



CARS TO KEEP

Lotus Europa Special

A song for Europa

Europas, especially the five-speed, twin cam Special versions, are now becoming 'collectable', but these often controversial cars are not everyone's favourites . . .

Why the Editor chose me to write about the Lotus Europa I do not know. The trouble is that I'm an Elan man!

The Elan is still one of the finest little road motors you can get. Its compact dimensions and vivid acceleration make it ideal for modern traffic conditions and it is by far the most comfortable of all the small sports cars. If you set up an Elan for racing, you spoil it, for

although it is admittedly too 'soft' for the circuits, its ride and handling in standard form are ideal for any journey in any country, and the longer the better. I hope that Colin will see the light and bring back the Elan, and that in modernising it he will not alter it too much.

The Europa, on the other hand, I cannot love. Perhaps that is because, in my opinion it is ugly, like most mid-engined cars. Beauty is

in the eye of the beholder, so let us not discuss the subject further. I am quite cognisant that there are some people who must have a mid-engined car and nothing else will do. They are fully aware of the shortcomings of the breed but Formula 1 cars are mid-engined and so that is what they want.

At least the Europa is a true mid-engined car, with the power unit placed longitudinally as in a racing car. Those cars with a transverse engine and transmission, only just ahead of the rear wheels, are more akin to rear-engined machines, though I suppose they are nominally mid-engined. It also has a little more luggage space than some of these vehicles, though it is strictly a two-seater.

When Colin Chapman first decided to build a mid-engined sports car, he thought of it as something small, simple and cheap, to be a replacement for the immortal Seven. Somehow it seemed to grow and grow during the designing period and it finished up 1ft longer than the Elan and 8½in wider. Then came the idea of making it an export only model, which is why it was called Europa. The plot was to build the cars in England, without engine or transmission, and fit these essential components at the other side of the Channel, thus greatly reducing import duties.

The engine chosen was the light-alloy unit from the Renault 16, complete with its own gearbox and final drive. Normally, in the Renault saloon, it sat behind the driveshafts to the front wheels, with the transmission poking out in front. For the Europa it was turned right round the opposite way and centrally mounted, with the gearbox behind it. This gave four reverse gears, of course, but it was made possible, without too much modification, to mount the crown wheel on the other side of the pinion, thus causing the car to go forwards instead of backwards.

In mid-engined cars with the power unit mounted fore and aft, it is usual to find that the ancillary belt drives are right up against the



'Look what I've found!' Colin Chapman shows what he did with the Europa's Renault engine