Type 26 Register Update No. 10

We were very pleased to have the opportunity of a detailed conversation with Ron Hickman at the last Donington show. Ron was able to explain to us the reason why series one and series two Elans have an enclosed boot aperture which at first sight would appear to be a retrograde step when considered against the conventional boot opening of the Elite, a design which of course preceded the Elan by three or four years.

He was able to tell us that the Elan was originally conceived as a monocoque, as of course the Elite was. It was therefore to be the first open car of chassisless fiberglass reinforced unitary (monocoque) construction. The "Twentysix (initially coded S2) project" was to be close to the Austin Healey Sprite concept and therefore a replacement to the Seven, but by 1961 it had become the successor to the Elite and therefore essential to the survival of Lotus. The problem that was facing him however was that the Elite was a closed car whereas the Elan was going to be a convertible. Being totally enclosed, the Elite body had natural strength on the eggshell principle – but all that would be lost if the roof were chopped off. So, as the Elan was starting off in effect with the roof chopped off, consideration had to be given as to how some of the lost strength could be regained, especially with the open door and boot apertures. Amongst Ron's ideas was to make the boot aperture completely surrounded by compound curves and thus some body strength was in effect built back into the shell.

However, with the increasing difficulty of devising a method of producing an open fiberglass monocoque solution with the required strength, and time marching on, in mid-1960 Chapman suggested producing a simple folded metal backbone chassis to overcome the problem. By then, however the design of the bodyshell had been finalized and it wasn't considered to be a good use of time and resources to re-design it with a more practical boot aperture. But as we all know with the advent of the Series 3, the boot was extended to the rear of the body along with numerous other detail changes to the bodyshell.

This design of the boot aperture presented water drainage problems - perhaps some Type 26 owners would say that they were never satisfactorily solved because a wet day would frequently result in quantities of water being deposited on the contents of the boot. Ron's problem was to get the water away from the gutter recesses of the aperture and so he had to design a system of pipes to drain it away. This sounds quite easy but Ron tells of tests that were carried out to ascertain the optimum diameter of the pipework to achieve the most efficient drainage. Eventually, a diameter of between 3/8" and ½" was settled upon. Two pipes were fitted, one in each of the lower two corners of the aperture and the run down to, and through the rear bumper and drain out through the bottom of the bumper. Top marks to everybody that knew that S1 and S2 rear bumpers had drainage holes in the bottom! In everyday service these pipes become blocked with leaves and other debris, thus rendering them ineffective.

RARE PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN MID-1963 AT BOURNE PLASTICS NOTTINGHAM, SHOWING THE CHARACTERISTIC RIBBED FLOOR OF BODY NUMBER 158 (NOT KNOWN TO THE REGISTER) AND THE LAYOUT OF THE SOMRIB PAPER ROPE, USED TO STIFFEN THE BONNET, BUT ALSO USED UNDER THE NOSE.

Another point worth noting on the matter is that when Lotus remanufactured replacement type 26 shells in the late 1960s, 70's and 80's (the last genuine type 26 bodyshells were produced by Lotus in the early 90's), they incorporated some of the modifications that had been made when the type 36 and 45 shells were designed. Examples of these changes are the disappearance of the ribbed floor panels (see photograph) which were a distinctive feature of the Type 26 shells, the abandoning of the drain pipework mentioned above and the different design and shape of the panel beneath the radiator at the front. This was because shells are made in two halves and when the replacement shells were made the lower (or undertray) halve followed the later S3 design. Armed with this information it should be easier for you to ascertain whether a car has its original shell or not.

It is quite well known that the contract that Lotus entered into with S Bourne Ltd of Nottingham for the supply of shells was less than an unqualified success. The original contract was for the supply of 1000 shells but as soon as they started arriving at Cheshunt it was apparent that there were not only quality problems, but owing to production problems, Bourne had difficulty in producing them at the required rate to meet very high demand for the new Elan 1600. One of the main issues that Ron recalls was that the thickness of the fibreglass in the pedal box area was insufficient, leading to alarming flexing when the brakes were applied hard. The remedial work had therefore to be carried out at Cheshunt.

From what we have been able to ascertain, S Bourne Ltd was quite a large company involved in the manufacture of fiberglass boats, but it seems to have disappeared without trace, going into liquidation in the late 1970s. If any members based in the Nottingham area have any memories of the company, or its personnel we would be much obliged to hear from you. Presumably somewhere, some pictures of the factory must exist. If anyone knows of any such pictures please let us know.

As we know, Ron was an avid photographer at his time at Lotus and took many photographs of the cars during their design phase and production. Unfortunately he does not appear to have taken any of the Bourne shells being produced at their Nottingham factory.

When the production of the shells switched from S Bourne Ltd to Lotus a number of differences were, over a period of time, incorporated into the shells. One of these was the removal of the return lip above the headlight pod aperture, another was the lack of a filling between the upper and lower parts of the body, readily visible on both sides in the engine compartment of a Bourne shell. As mentioned before, a key difference between Bourne and Lotus produced shells was that Bourne used a grey pigment in the gel coat and resin layup, whereas the interior of the Lotus shell was painted black. As always, it is not possible to state definitive change points but the above represents the general position.

Dashboards are a key visual component of a restored car. Ensuring replacements are to the correct original specification is not easily achieved, and is a topic that we will cover in forthcoming updates. However, a key part that will almost certainly need replacement is the securing screws. Whilst excellent quality, correct chromed pan pozi replacements for later S3 and S4 cars are available from Paul Matty Sportscars, those used on earlier cars are of a completely different design and not available. The Type 26 Register is pleased to announce that they will be able to offer three differing, complete kits for early S1's (blacked socket button head), Later S1's and early S2's (blacked semi button head with Phillips drive), later S2's and early S3's (chromed semi button head with Phillips drive) shortly. Please keep checking the website for the latest news.

Please visit www.type26register.com The site is updated regularly with important reference material, advertisements and other items of interest for S1 and S2 owners.

Please contact Tim Mees 0044 (0) 1189 891705 and tim@type26register.com or Charles Giles charles@type26register.com

STOP PRESS Visit the Type 26 Register stand at the 2010 CLUB LOTUS SHOW AND FESTIVAL. **Tim and Charles**

S1 PRODUCTION AT CHESHUNT. QUIZ: WHEN WAS THIS PHOTO TAKEN? (MONTH AND YEAR PLEASE!) THE CLUES ARE IN THE PICTURE! PLEASE EMAIL charles@type26register.com WITH AS MANY REASONS AS POSSIBLE TO SUPPORT YOUR ANSWER, AND I WILL PUBLISH THE RESPONDENTS, WITH THEIR CORRECT REASONING, IN THE NEXT UPDATE. THE FULLEST ANSWER WINS A PRIZE. PLEASE VISIT WWW.TYPE26REGISTER.COM TO SEE THE IMAGE IN THE ORIGINALITY SECTION. TIP: YOU MIGHT LIKE TO USE THE ZOOM FUNCTION TO GET THE KEY INFORMATION NECESSARY!"