

Lotus 340R

Related models : **Elise** - see text below

Picture Gallery: Nil

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Versions included here: General

It's so long we haven't seen a Lotus whose name without starting from "E". The last one was Seven, which evacuated from Lotus price list in 1973. Interestingly, the new 340R is intended to be a modern Seven. In other words, it's a minimalist that prefer weekend race activities more than daily use.

Really, it looks somewhat like a Formula racing car, with exposed wheels and front air foils at either side of the nose. No roof, no soft top, zero rain protection at all. Although there is a windscreen (unlike formula racing cars), it's not high enough to eliminate buffeting to the cockpit, so it's better to wear helmet.

The cockpit makes an Elise seemed nearly luxurious. Firstly, there is no door. To enter, sit on the glass-fiber bodywork, swing your legs into the footwell one by one. Well done, doing this everyday could save your gymnastic club membership fee. After settling on the racing bucket, you'll find a stylish yet simple layout. Like its chassis donor, Elise, the floor and sills are simply the exposed surfaces of the aluminium chassis. There's no equipment at all, such as radio, air-conditioning, window (yes, no window, let alone electric or not), carpet ... instead, there are a lot of concept car-like styling features to deliver a sense of occasion. Like Elise (or any Ferrari), the gear knob is an aluminium globe, but the 340R has more stylish alloy decoration, such as the rim surrounding the base of shifter lever and the whole handbrake. More eye-catching is the twin white-faced gauges suspended in the air by an arc of plastic moulding, very stylish. Underneath the plastic dash is a thin aluminium blade vertically runs down to the shifter. That's 340R's center console, which houses virtually all the control buttons available. Lastly, 340R also differs from any other road car by offering a transparent composite panel covering what would have been the middle of the door (that's between the upper body work and the aluminium chassis sill). The original show car had

that place exposed to air, but it was found too drafty.

Likewise, the exterior styling looks more like a concept car than a EU-approved road car. The glass-fiber bodywork is very complicated in shape, delivering an aggressive and purposeful feeling. Aggressiveness come from twin-plane front spoilers, exposed wheels and suspensions, a lot of aggressive-shape ventilation holes and cooling ducts, exposed exhaust silencer and the high angle rear spoiler held by aluminium frames. Style came from ecliptic headlights, chromed exhaust pipes mounted at unusually high level, 4 suspended circular rear lights and a McDonald-inspired twin rollover protection bar. Overall speaking, is it beautiful? I don't think so, although it is undeniably one of the most spectacular cars on road.

Technical View

It's essentially an Elise with more power and less weight. The aluminium chassis is pure Elise, but the minimalist body work, lean cockpit, no roof, no window, cut-down windscreen etc. reduce the dry weight to a claimed 600 kg. Transferred to a kerb weight, it becomes 675 kg, about 100 kg lighter than Elise 111S.

On the other hand, it has 34 more horsepowers than Elise 111S, thanks to an engine modified from the 190 hp Single-Vehicle-Approved-only Elise Sport. The 1775 c.c. four pot was derived from the standard Rover K-series rather than VVC unit, but it has higher compression ratio and various modifications to improve breathing, plus an aggressive computer mapping. Although the 177 hp maximum output and 126 lbft of torque cannot match the Elise Sport, it fully complies with EU's noise and emission regulations. As a result, the 340R has obtained EU's type approval and could be sold to any EU member countries without limited number, although Lotus decided to build only 340 units to ensure desirability.

Apart from the number of production, interesting, the name 340R was also intended to represent the power-to-weight ratio. However, because the car turned out to be a bit heavier and a bit less powerful than desired, it is now just 295 hp / ton. The race track version, on the other hand, with catalyst removed and reprogrammed to restore the 190 hp output, and striped out to 568 kg, just miss the target by 5 hp / ton.

On the road

Despite of the vast increase of power-to-weight ratio, the 340R still isn't as lightning as our crazy Caterham R500 or Westfield FW400 - these cars are 400-460 kg and have 190 hp on tap, no match by the 340R. In fact, drive it normally, it feels more similar to the Elise 111S. Below 4,000 rpm, its weight advantage over the Elise is offset by the VVC engine's flexibility. Above that, the 340R starts getting into live. It roars harder, spins stronger towards the 7,600 rpm redline while delivering the extra punch over the Elise. 0-60 of 4.4 sec might be a bit optimistic (4.7 could be more believable), but it is undoubtedly at least 0.7 seconds quicker than any road-going Elise. Likewise, the 140 mph top speed is also doubtful because of inefficient aerodynamic design, but no one will buy this kind of cars for autobahn cruising.

Surprisingly, despite of its lightweight, the 340R also display very well road manner. It's grippy and stable at the limit, without the uncontrollable feeling of other super lightweights. Undoubtedly, the larger section tyres specially designed by Yokohama play an important roles in handling. They have fewer grooves than normal road tyres and more like racing slick, thus provide massive grip as well as meaty steering feel. The rear ones are 225/45 ZR16, like Elise 111S, make it less tail-happy than the standard Elise. This is very crucial to the 340R, as it corners faster and harder than any Elise, and is more responsive in any situation. Stiffer suspensions, more downforce from the big rear spoiler and ground effect rear diffuser also raise its cornering ability.

As long as the sky is clear, 340R is the best tool to enjoy driving fun. It has the same superb steering feel and throttle steer ability as Elise. In addition of that, it has more power and more grip to explore higher level of cornering limit. Braking can hardly be better. Compare with Caterham or Westfield, it is more secure to drive fluently, without scaring your passenger. And ride quality is first class (even comparable to many warm coupes). It's stylish and more like a consumer product than a kit car too.

Anyway, nightmare could be happened if the sky start raining after driving long away home. At shower, the only technique to avoid wetting your hair is to drive faster, fast enough that the rain drops are deflected from the windscreen. Unluckily, the Yokohama rubbers seemed unhappy with wet. At pouring, you'd better to look for sheltering, unless you'd like to have a cold water bath !

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Specifications

Model	340R
Layout	Mid-engined, Rwd
Dimensions	L / W / H / WB: 3620 / 1655 / 1123 / 2300 mm
Engine	Inline-4, dohc, 4v/cyl.
Capacity	1775 c.c.
Power	177 hp
Torque	126 lbft
Transmission	5M
Suspensions	All: Double wishbones
Tyres	F: 195/50 ZR15; R: 225/45 ZR16
Weight	675 kg
Top speed	132 mph*
0-60 mph	4.6 sec*
0-100 mph	12.5 sec*
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