

6

■ LOTUS EMIRA ■

# LOTUS BLOSSOMS

The second car from New Lotus is the company's last petrol-engined sports car – and likely its greatest. By **Ben Miller**

Photography Jordan Butters



CAR hits the road in the Emira, dynamics guru Gavan Kershaw at the wheel

Lotus is alive. You can feel it.

On a perfect autumn morning Hethel is buzzing; camouflaged Emira prototypes come and go at the gatehouse; a TV crew like an army in black woolly hats crawls all over the perfect little form of Radford's visiting Type 62; Radford's Jenson Button chats with attributes director Gavan Kershaw; and MD Matt Windle flits around the site's slick buildings, bright-eyed both at what Lotus has achieved in 2021 and all that 2022 will bring.

For Lotus, 2022 starts with Emira, its love letter to the kind of machines to which it owes its existence. Firstly the second engine option will go live for ordering, a 355hp AMG turbo four-cylinder driving via a twin-clutch gearbox. Then, in early spring, manufacturing will begin (in a redeveloped

building originally erected in the crazy Bahar era) ahead of first Emira deliveries in April.

The four-cylinder engine (which makes for a 50kg lighter Emira, give or take) will sit alongside the supercharged V6 (manual or auto) in a rapidly blossoming array of options Emira owners will have to 'agonise' over for many a long and very happy hour. Goodyear (70 subtly different compounds and constructions were submitted before Lotus made its selection) or Michelin Cup 2 rubber (again, bespoke, with Lotus branding on the sidewalls)? Your choice. Limited-slip diff or no? Tour chassis or Sport (tuned for both tyres, so you may want a spare set of rims)? Torture...

The lucky devils. Why? Because they're already in a queue that formed the moment Lotus unveiled the car and grows steadily longer by

the day (hundreds of deposits were taken at the Goodwood Festival of Speed alone). And because, on this evidence at least, there's no such thing as the 'wrong' Emira.

Kershaw talks me round the car as it idles in the cool, bright morning air. With Goodyear rubber, no LSD and the Tour suspension (no adaptive dampers here, mostly to keep the price down; the First Edition cars are £76k but entry point is £60k), this is the Emira in its most road-orientated guise (though the DCT four will surely be even more civilised). The 'wrong' car, then, for a few laps of Hethel? Trying telling Kershaw or the Emira that.

A couple of gentle laps to warm the fluids and tyres and we're into it. Lap speeds soar and our times, were they being recorded, would be tumbling. But over in the hot seat there's absolutely ▶





No unyielding springs or roll bars here – Emira is accessible, comfortable, biddable

no change in Kershaw. He moves, talks and shifts gear with the same languid ease regardless – a man in his element (he's been lapping Hethel since he was a teenager).

And the car? Oh man, the car. If you've already moved on to EVs, or if your circumstances preclude a two-seat sports car, then fear not: this is 'just' a two-seat sports car. But for many reading this magazine, who know Lotus and who, on getting behind the wheel of a car for the very first time experienced a wondrous epiphany at the intimacy and thrill of the car/driver relationship, then this may just be *the* two-seat sports car.

The Emira feels special everywhere – grippy yet responsive, playful yet balanced, fast but biddable – but it feels like a true Lotus through the fast direction change just after the pitlane exit. Kershaw makes his deliberate steering inputs (Jenson Button-esque, appropriately, or perhaps

Button's are Kershaw-esque?) and the car responds instantly, sweeping its nose to the apex kerbs (the hydraulically-assisted rack is slightly quicker than the Evora's). But it does so without instability or nervousness. And that friendly character's there too in the way the car rides the kerb's corrugations – you feel and hear them, but they don't deflect or upset the Emira.

The secret? Put simply, freedom – the budget and the blessing to spend time on every aspect of the car, to explore every option and to push suppliers to deliver their best.

'It's a clean-sheet design for us,' says Kershaw, beaming. 'This is the widest Lotus we've produced for a long, long time. We increased the front track width and there's more downforce than we've had before, despite not having any visible spoilers – that's where the lateral grip comes from. And then it's just the ability to move every hard point, and to be able to put the weight exactly where we want it. All those options were open to us. Then it's working with the suppliers. So, on the brakes, for example; lots of different calipers, pads, master cylinders, boosters... It's been to years since we had the ability to do something completely new.'

The tight last corner lets Kershaw demonstrate both the AP set-up's ferocious stopping power (while telling you the Evija EV generates comparable forces under *acceleration*, and he'd know...) and the subtlety of the multi-stage ESC, which runs from Tour through Sport and Track to fully off. Even in Sport there's plenty of slack leash

with which to work, so we do, the yaw controlled despite the absent LSD. But this Emira's undoubtedly happier keeping things neat: one steering wheel input, huge corner speeds with just enough roll to let your brain keep up, then clean traction and another chance to play V6 tunes using the throttle pedal and very mechanical shift.

We head out for a quick road loop, and it's here that New Lotus really begins to assert itself. For a sports car, getting in and out of the Emira is easy. There's space behind the seats and a full-width boot compartment for bags. The cockpit, while still simple and elegant, feels solid, contemporary and spacious, its ergonomics a fusion of timeless sports car fundamentals (John Miles, the F1 driver, told me the gearlever's in the right place when you can hook your thumb on the wheel and touch the gearknob with your little finger,' says Kershaw, demonstrating the same in the Emira) and current best practice (the touchscreen's high on the dash, within your eyeline, but the functions below that are blind-reach physical switches).



'Go on, gizza go' 'No'

**NEED TO KNOW | What is it?** Lotus

Cars' last sports car with an engine

**Tech?** Bonded aluminium chassis, double-wishbone suspension, all-up weight of 1405kg in its lightest form

**Aimed at?** The drivers | **When can I have one?** Spring if you've already ordered. If you haven't, crack on



Visibility is startlingly good, the screen vast like a Group C car's bubble and the drop in the side windows just aft of the A-pillars working with the rapid fall-away of the bonnet to give you a panoramic field of vision. Nothing rattles and nothing squeaks. I cannot smell glue.

The roads are quiet, Kershaw guiding us at speed with delicate nudges of the wheel as the V6 sings its mournful tune. The lack of any sort of dead zone around the straight-ahead is obvious, the car responding keenly to just a few degrees of lock. 'Keeping the hydraulic steering was vital, for that instant response, feel and consistent build-up and drop-off of steering effort,' he says.

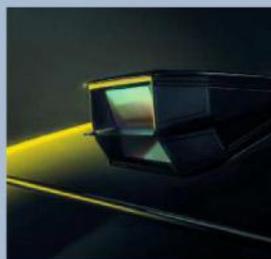
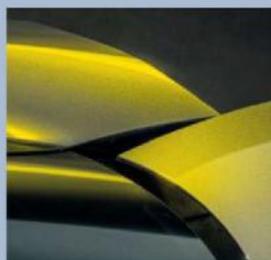
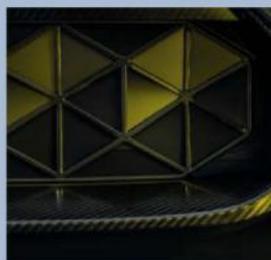
The ride too, on Tour-spec Bilsteins, is peachy, with enough compliance to shrug off rough surfaces – and they're still being fine-tuned. The Emira's settled yet serene, and the antithesis of the rock-solid sports car that insists on beating you up as you wring its neck. Oh no. This is a Lotus. What's more, it's shaping up to be *that* Lotus – the one you always promised yourself.



■ LOTUS TYPE 132 ■

## THE LOTUS OF SUVs

2022's bravest car is a Lotus like no other



### 1. It will look sensational

In the spring Lotus will unveil its Cayenne-sized battery-electric SUV, codenamed Type 132. If the all-new but reassuringly traditional Emira is the culmination of everything that has gone before, Type 132 is the embodiment of the firm's future: electric, global, ambitious. And if, after the likes of the Cullinan and Urus, you're worried the big Lotus will be a hulking affront to everything light, elegant and Chapman, don't be. Type 132 will be, we're promised, the Lotus of SUVs, and that extends to the proportions. Reckon on a cab-forward body with the dramatic forms and surface language of a supercar, sitting low on big wheels. Evija meets SUV via the talented trio of Russell Carr, Peter Horbury and Ben Payne? We're in.

### 2. Aero will be king

With two e-motors, space for five and the big battery required for a competitive range, Type 132 simply cannot be lightweight. But it can be a Lotus aerodynamically. Expect active elements front and rear (middle picture) to balance drag, cooling and performance requirements, and a sculpted overall shape able to cheat more miles from each charge.

### 3. It's the work of a dream team

Defined, designed and developed in the UK? Check. Engineered in Germany? Check. Chinese funding, state-of-the-art EV know-how and manufacturing expertise? Check. Safety and assist systems developed in Sweden (including the lidar system pictured)? Check. Type 132 will be a truly global Lotus – in the best possible way.

**NEED TO KNOW** | **What is it?** The first Lotus SUV – and it's electric | **Tech?** Twin-motor skateboard platform, lithium-ion battery rated at up to 110kWh, 0-62mph in under 3.0sec for the top-spec version. Oh, and some fiendishly clever driver-assist systems | **Aimed at?** Anyone keen on the idea of a truly desirable electric SUV | **When can I have one?** Late 2022