Significant Lotus anniversaries during 2021

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Lotus Type 21.

Lotus has always produced remarkable sporting vehicles, and 2021 sees many anniversaries for the firm...

Watch this space: Wheels-Alive is aiming to bring you more information about these cars as we move through this year.

There are numerous significant anniversaries for Lotus to celebrate in 2021. The firm tells

us that they will deliver more detail on these cars – and the fabulous stories behind them – later in the year. To whet your appetite, here's what they say so far about their historic and genuinely iconic models…

70 years since the Lotus Mark III

This year marks seven decades since Lotus founder Colin Chapman built his third car, aka the Mark III. For the 1951 racing season he decided to focus on circuit-based events and assembled a vehicle to compete in the 750 Formula. He started with a 1932 Austin Seven saloon, bought for £15, and stripped it back to its chassis to rebuild from the ground up. Replacing almost every element, his creation weighed just 370 kg (816 lb)s, had a 0 – 50 mph time of 6.6 seconds and a top speed in excess of 90 mph. Registered as LMU3, it first raced at Castle Combe circuit in Wiltshire and won. It performed impressively all year and was clearly faster than any competitor. It was even used by Colin to take girlfriend (and later wife) Hazel to Scotland on holiday!

60 years since the Lotus Type 21

For Chapman, a huge amount changed in the 10 years after the Mark III. With a prototype built from scratch in just six weeks, the Lotus Type 21 was his F1 race car for the 1961 season. He devised an innovative way to improve the mid-engined car's aerodynamic profile; it sounds simple and obvious now, but lowering the seating position and leaning the driver back to reduce the running height and centre of gravity was pioneering at the time.

The car made its debut at the Monaco Grand Prix, but its one and only Grand Prix victory was at Watkins Glen, USA, with Innes Ireland at the wheel. It was the debut F1 win for a 'works team' Lotus.

50 years since the Lotus Type 56B (aka the turbine car), and the Lotus Europa Twin Cam

Chapman decided the Lotus Type 56 Indycar could be reworked as an F1 racer for 1971,

and it was to be known as the Type 56B. It used a Pratt & Whitney turbine engine and ran on aviation-grade kerosene, considered a safety improvement as it was less flammable than regular race fuel. Finished in the red, white and gold of sponsor Gold Leaf, the pioneering car made its world debut at the Daily Mail Race of Champions at Brands Hatch on 21 March with Emerson Fittipaldi at the wheel. The track's uneven surface didn't suit the design, and repeated 'bottoming out' led to retirement on lap 33. Technical issues blighted further appearances at various circuits. F1 regulation changes meant development was halted and only one Type 56B chassis was ever completed.

Also in 1971 was the debut of the Lotus Europa Twin Cam – the first project of Lotus designer Oliver Winterbottom. Since the mid-Sixties Lotus had been building a Renault-engined version of its low-slung Type 46 Europa, but '71 was the year Chapman decided to replace the French engine with a 1,558cc Lotus-Ford twin-cam power unit developed at Hethel. Almost 1,600 examples of the Europa Twin Cam were built during 1971-2.

40 years since the Lotus Type 88 (aka the twin-chassis car), *For Your Eyes Only* and the Lotus Sunbeam's rally success

A Formula 1 car that is among the best-remembered of all time… because it never actually raced. At the heart of its pioneering approach was the fact it had two chassis. Noting that the plural of 'chassis' is 'chassis' – spelt the same – Chapman realised there was nothing in the F1 rules to stop a car having two of them. The primary chassis was made from carbon fibre and Kevlar, and included the engine and the driver's cockpit. It was sprung separately, and more softly, to a second stiffer chassis which managed all the aerodynamic downforce.

The car was due to make its debut at the 1981 United States Grand Prix West but its progress was halted by a chorus of disapproval from rival teams. It was eventually withdrawn.

June 1981 saw the premiere of *For Your Eyes Only*, the 12th film in the James Bond series and the fifth to star actor Roger Moore as the British secret agent. A Cold War thriller, the action sees Bond drive a Turbo Esprit, compete with twin ski racks on the roof, around

Cortina d'Ampezzo in the Italian Dolomites. The car's appearance built on its popularity from Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* four years earlier, and further boosted Lotus' global profile and sales.

Lotus has had many significant successes in motorsport, most famously its seven Formula 1 Constructors' and six Drivers' titles. But in November 1981 it added its one and only global rally honour – the World Rally Championship Manufacturer's title, won by the Lotus Sunbeam.

It came about because Chrysler Talbot commissioned Lotus to develop a rally version of its Sunbeam hatchback. Based on a 1.6-litre GLS fitted with stiffer suspension, a larger anti-roll bar and wider transmission tunnel, the drivetrain consisted of a 2,172 cc version of the Lotus 907 engine mated to a ZF gearbox.

It was unveiled at Geneva Motor Show in April 1979 and met with enthusiastic media reviews. It also met its brief off-road – in 1980 Henri Toivonen won the 29th Lombard RAC Rally in a Lotus Sunbeam, and in 1981 its multiple successes led to the WRC Manufacturer's title.

25 years since the Esprit V8

The year 1996 at Lotus will always be associated with the public launch of the Lotus Elise (the story of its development and Frankfurt Motor Show debut the previous year are already told in other 'US LOT' Blogs, reached by following those links). But 1996 is also remembered for the Esprit V8, premiered at Paul Ricard circuit in France in the March in the shape of an Esprit GT1 race car. Four days later, the covers came off the 175 mph road-legal version at the Geneva Motor Show. Meeting all global environmental and safety standards for the year 2000, and with 350 bhp and 400 Nm (295 lb.ft) on tap, the Lotus-designed, lightweight and compact 3.5 litre V8 with its distinctive red cam covers was the power unit to take the company into the new millennium. Equipped with two water-cooled turbos – an architecture that was mimicked later by others – it had a 0 – 60 mph sprint time of 4.8 seconds. Amazingly, the engine occupied less space in the middle of the Esprit than

the 2.2 litre four-pot that it replaced.

20 years since the Elise S2

Introduced at the Birmingham Motor Show in October 2000, the second-generation Elise went on sale the following year. It featured a heavily restyled body and interior, revised soft-top roof, reworked suspension and a host of other enhancements. It kept the Rover K-series engine, though it now featured a Lotus electronic management system and an extra 2 bhp, taking the total to 120 bhp. *Autocar* magazine summarised the changes… 'Does the impossible… betters the original Elise… ride handling and engine are improved on a car we thought was untouchable.'

10 years since the Evora GTE

The 2011 Evora GTE race car was developed with one aim – to be successful in the new global motorsport GTE category. Austrian team Jet Alliance Racing was announced as official partner for the maiden season and two cars were entered into the Intercontinental Le Mans Cup (ILMC), which meant Lotus would take part in the iconic Le Mans 24-Hour – a race it had not entered since 1995.

At first glance the car looked similar to the Evora GT4 of 2010, but approximately 85 per cent was new. The Cosworth-tuned engine was bored out from 3.5 to 4.0 litres, and it had fresh bodywork and larger wheels. At Le Mans both cars ran strongly; #64 of Martin Rich, John Hartshorne and Oskar Slinger retired on lap 127 when a wheel broke, but #65 of Johnny Mowlem, James Rossiter and Jonathan Hirschi lasted the distance and finished 22nd overall, seventh in class and earned a podium in the ILMC – amazing results given a development time that was significantly less than a year.