

# Porsche Cayman S and Lotus Evora Comparison Test Drive

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By Larry Webster

The Porsche Cayman S and the new Lotus Evora are two of the finest driving cars available at any price. They trade outright horsepower for handling prowess, telepathic controls and even a bit of fuel frugality. But which one cuts the best curve?

**Los Angeles**—After years of gestation, the new Lotus Evora has arrived on our shores. With an aluminum chassis, a Toyota V6 and a close-ratio manual transmission, its maker claims the low-slung sports car handles better than anything else on the road. Heady claims for sure, especially since the Evora's \$74,675 base price also lands it right against Porsche's Cayman S, a lauded driver's machine that debuted in 2006. To find out which one rules the tarmac, we ran the pair on and around L.A. mountain roads, highways and city streets, and also stopped at Camarillo airport for instrumented testing. Over what was probably the best 330 miles we've ever spent in cars, we found our favorite.

## The Specs

While both of these cars carry six-cylinder engines ahead of the rear axle—a rare engine placement—they're actually very different vehicles.

For example, the Evora has a V6 engine, while the Cayman relies on Porsche's flat six-cylinder. Displacing 3.4 liters, the aluminum motor employs a dry-sump lubrication system, variable valve timing and lift, direct fuel injection and a lofty 12.5:1 compression ratio. It belts out 320 hp at 7200 rpm and 273 lb-ft at 4750 rpm. A six-speed manual is standard, but our test car had the optional \$3420 seven-speed automated dual-clutch gearbox.

This powertrain rides in a steel unibody that's a hardtop version of the Porsche Boxster. Struts front and rear anchor the tires to the chassis and optional adjustable shocks that were on our testor offer two suspension settings, normal and sport. Massive disc brakes ride inside all four wheels.

The Lotus eschews the conventional pressed-steel unibody for a hybrid aluminum and steel frame. The center tub is made from aluminum extrusions that are bonded and bolted together. An aluminum front subframe carries the front forged-aluminum control arms, while in the rear, a galvanized steel structure holds the engine and rear suspension. The body is fiberglass.

Driving the Evora's rear wheels is the same engine that's in the Toyota Camry. This sounds horrendously plebeian for an exotic-looking sports car, but the Camry's 3.5-liter V6 is actually a decent mill, and frankly, a small-volume manufacturer like Lotus—about 2000 cars a year worldwide—couldn't develop its own engine and sell a car for less than 100 grand. So like the Elise, the Evora relies on Toyota for power. Lotus provides its own engine-management system, exhaust and intake, which has bumped the power to 276 hp at 6400 rpm and torque to 258 lb-ft at 4700 rpm. There are two manual six-speed transmissions available, standard and close ratio. An automatic will be offered by the end of the year.

As an "everyday" Lotus, the Evora also has some major concessions to practicality not typically seen from the brand. Most notable is the rear seat. It's a cramped bench that's not fit for anyone over 5 feet tall, but since the rear trunk is small, the extra interior space is useful. The extra interior length also means the Evora can comfortably accommodate taller drivers than the

Cayman. In addition, the Evora offers a backup camera, leather trim, iPod connectivity, navigation and, except for cupholders, nearly all of the features one might desire in sometime commuter.

The Cayman, likewise, can be outfitted like a Cadillac, but naturally the price rises quickly with each option. Our loaded version rang in at \$76,505, a princely sum, but roughly nine grand cheaper than the \$85,680 Evora. At least the fuel bills will be somewhat reasonable. The Cayman is rated for 20/29 EPA city/highway, and the Lotus comes in at 18/27 with the close-ratio gearbox. And as you'll soon learn, that's reasonable efficiency for the performance these cars provide.

### **The Drive**

The Evora's extruded aluminum side sill provides a bit of hurdle when you drop into the bucket seat. We're not talking about major gymnastics, but a rehearsed technique greatly eases the ingress/egress. So getting in the Evora is either a sense of occasion or an unfortunate inconvenience depending on your outlook. The Porsche is like any other car with unimpeded access.

Once inside, neither car is especially roomy. The Lotus has the advantage of greater fore and aft seat travel, but shoulder room feels a little tight compared to the Porsche. Also, the Evora's pedals soak up every bit of the pedal box so there's not any room for a dead pedal. Still, both cars have tilting and telescoping wheels, which meant a comfortable driving position was readily achievable.

On the dragstrip, the Porsche's 13 percent better power-to-weight ratio and quick-shifting gearbox carried the day. It ran to 60 mph in 4.82 seconds, a half-second quicker than the Evora. And of course, the acceleration gap continues to widen as the speeds increase. The Evora has a slight grip advantage—its 0.99-g skidpad number is 0.01 g higher, and it stops from 60 mph in just 104.29 feet, nearly 4 feet better than the Porsche. On a racetrack the Porsche would still quite easily hand the Evora its lunch.

In normal driving both are shockingly civilized and quiet, but the Porsche has an edge. For one, there's the automated gearbox; as much as we liked rowing the Evora's gearbox, in traffic it gets old. Also, the Lotus has huge B pillars that hamper rear visibility, especially when checking the blind spots.

Change the venue to a sinewy mountain road, however, and things change. The Cayman is a practiced artist in the curves, a machine that responds with equal aplomb to both aggressive driving and a more moderate pace. The engine's intake honks deeply at wide-open throttle and there's good communication between the tires and driver. The gearbox snaps off upshifts insanely fast and delightfully blips the throttle for downshifts. This transmission, by the way, deserves a better operator interface than the steering-wheel-mounted buttons. We're thinking of proper, column-mounted paddles like a Ferrari, not cheap plastic bits from a Pontiac Grand Prix.

Lumpy pavement is the Cayman's kryptonite. The body moves up and down quite a bit, which doesn't necessarily effect the car's grip, but the motions sap the driver's confidence. Selecting the sport mode only made the ride stiffer and still didn't quell the body motions. Overall, however, the Cayman deserves its high regard among sports car aficionados.

Comparatively, the Lotus is on another planet. That same undulating road posed no challenge for the Evora's suspension. There's a fluidity that's remarkable. It's like the wheels are free to

move up and down, conforming to the surface, but simultaneously, the body stays flat and level. We don't mean to give the impression that the Porsche is awful in this regard—it's not—it's just that the Lotus is uncannily good.

Switching between the two reveals a marked difference. The Cayman simply feels larger—though it's about the same size—as if there's a thin, but extra layer of isolation between the road and the driver. The Porsche's responses are just a tick behind, yet it's also the stiffer of the two cars. Somehow Lotus has figured out how to make the suspension both incredibly supple and sharp-edged.

On real-world backroads, the Evora outhandles the Porsche by a wide margin. Now, handling is a tough concept to quantify beyond a driver's impressions. We thought we'd bring some data to the exercise by driving both cars over the same section of curvy pavement while recording the speed, time and g-forces with our VBOX data logger.

Over a one-mile course, the Lotus was faster by a mere tenth of a second. The data suggests an inconsequential difference between the two cars, which didn't back up our seat-of-the-pant impressions. But digging deeper reveals something else: The Porsche gains times in the straights thanks to its better power-to-weight ratio, but in the curves the Lotus was often going up to 5 mph faster. Since both cars have about the same grip, the difference is simply that the Evora provides greater confidence and thus we felt more comfortable pushing it harder.

What's amazing is that the Evora has this handling without the help of fancy chassis aids. Sure, there's stability control—which, like the Cayman's, unobtrusively operates in the background—but the power steering doesn't have variable assist and the shocks lack multiple settings.

All that hard charging took a toll on fuel economy. During a 260-mile mix of city, highway and aggressive backroad driving, the Porsche managed 22.90 mpg and the Lotus 22.69. Be gentle with the throttle and both cars can easily achieve fuel economy in the high twenties.

### **The Bottom Line**

The Lotus delivers a man-machine connection that we didn't think was possible—a car that every ride and handling engineer should sample. Plus it's full of character—you sit practically between the front wheels, the shape is as exotic as a Lamborghini, and the Toyota V6 is not only commendably smooth, it also cries a deep-throated wail like the Porsche. In today's world of blandness, an interesting ride that doesn't suffer a ride penalty is an alluring option. The Porsche is not only outright faster, it's cheaper and better quipped inside. Picking between the two is a bit like choosing your favorite Burt Reynolds movie. If you plan to commute in one of these two cars, the Cayman is a better option. It's simply a tick easier to live with. Give us 75 grand, however, and we're high-tailing it to the Lotus store.

	Lotus Evora	Porsche Cayman S
<b>Base price</b>	\$74,675	\$61,150
<b>As tested</b>	\$84,680	
<b>Powertrain</b>	276 hp/258 lb-ft, 3.5-liter V6, 6m	320 hp/273 lb-ft, 3.4-liter flat 6, 7 auto man
<b>Suspension (f/r)</b>	control arms, coil springs/control arms, coil springs	struts, coil spring/struts,, coil springs
<b>Wheelbase (in.)</b>	101.4	95.1
<b>Length (in.)</b>	170.9	172.3
<b>Width (in.)</b>	72.8	70.9
<b>Track (f/r)</b>	61.7/62.0	58.5/60.2
<b>Axle ratio</b>	3.24:1	3.25:1
<b>Brakes (f/r)</b>	13.8-inch disc/13.1-inch disc, ABS, ESC	12.5-inch disc/11.8-inch disc, ABS, ESC
<b>Curb weight</b>	3100	3180
<b>Weight distribution</b>	38.7/61.3	45.3/54.7
<b>Power-to-weight (lbs/hp)</b>	11.23	9.94
<b>Tires (f/r)</b>	225/40ZR-18/255/35ZR-19	P235/40ZR-18/P265/40ZR-18
<b>Acceleration (sec)</b>		
<b>0-30 mph</b>	1.93	2.06
<b>0-60 mph</b>	5.32	4.82
<b>0-100 mph</b>	12.93	11.11
<b>40-70 mph</b>	3.98	3.17
<b>Quarter-mile</b>	13.58 @ 102.47	13.00 @ 109.05
<b>Braking (ft)</b>		
<b>30-0 mph</b>	26.45	27.22
<b>60-0 mph</b>	104.29	108.21
<b>Skidpad (g)</b>	0.99	0.98
<b>Mountain road run (sec)</b>	77.40	77.50
<b>EPA fuel economy (city/hw)</b>	18/27	20/29
<b>PM fuel economy</b>	22.69	22.90