

The Great Lotus

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By Luc Gagne

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What do the all-new Lotus Evora and Toyota RAV4 have in common? The engine, that's what! In the case of the former, the 3.5-litre V6 sits right behind the passenger quarters and elevates the Great Lotus to the ranks of the Porsche Cayman in terms of muscle and refinement.



The 2010 Lotus Evora is a true GT car in the mold of its direct rival, the Porsche Cayman.
(Photo: Matthieu Lambert/Auto123.com)

The addition of this model to the British brand's lineup is major news. After all, the last time Lotus introduced a new car was way back in 1995, when Italy's Romano Artioli, head of Bugatti, operated under Lotus wings. The Elise, a cute and nimble little roadster, was actually named after his daughter Elisa... and in accordance with the company's tradition of selling cars that start with an "E."

Over the years, and under new stewardship (Malaysian automaker Proton purchased Lotus in 1996), the Elise gave birth to a plethora of variants, both for the road and the track, as well as two very interesting evolutions: the Exige and Europa S two-seaters.

GT character

The 2010 Lotus Evora is light-years ahead of the Elise. That was the goal, mind you — the folks in Hethel, England, are striving to diversify and expand their portfolio in order to widen the customer base.

Consequently, they're now banking on comfort and luxury to attract buyers. The interior of the Evora can comfortably sit two large adults for hours, which contrasts heavily with the cramped Elise and those shells called sports seats. You don't have to be a contortionist to take place in the Evora... well, maybe just a bit. Still, once you've found your way inside, you can feel the seats wrapping your entire body like a wetsuit. I love it!

By the way, the Evora is Lotus' first 2+2 car since the angular Elite and Excel of the 1970s and 1980s. The small bench seat in the back is available at a ridiculously-low price, so I'm willing to

bet that most customers will take it.

Of course, Lotus does not want to fool anybody and acknowledges that this bench is designed for children. No fully-grown human being would tolerate that much discomfort. The Isofix system for child seat explicitly suggests the type of occupant that should be sitting there, anyway.

More than just a Lotus

Any self-respecting rival of the Cayman can't make any compromise with regard to features and amenities. Therefore, expect to find climate control, power steering and Parktronic with rearview camera (thank God because rearward visibility is limited at best). There's Bluetooth with iPod connectivity, too!

The effective sound-deadening materials allow occupants to fully appreciate the fantastic Alpine audio system, whose 7-inch colour interface doubles as a navigation display and rearview camera monitor. It's a real shame, however, that the various controls were seemingly designed for Lilliputians and that the screen becomes impossible to read when exposed to direct sunlight.

Leather is everywhere — on the seats, the dashboard, the steering wheel and even the door sills. While the overall design is striking to say the least, ergonomics and controls could be improved. What's more, the narrower front section of the chassis means you can forget about a dead pedal to rest your left foot. Too bad.

Warning: hot trunk!

At 161 litres, the trunk may seem small, but in reality, it's slightly more voluminous than the Cayman's front trunk (+11L). And because of its wide shape, a stand-type (portable) golf bag can fit easily.

Be careful when loading items, however. Keep food away from the inner panel that separates the trunk from the engine... unless you want to cook your steak on the go!

Naturally, the Porsche coupe provides an additional 260 litres of cargo space that can be accessed thanks to its rear hatch. But, if you choose to sacrifice the Lotus' rear seat, then you automatically free an extra 651 litres of space where Gucci garment bags will surely fit!

Performance to spare

The Toyota-sourced, transversally-mounted V6 has very little room to breathe. Yet, access to the chassis and mechanical components is not a problem thanks to the fully-removable front and rear body panels. That will make every repair man happy!

Having said that, don't expect the powertrain to let you down anytime soon. Since 2005, the unit known as 2GR-FE has proven highly dependable and reliable in over 20 different Toyota and Lexus products around the globe. Vehicles like the RAV4, Highlander and RX 350 SUVs, the Previa and Sienna minivans, the Venza crossover and the Avalon and Camry sedans use this engine.

Performance definitely fits the bill. Producing 276 horsepower (269 in RAV4 application), the 3.5-litre mill shoots the British bomb from 0 to 100 km/h in 4.9 seconds according to the manufacturer.

It's reportedly fuel-efficient, too, although the average of 8.7 L/100 km (city-highway) announced by Lotus does seem exaggerated, especially if the driver decides to push the car even just a

little. My very brief, mostly urban road test saw the Evora burn no less than 13 L/100 km.

Or course, typical Lotus owners don't really care about fuel economy. They are way more interested in performance and driving dynamics, like the Evora's remarkably short braking distances from 100 to 0 km/h — 36.8 metres.

World-class handling

Power is sent to the rear wheels through a six-speed manual gearbox, also sourced from Toyota. Shifts are precise even though the throws are a bit long. The clutch offers little to no resistance, which proves quite pleasant when driving in dense traffic. I'm here to report that Lotus will also make a six-speed automatic available in the near future.

Suspension travel is surprising. Much like the Elise, which by no means feels jarring, the Evora delivers an astonishingly compliant ride by sports car standards. The power steering, meanwhile, is razor-sharp and perfectly assisted.

The ultra-rigid, all-aluminum chassis helps the car make a mockery of poorly-maintained roads, the same ones that you would normally avoid with a Ferrari. Ironically, a lot of unwitting people liken the sleek-looking Evora to the more prestigious, Modena-built thoroughbreds!



The Evora delivers an astonishingly compliant ride by sports car standards. (Photo: Matthieu Lambert/Auto123.com)

Pros and cons

In Canada, the 2010 Lotus Evora starts at \$84,200. The optional rear seats add a mere \$680 to that price (the two-seat base model is referred to as "2+0" by the company), which means that a new Evora costs \$18,900 more than a 2010 Porsche Cayman.

The latter offers much better all-around visibility, superior cockpit ergonomics and two trunks instead of one. Moreover, stepping inside the German sports coupe requires a lot less flexibility!



Evora buyers will enjoy the kind of exclusiveness that not even a Cayman can match.
 (Photo: Matthieu Lambert/Auto123.com)

On the other hand, the Lotus boasts a super-solid architecture (aluminum chassis with fiberglass body) that makes wear and tear irrelevant. The engine promises a high level of reliability and could, in extreme cases, be repaired almost anywhere. Finally, the provocative design makes every onlooker weak in the knees. And since no more than 2,000 units will be sold on the planet, Evora buyers will enjoy the kind of exclusiveness that not even a Cayman can match.

By Jove!

Summary Rating:		Complete Rating	
Styling (82%)	★★★★☆	Performance (77%)	★★★★☆
Accessories (76%)	★★★★☆	Driving Dynamics (87%)	★★★★☆
Space and Access (74%)	★★★★☆	Safety (70%)	★★★★☆
Comfort (87%)	★★★★☆	General Appreciation (100%)	★★★★★
Styling		Performance	
Exterior (90%)	★★★★☆	Acceleration (80%)	★★★★☆
Interior (80%)	★★★★☆	Engine output (80%)	★★★★☆
Exterior fit and finish (80%)	★★★★☆	Transmission (80%)	★★★★☆
Interior Fit and Finish (80%)	★★★★☆	Fuel consumption (70%)	★★★★☆
Accessories		Driving Dynamics	
Convenience and equipment (80%)	★★★★☆	Steering (90%)	★★★★☆
Instrumentation and controls (80%)	★★★★☆	Handling (90%)	★★★★☆
General ergonomics (70%)	★★★★☆	Braking (90%)	★★★★☆
Heating / ventilation / air conditioning (70%)	★★★★☆	Manueverability (80%)	★★★★☆
Sound system (80%)	★★★★☆	Safety	
Space and Access		Traction and stability control (70%)	★★★★☆
Front space and access (70%)	★★★★☆	Mirrors (70%)	★★★★☆
		Visibility (60%)	★★★★☆
		General safety (80%)	★★★★☆
		General Appreciation	
		General Appreciation	★★★★★

Rear space and access (60%)	★★★★☆☆	(100%)
Cargo space and access (70%)	★★★★☆☆	
Storage capacity (70%)	★★★★☆☆	
Access to mechanical components (100%)	★★★★★★	
Comfort		
Seats (90%)	★★★★★★	
Driving position (80%)	★★★★☆☆	
Suspension and ride (90%)	★★★★★★	
Noise level (90%)	★★★★★★	