

CLASSIC DRIVER

For your snow-blind eyes only: shooting for Zell am See in the last Lotus Elise

Lead
Forty-three years after James Bond drove his iconic, ski-clad Esprit Turbo into the Alps, another Lotus returned to the snow at this year's F.A.T. Ice Race. Make sure you bring your tinted ski goggles...



We all know that when James Bond isn't driving an Aston Martin, he's driving a Lotus. And despite its modest screentime, the Esprit Turbo from 1981's 'For Your Eyes Only' ranks up there as one of the most iconic. It's distinctive red and gold colour scheme, twinned with two pairs of skis mounted over its louvred rear window, made it an instant classic.

It's a car that has also provided the inspiration for several Lotus-based homages in recent years. A special edition Lotus Evora in 2009, as well as a one-off Lotus Exige in 2015 have both sported the colour scheme and ski rack synonymous with the Bond car.



This particular Lotus, however, is less of a tribute act and more of an abstract cover band. Imagine the Bond theme reinterpreted by Kraftwerk, turned up to eleven, and performed inside a nuclear reactor. In place of the Esprit's spooling turbo is a whining supercharger; instead of the retro louvres is a rear wing that looks like it's straight off a Boeing 747; replacing the eighties paint job is the unfeasibly bright 'luminous orange'.



Prepared by Austria's very own 'Q Branch', Egon Zweimüller, there are clever Bond-inspired details throughout this one-off Lotus Elise. As well as the essential ski rack, a custom mounted tow hook (for pulling a skijorer) conjures up memories of 007's adventures on ice – all the way from 1969's 'On Her Majesty's Secret Service', through to 1999's 'The World Is Not Enough'. For the real Bond aficionados, a 'Burglar Protected' sticker is tucked away on the side windows – a reference to the self-destructing white Esprit Turbo in 'For Your Eyes Only'.



The specific colour of this Lotus – the Elise Cup 250 Final Edition – is 'RAL 2005'. It's the kind of shade which ought to carry a health warning when viewed in full sunlight, or at least be used to paint the ambulance which picks you up afterwards. It's a nod to another British icon – Team Lotus – who ran the same colour scheme on its STP-liveried Indy cars in the 1960s.



Out here, against the snow-covered backdrop of Zell am See's annual F.A.T. Ice Race, the impact of the incandescent paintwork is intensified even further. If Bond needed to destroy his enemies' retinas whilst making a swift exit onto a nearby ski slope, this is the car he'd choose.

The Elise Cup 250 Final Edition was one of two run-out versions of the Elise, before Lotus wound up production of the model in 2021. In fact, the ski-bedecked car in front of us is the very last Cup 250 to roll off the line, hence the 'FINAL' registration plate. Very 007.



The '250' denotes the horsepower, but it's the 'Cup' moniker which makes this car really interesting. This featherweight track-special weighs in at a meagre 931kg and features an all-carbon aero set up first seen on the Cup 260 Elise, which helped that car to generate 180kg of downforce at 151mph – almost twice as much as a Porsche 718 Cayman GT4 RS.

Out here in the ice and snow, the tiny Elise will take all the downforce it can get. As the rear wheels scuffle for grip, the aero does its damndest to preserve what little traction there is. With its mid-engine layout and short wheelbase, the Elise is a notoriously difficult car to drift; winter is most definitely not this car's natural habitat.



But honestly, who cares? Because all we can see beyond those luminous wheel arches are the beaming smiles of everyone who sees this car coming. Thumbs up, flashing lights, beeping horns; not to mention smartphones being drawn from pockets quicker than a silenced pistol from a tuxedo.



It's a reminder that driving a Lotus should be fun – whether that's at ten-tenths on a racetrack, carving up an alpine pass, or sliding sideways with a set of bright orange skis on its roof. Now, come, come, Mr Bond... when was the last time you saw an Aston Martin do that?

Photos by Jon Gorman

Gallery

