

PROJECT "47"

LOTUS REMARQUE - December 1995 - James Petrocik

My love affair with the Europa is a long-standing one. I bought my first Lotus in 1973- a new Twin Cam Special-and I still have it.

One day, I walked into my office and saw the local Auto Trader on my desk. There was an item circled: "1967 Lotus Europa, needs work, \$700." I immediately called the number, asked for directions, and was out of there.

As soon as I saw the car, from 50 feet away, I decided that I would pay the asking price, if necessary. When I departed a short time later, I was the proud owner of a Type 46, VIN 0418, for the total price of \$550.

Four of us were required to wrestle 0418 onto a trailer, because it would not roll; the frame had rusted to the point that the suspension had fallen away. As I proudly hauled my newest acquisition home, I really had no idea what I was going to do with the car. But, once we arrived, it looked just fine sitting in my back yard.

So few Type 46s were built-less than 2,000-that I knew I had acquired something special. Something that deserved to motor down the road again one day. But what, exactly, to do with a car that all of the articles I had read said to avoid - especially in the condition that this one was in?

Thumbing through the Lotus Europa Gold Portfolio book, I found myself fixed on page 170, poring over every detail of the Type 47. This twin cam powered version of the 46 was built for

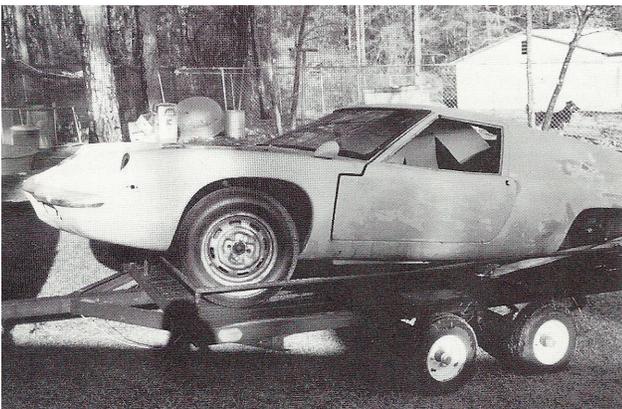
racing only, and it is a rare classic indeed; only 55 were made. In Gold Leaf trim, it looked truly stunning. By the next morning, I had a basic plan: I would make a Type 47 look-alike.

Thus began Project 47. My plan was to cut the badly rusted frame out of the 46's body and reconstruct the bottom so that I could bolt in a Europa Twin Cam or Spyder frame. Because I just happened to already have in hand a complete Europa TC chassis and a five-speed gearbox, it seemed like the right thing to do.

As the plan came together, I did question myself. I wondered if I was getting in over my head or committing a sin by doing this conversion. But I decided: Screw it! I was going to build me a neat little street racer! A Type 47 look-alike in Gold Leaf trim, exactly like the one on page 170, with right hand drive, side fuel fillers, vents, and swing-out door windows.

To start, I removed the frame with a jigsaw, stripped it of all usable parts, and trashed the rest. Then, with the old frame cut out, I turned the body over and surveyed what I had done. It was going to be necessary to fiberglass both the front and rear inner wheel wells, the footwell areas, part of the center tunnel, the body-to-frame mounting points, and a number of other items.

At this point, I still had many questions and doubts about exactly how I would fit the Twin Cam frame into its new body. How could I ensure that the frame would be level and in the cor-



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rect relative position? How far into the body should I set the frame? How many problems was I overlooking? Who could I call for some answers? Would I even understand the solutions if they were explained to me? Fortunately, Bob Clayton, a Lotus, Ltd. member and seasoned Lotusphile, was always able to come through for me with the information that I needed.

When I began Project 47, I was already in the middle of a ground-up restoration on a Type 74 that I had bought a year earlier. So I decided to use the Europa Twin Cam's body for molds. I turned the TC body upside-down, supported it next to Project 47, and began to make molds of the needed bottom sections.

I then positioned the replacement frame into the 46's body up to the remaining part of the tunnel and leveled it, leaving myself some room for the necessary padding. After taking the molds from the TC, I positioned the front inner fenders and footwell areas and glassed them in.

Next, with the frame in place, I positioned molds of the rear inner wheel wells. I did this based on the location of the rear shock tower mounts on the frame, and glassed them into position.

To properly fit the wider TC frame, I then cut two holes near the inside of each fixed-seat area and glassed small dimples to the inside. With the seats in place, they could not be seen from inside the car.

I also glassed in the body mounting bobbins and a few minor items before smoothing out the rough areas.

When I was done with the bottom, the 46's body looked just like the bottom of the TC's and appeared stronger.

I next turned my attention to the outside of the body and began there by constructing the side fuel filler points and vents. But, like other Europa restoration projects, it was the minor body damage and stress cracks that turned out to be the most time consuming. Sanding and filling in all of the pinholes seemed like an endless task, but I

finally arrived at a smooth surface, ready for paint.

An understanding local paint shop allowed me to do the masking and assist with the spraying. The results were worth all of the hours of sanding. I was very happy with the finish.

After I got the body back from the paint shop, I started preparing it for mounting on the frame. The wiring in the S1 required significantly fewer circuits than the Twin Cam's. Installing the wiring harness had to be done prior to placing the body on the frame, due to the different interior.

The actual mounting of the body on the frame was easy; with the assistance of some friends, it took only a few minutes.

I decided to leave the installation of the windshield and rear window to a professional glass man. I had the door windows made out of Lexan. The latches came from a swap meet. The door-sized Gold Leaf Team Lotus decals were custom-made and pricey, but they were worth it. Like any other restoration project, the last ten percent of the work seemed like it took 90 percent of the time. But motivation was no problem. I could hardly wait to fire up Project 47 and tear off down the road.

It was a Saturday morning when we pushed the finally-completed car outside. What a transformation! The once-lifeless, rusting shell stood in the sunlight, reborn and glowing. I could not stop smiling and walking around it, admiring its brilliant Gold Leaf trim. Later, sitting back, sipping a cold one and just continuing to look at it, I felt an immense amount of personal satisfaction.

Although not a real Type 47, I now have a kick-ass little street racer for a fraction of the price of the genuine article. The out-of-pocket cost of Project 47 was less than \$3,000. Added to this, of course, must be the debt of thanks that I owe to a handful of friends for their assistance and encouragement along the way. My labor, I just considered a learning experience.

Oh, by the way: It goes!