



LOTUS EMIRA

It impressed on our road trip to Monaco; how will it fare on track?

FOR A MAN WHO CYCLES UP MOUNTAINS OF HIS OWN FREE will and lives on a diet of chocolate chip cookies and double chocolate chip cookies, Henry, at times, shows remarkable wisdom. Towards the end of his Emira road trip (p64) he said: 'The whole car rewards smoothness and feels best when you stop just short of trying to really wring its neck.'

You can decide for yourself if that sounds like your sort of sports car, but it certainly doesn't sound like a recommendation for a new trackday hero. Even so, I'm excited as the Emira emerges from Anglesey's pitlane and the track unravels ahead. It's a new Lotus. It *has* to be good.

The feel-good factor is high. Lotus has nailed the overall look and feel of the interior. Grasping the lovely, cool manual gearshifter and with the brawny V6 thumping the Emira along at a fair old lick even at low revs as the fluids warm through, it's hard to believe Lotus has made something that feels so fresh, new and desirable for so little money. There's plenty of junior Ferrari about the Emira, and that can only be good.

The squared-off steering wheel detracts slightly. I can live with the shape but the thickness of the rim combined with the physical weight of the rack combine to erode the sense of delicacy that comes through the supple, relaxed chassis. There's more inertia than expected.

This car rides on Sport suspension but comes with the less aggressive Goodyear F1 tyres fitted as standard on the Tour-spec car. Lotus felt the combination would be best for Henry's drive, as they feared he might run into bad weather over the Alps-Maritime. On a dry day at Anglesey we crave the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2s that should be fitted to a Sport model. Lotus couldn't support our track activity with tech back-up or Cup 2s, but has said it will be able to do so at a later date.

We crave greater precision and urgency in other areas, too. The six-speed manual gearbox can't be rushed. Try to snick through an upshift from second to third in a hurry and, more often than not, you'll get a nasty graunch and no gear. I can't think of a manual 'box fitted to any production car that would be trickier to manage on a circuit.

Lotus has done wonders with the humble Toyota V6 that's been a staple of the Exige and Evora in recent years, injecting character and volume

into a unit that was never engineered to have much of either. Spectators at Anglesey would probably think it's one of the world's great engines as the Emira zips around the track emitting a deep, hard-edged note that would make a Ferrari F8 Tributo owner jealous. The drama is less intense inside and so is the performance. The Emira feels quick but doesn't rev as freely as you'd like, and it's all too easy to hit the limiter, which kicks in at just 6800rpm. It's a decent engine but not a source of joy.

More curious still is the Emira's reluctance around Anglesey's corners. Henry's right that it's a car you can't really attack with, but even when treated with kid gloves the chassis doesn't find equilibrium. There's not enough precision on turn-in and the front washes into understeer. More throttle just pushes the front tyres further off line. Approach the corner differently with aggressive trail-braking and the rear seems to fall into messy, time-consuming oversteer. Lotus generally makes cars that reward a very neat style, but in this instance that sweet spot is elusive.

Perhaps it's me. I'm just having an off-day? But no. John Barker and Steve Sutcliffe experience the same reluctance to hit an apex and the same sense that the Emira is lacking control. Steve looks a little shocked. 'Why does it feel so heavy?' he asks (it actually tips our scales at 1486kg, with more than 60 per cent of the weight – more than in a 911 GT3 – over the rear axle). John is equally perplexed. 'The prototype that Dickie drove [evo 296] was flat mid-slide, settled and balanced, a willing accomplice. This car doesn't feel at all like that car looked. It's a wrestling match.'

Even so, the lap time is a respectable 1:18.5 and with the Cup 2s that would surely improve by a significant margin. It's not a million miles behind a 991.1 Carrera (1:17.9) and in the ballpark. If only extracting the time was a more enjoyable process. Perhaps the Sport chassis and Goodyear tyres just don't mix? It's possible. However, we can only report on what we find, and this Emira just did not work on track and had some fundamental issues that would surely detract on road, too. John's succinct summation is telling and gets to the heart of the matter: 'This Lotus feels like a car *before* it's been to Lotus, the raw clay waiting for that sprinkling of magic.' **JB**

