



## Lotus Cortina's 50th Birthday

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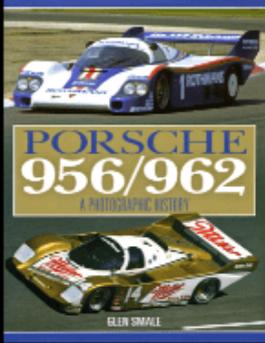


Lotus Cortina Mk1 driven by Sir Stirling Moss at the Goodwood Revival 2007, here being chased by its arch rival Mini Cooper (Image supplied by VMP)

Announced in January 1963, the Lotus Cortina was destined to take the motorsport world by storm. The gestation period of the model can be traced back to 1961, when Lotus boss, Colin Chapman, began the development of his own engines to power his cars. Up to this point he had used the rather expensive Coventry Climax engine but he managed as only Colin Chapman could, to coax the well-known engineer, Harry Mundy, into designing a twin-cam head for the Ford Kent engines, using the 997cc and 1340cc sub-assemblies. The following year, however, Ford announced the introduction of their 5-bearing 1499cc engine, and with an eye to using this unit in the new Lotus Elan, Chapman engaged the services of



Cosworth to further develop the new unit.



Foreword by Norbert Singer

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Chapman's work on the engines and the extra performance he extracted from them caught the attention of Ford's Walter Hayes, who asked the Lotus boss to fit the new engines to 1000 of the 2-door Mk1 Cortina models. Not being one to turn down a good offer, Chapman set about preparing the cars at their Cheshunt plant, despite frantically trying to get their Elan production ready which was proving troublesome.



1965 Lotus Cortina Mk1s in police trim (Image supplied by VMP)

With engine capacity increased to 1558cc (now giving 105bhp) and mated to the close-ratio 'box as fitted to the Elan, the Lotus Cortina began to take shape. Rear suspension



modifications included a radical A-frame coil-sprung set up, while certain steel body panels (doors, bonnet and boot) were replaced with aluminium and lightweight casings were used for the gearbox and the diff.

The Lotus factory cars were painted in the now familiar white with a green stripe running along the flank, while the full-width front bumper was replaced with a pair of smaller quarter bumpers. The rear end retained its full-width bumper but two neat Lotus badges adorned the rear wings, and a single round Lotus badge was fitted on the right side of the radiator grille. Safety belts and a radio were considered optional equipment.



Lotus Cortina Mk1s on display at Silverstone Classic 2012 (Image supplied by VMP)

The Lotus Cortina's top speed (for road use) was an impressive 108mph, and in 1963 this model would have set you back the not insignificant sum of a little more than £1100.00, while the standard sedan model would cost around £660. Between the years of 1963-1966,



no less than 3301 Lotus Cortinas were produced.



1963 Lotus Cortina Mk1 in typical cornering pose driven by Jim Clark (Image supplied by VMP)

The Lotus Cortina began its remarkable career on the circuits of the world in late '63, as the model was only homologated in September of that year, but the legendary battles that ensued with the Mini Cooper, Alfa GTA, Mustang, the 3.8-litre Jaguars and the mighty Ford Galaxy thrilled crowds around the world. Jim Clark of course was the name that became inseparable from the Lotus Cortina. To record all of the Lotus Cortina's motor racing and rallying achievements would require no less than a book, as the car raced on all continents where the **Ford Cortina** was sold, as well as notching up a victory in the East African Safari Rally in 1964...but we are not going to dive into that part of the models history here, perhaps another day!

So in a brief but fitting tribute to the mighty Lotus Cortina, we would like to wish the people's favourite a truly rapturous Golden Anniversary!



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