



CLUB LOTUS ELAN SECTION



An Elan Series 3 SE converted and modified in Switzerland

Elan Fastbacks

In the 2017 spring edition of Club Lotus News we looked at the well-known and much admired Shapecraft fastback Elans. We also looked at the estate conversion of the Elan by Hexagon in the spring 2015 edition and we may look at the estate conversions applied to the +2 in the future.

There have been a number of other firms who have attempted to produce their own interpretation of how the Elan could look with a fastback roofline. It is to these that we turn our attention in this article, exploring those fastback versions that we know of. Unfortunately we have limited data on these conversions, so if any member has additional information or is aware of other fastbacks that we have missed, we would be delighted to hear from them.

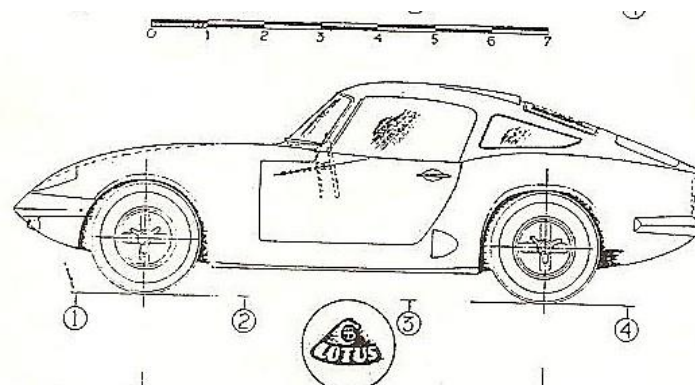
Sherwood Minilite



The Team Minilite Racing Elan of Brian Sherwood

Brian Sherwood bought a new Elan 1600 in August 1964 and decided to take it racing, entered under the Team Minilite banner. His first event in the Elan was at Silverstone in October 1964. In the following two seasons he competed in many club meetings around the country, including the Birkett 6 hour races. Over this period Sherwood continually modified the car, including fitting wider Minilite wheels, extended wheel arches and two iterations of the front nose area. Of course, the most significant modification was the fastback, very similar to the Team Surbiton Shapecraft Elans, incorporating rear side windows. It is notable that Sherwood fitted the rear windscreen lower down the bodywork than Shapecraft did. This probably reflected the racing-only nature of the car (though it was road registered as 849 URO) and the fact that it appears to be permanently fixed in place. Apparently the fastback body was constructed by Sherwood's mechanic over a chicken wire former. Unfortunately the fastback bodywork no longer exists, though the car now sports a 26R body and still competes, as a GTS Elan.

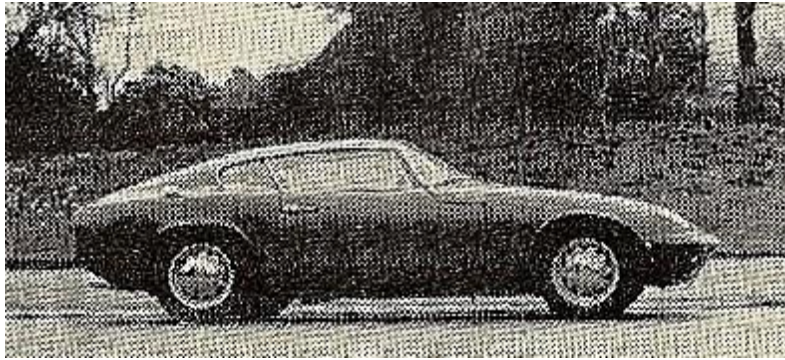
Mystery Design Drawing



This drawing, along with sectional renderings, was handed to Ron Hickman, having been done by a mysterious friend

In 1964 one of the staff at Lotus's Cheshunt Road factory handed a series of drawings to Ron Hickman. They were of a fastback body, almost copying the Shapecraft design. Hickman was disparaging about it. He is reported as saying, "... I thought it was horrible anyway... it wasn't even a good likeness of the basic Elan." It never made production!

Mystery Car



The advertisement photograph of the mystery car

The next fastback is a complete mystery. We do know it existed, since the rather poor quality photograph above was used by the then seller Gold Seal Sports Cars, to advertise the car in Motor Sport and Autosport magazines in 1966. It is described as a Series 2 Special Bodied Fixed Head Coupe, being a 'superb looking car in flame red'. Apparently it was fitted with various extras, too. There's no denying it looks a most handsome conversion. It is not thought to have survived.

Frua Elan



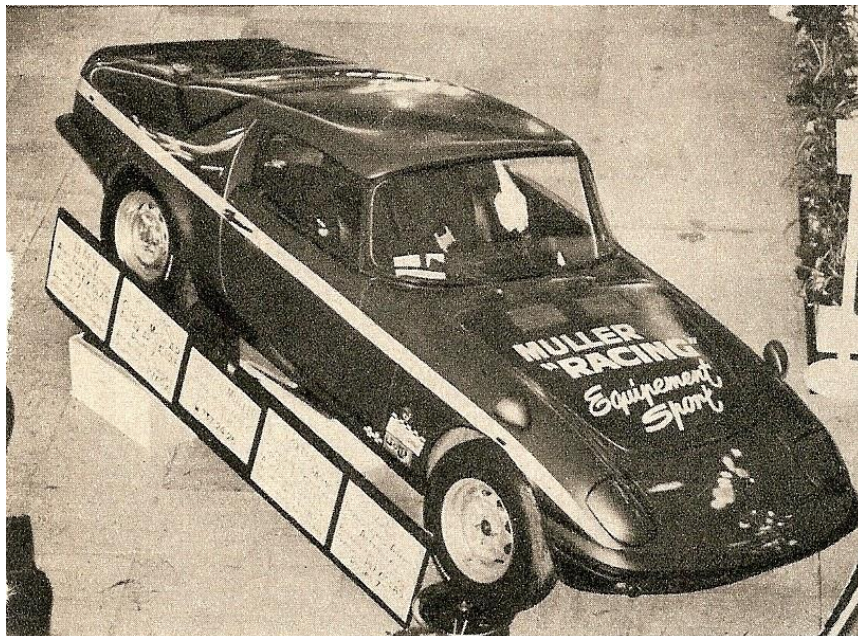
The good looking and well executed fastback by Carrozzeria Pietro Frua

Fortunately much more is known about the next fastback, a styling exercise by Carrozzeria Pietro Frua, who had penned the Lancia Aprilia Cabriolet, O.S.C.A. 2000 S Spider, Fiat 600 Multipla and went on to design the Saab Sonnet IV, Fiat 127 Coupe, Maserati Kyalami Spider and others. The car, with Unit Number 3403, was invoiced by the factory in January 1964 to Holiday Cars Import, the Swiss importer for Lotus. The Carrozzeria worked hard and fast, in time to show the car at the opening of the Geneva motor show on 22nd March 1964. The body was fabricated in steel, with aluminium doors and bonnet, then painted a custom red. A stainless stiffening rod was secured between the two rear suspension turrets, intruding into the load space somewhat. The interior was fitted out in luxury ivory-coloured leather. The rear side windows could be hinged open, whilst the rear screen itself, made with a substantial yet slim-looking surround, opened up to give access to the rear load area. At the front a smaller than standard chromed bumper stood proud above twin radiator openings, with the headlights given Perspex coverings, reflective of the 26R and E Type Jaguar. Below the front Lotus badge was a chromed script 'Lotus Elan 1600 SS Coupe'. Rudge type wire-spoked wheels were fitted.

The car was, intriguingly, fitted with an engine number indicative of the earliest 1500cc Twin Cam type. It did have to be replaced subsequently, once it had finished duty with Frua. Perhaps Lotus had the engine spare and thought that as a concept car, it would not be doing many road miles.

According to the first owner, Silvio Mosers, who bought the car from Frua in 1966, the styling exercise had been commissioned by Colin Chapman to test the possibility of mass producing a fastback Elan version. Indeed, in a press release the plan was announced to construct the Frua body and to then complete cars at three plants in England, Italy and Switzerland. As we know, this never came about. The car was exhibited at the Salon de l'Automobile in Paris in October 1964. The car remained in Switzerland, changing hands several times, until the 1980s. It then spent time in the UK and in Germany before finding its way to Japan, where it is currently in private ownership in Tokyo.

Muller Targa Fastback



The French Muller Elan conversion, about which little is known

Carrossier Muller, based at 80 rue Anatole France, Levallois-Perret in Paris is still a garage and body shop, though little is known about its earlier history or indeed, about the intriguing fastback and targa topped Elan it displayed at a motor show in the mid-1960s.

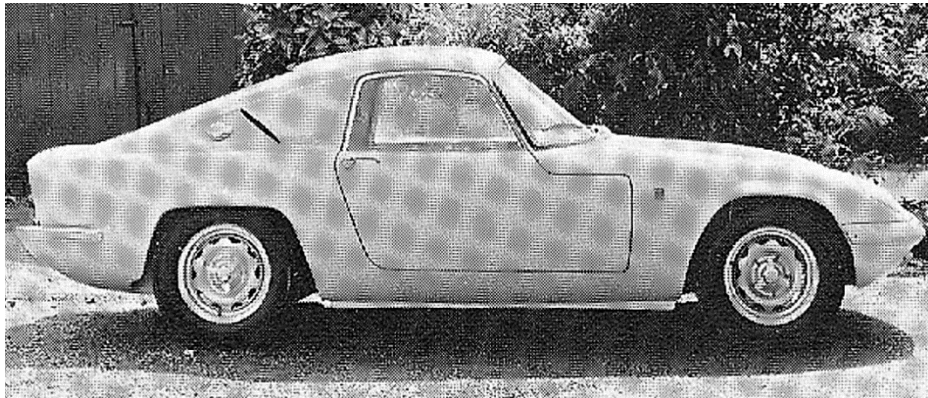


The targa roof displayed

This appears to be based on an Elan 1600. The bonnet has cooling vents in the area closest to the windscreen. Racing Dunlops are fitted to standard bolt on steel wheels, which have been painted

white. A broad white stripe has been added along the length of the body. A Kamm tail spoiler has been added to the boot. In five panels at the foot of the stand are the contact details for Carrossier Muller and what appears to be descriptions of the Plexiglass used, presumably in the rear window, the fact that Muller could tune the car for racing or make it into a convertible coupe, as well as some description about the aerodynamics of the car. It is not thought that an example has survived.

Factory Concept?



Was this how the factory envisaged a fastback Elan should look like?

There is an interesting photo of a white fastback car in Peter Filby's 'Specialist Sports Cars', published in 1974, which is reproduced here. Filby speculated that it was a factory concept. Additionally, in the December 2012 edition of 'Classic and Sports Car' magazine a Mr Andrew Bodman wrote a letter with a photo of a fastback Elan which he says he took at Hethel in 'about 1970 at the back of the factory'. Bodman claimed it was a Series 4, stating that the fastback body appeared to go in a straight line from above where the FHC rear window would be to the rear edge of the boot. He also wrote that the roof side panel has what looked like a raised intake or vent, with the fuel filler to the rear of it. Again, nothing is known to survive from this attempt to alter the basic Elan shape, neither are we aware of any other Hethel commentator ever having mentioned this car.

Original Swiss Fastback S3



The Swiss Series 3 Elan fastback, showing the frontal treatment

The Swiss appear to have had a liking for fastback Elans. This well documented red version still exists and demonstrates some interesting features. Apparently based around a LHD Series 3 Special Equipment Elan, the original owner had the car converted to his specification in Switzerland. We have seen a poor photo of the VIN plate, which appears genuine, though unfortunately only a small part of the Unit number is discernible, although enough to date it as a Series 3. The front nose has been lengthened and widened to incorporate larger wheel arches and faired in square headlights, two per side. The front indicators appear to have been deleted altogether! At the rear the fastback incorporates an opening boot lid below the window and the standard rear lights have been replaced with three individual lights per side. Wider wheels are fitted, the rear arches having been enlarged neatly within the bodyline of the fastback and a horizontal vent has been fitted above the swage line. Side windows appear to have been replaced with Plexiglass and a slide opening. All in all, the car has a sporting look about it and we have a photograph of it competing in a hill climb, so it may have also had its engine breathed on.

It is known that a previous owner bought the car in the mid-1970s, when it was fitted with standard steel wheels. He carried out a body off restoration, uprated the driveline and had the wider wheels and arches incorporated. Having competed in the car he sold it in 1985 to his brother, who sold it to the last known owner the next year. The car was then for sale at a classic car dealer in Switzerland in 2010.

IWR One



IWR One, the car that was due to compete at Le Mans in 1964

Our final two cars are the Ian Walker Racing fastbacks built in the 1960s, one for the track, the other for the road. These cars are well known, as is their history, so we shall describe them in brief for the sake of expediency in this article.

During the early days of racing Elans, Ian Walker was heavily involved in running a number of Elan's. In 1964 Walker decided he wanted to design and construct an aluminium bodied Elan to compete for the Index of Thermal Efficiency at Le Mans that year. The bodywork of the car was expertly made up in alloy by Williams & Pritchard. Testing of the car started immediately and Jackie Stewart took 1st place with it at the Coup de Paris GT race at Monthlery. Before it reached Le Mans however, the car was crashed too heavily and Walker ran out of time. The car was subsequently painstakingly rebuilt and continues to enjoy a competitive life.

IWR Two



The road going IWR Fastback, a special one-off

Having seen IWR One a Swiss gentleman called Hermann Huber, contacted Ian Walker to ask him to sell the aluminium bodied Elan to him for his father. But Walker refused. After continuous requests by Mr. Huber Walker finally decided to make him a second car. This second car, serial-number IWR/GT/2, was intended to be strictly a road-going Elan. It was painted in French blue by Harold Radford Limited who also fitted the red Connolly hide interior before it was delivered to Mr. Huber in 1965. The Huber family kept the Elan in their family for 37 years and they did not make any modifications to the car, leaving it untouched until it was sold in 2010. Since then it has been on the market on a few occasions and is now in private ownership.

Contact Us

Tim Wilkes and Mark Kempson can be contacted via email at elansection@clublotus.co.uk or via Club HQ by post or on 07720 288100