Lotus Elise

By Brice Cooper
Photography by Hector Maldonado

In last month's review of the Lotus Elise, we tested the two-seater's ability to function as a daily driver on city streets. Although it passed the street test with flying colors, the true testing ground of any performance vehicle can best be judged at the track. Fortunately, I was able to do just that when Fox Valley Motorcars invited me to a Lotus-only track day at the Autobahn country club raceway in Joliet, Illinois.

When I arrived, I was greeted by Mike Wogronic and Bill Nuccio Jr. of Fox Valley. My toy for the day was to be a gorgeous copper-colored Elise, which judging by the tread left on the tires, had already seen a bit of track time. As a newbie to the track, I was shown the ropes by one of the developers of the Elise, flown in from England. I have to say that those Brits take their motoring quite seriously. After I was shown what the Elise was capable of in competent hands, I took the wheel.

The Lotus has a tremendous horsepower to weight ratio that makes it a perfect fit at the track. Everything on the Elise was developed to coincide with the other components of the car. The brakes are big enough for the horsepower, and the horsepower is just enough for the suspension. This careful planning in the early stages makes the Elise a true track demon. I was amazed at how agile the car was without being squirrelly, and was able to maintain a good pace, feeling the feedback in my seat, just as you would in any purpose-built racecar. This is an automobile that communicates with the driver on a constant basis. This also means that the driver needs to listen when pushing the Lotus to the max, right before he spins out in turn seven...hypothetically that is.

The variable valve timing in the healthy Toyota Celica GTS engine makes for an exhilarating gust of power at around six thousand rpm. There's always just enough power at every corner. I felt quite comfortable in the Elise doing things that a street car should never do. My favorite part of the car was the ability to go extra deep into the corners under late braking. I was simply amazed at the braking potential of a stock automobile that costs less than $50,000.

The time that I spent with the Elise cemented a place in my all time favorite track day vehicles. The Lotus performed flawlessly and took tremendous amounts of abuse that no other street car has yet to compete with. In two full days of track time, the Lotus was still running strong and stopping on the stock brake pads. This is a testament to the commitment of Lotus to create a true super car. The only discomfort that I felt in the Elise had to do with the facial cramps I experienced while grinning ear to ear.

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