuit race, the team was set on a well deserved celebration and a very pleasant evening was subsequently spent on the beautiful ancient cobbled streets of Dijon.

Breakfast at 8am afforded the luxury of a later than normal lie in, with all sights then trained on Calais, some 564km north. The day began with the most crisp and sunny of mornings, so again the more scenic route was taken back along the N71. Refuelling and lunch were taken in the village of Arcis Sur Aube before another impromptu photo shoot in front of the Mayor's House, complete with a few spectators. Luckily the Mayor wasn't home at the time...

The remainder of the run back to the coast was uneventful, other than for the constant attention of other road users and a brief rain storm which showed that, at speeds above 40mph, only the Circuit Car's occupants' heads get wet!

At one point on the journey, Simon did notice a video camera trained on him from one of the cars on the autoroute and so he did a little posing for his audience's benefit, the results of which were posted on the popular website *You Tube* a few days later!

As is traditional on all foreign trips, a swift detour was made via a Calais supermarche, where the Circuit Car was stocked up with local French delicacies - well, the van was full of tyres, spares and tools, so it seemed an opportune moment to test the Circuit Car once more.

As with all previous tasks thrown at it, the Circuit Car took the new role firmly in its stride and hopefully put to bed any ridiculous rumour that this is anything other than a superbly practical everyday car!

The team arrived back in Hethel in the early evening after averaging a pretty decent pace all day and covering just over 600 miles since breakfast. Overall, the car had completed some 1300 miles of enthusiastic road use, over 200 laps of the Dijon race track and taken pole position, fastest lap and a strong result in the Regularity contest.

And just what had the team done to the car during the trip? Oh, a huge list of intense support activities - they checked pressures and levels, fired some fuel into the tank and washed it, once. And what did they do when they got back to Hethel? Why, argue over who got to take the car home that evening of course. It really is that good...

FOOTNOTE

While stopped at the barriers for the tunnel on the way home, an interesting phenomenon came to light. In the constant blast of air whilst driving the Circuit Car, Simon's hair had formed a perfectly aerodynamic teardrop shape. Could this become a Lotus Sport badge of honour for all future Circuit Car drivers, the team asked itself?

Simon sports his new aerodynamic 'hairdo', while the car, once again, proves its suitability as an all-rounder.

