

1963 LOTUS TYPE 23B

Just as the Lotus Type 19 was based on the Type 18 Formula 1 car, the Type 23 was the sports racing sibling of the Formula Junior Type 22 single-seater. As respected journalist John Blunsden commented at the time: "It is a car which, design-wise, offers few if any surprises. The Lotus 23 is the closest thing to the Type 22 Junior that it is possible to make that will carry a scaled down and smoothed out Appendix C, sportscar style body."

The familiar Lotus style tubular spaceframe chassis was splayed out to carry the wider bodywork, and torsional stiffness benefitted substantially from the increased cross-sectional area. The floorpan was of 20-gauge aluminium sheet. The prototype had a large wedge-shaped fuel tank fitted behind the seats, but production cars had a longitudinal nine-gallon tank mounted to the left of the passenger seat; an additional tank could be placed in the right-hand sill if long distance racing was intended. The front suspension featured Triumph Herald hubs, which the Type 22 also used. Likewise, the rear suspension was identical to the Lotus 22, except for slightly harder damper settings and slightly stiffer springs.

The elegant, close-fitting bodywork was made entirely of color-infused glassfibre, incorporating an air intake duct. The chassis tubes carried oil and water between the engine and their respective cooling radiators. The center bodywork sections were attached securely to the frame; but the rest of the body comprised large front and rear sections which hinged on outriggers and were held closed by simple spring clips. The doors were hinged at their bottom edge and blended with the three-piece wrap-around screen.

The Lotus Type 23 was introduced at the 1962 Racing Car Show with Ford 109E power, as modified by Cosworth to produce over 100bhp at 7400rpm from 1097cc. The engine was mounted on the car's center-line, but unlike the 22, it was mounted vertically in the frame. The gearshift linkage to the Renault or VW

gearbox could best be described as circuitous; it had to be cranked over to the left of the engine via two universal joints and three guides. The VW gearbox had a conventional gate but the Renault box had first and second gears nearer the driver of a right-hand drive car. A Hewland five-speed box was also listed as an option.

During early 1962 Lotus was developing its new Twin-cam engine for use in the the new Elan street car, and it looked ideal for use in the Type 23. The small capacity Type was already proving hugely successful, and when the twin-cam engine was installed in the 23 for 1963, the Type 23B was born. Underneath the seemingly identical bodywork to the 23, the chassis was substantially modified and strengthened to take the increased power (anything between 125 and 145bhp was being claimed by various engine builders) of the enlarged 1594cc version of the Lotus Ford twin-cam engine that, by then, was being fitted to the fast selling Elan roadcar.

A three-car Normand Racing Team, who fielded Type 23Bs for Mike Beckwith, Tony Hegbourne and, when available, Jim Clark, enjoyed great success with their immaculate white cars adorned with red and blue stripes in 1963. In the 49 race starts, the trio made, they placed no less than 38 times and took lap records at eight circuits. Ian Walker Racing Team also fielded a 23B with much distinction in both the UK and the USA. With both Graham Hill and Paul Hawkins behind the wheel of their immaculately prepared cars, they took class wins at several high profile meetings in the USA.

The strengthened Type 23B also lent itself to the use of other power plants and cars were seen with a multitude of other engines, such as BMW, Porsche and even the occasional American V8 power source. The Type 23 has one other historical claim to fame: it was the last small capacity pure sports racer designed by Colin Chapman.

MAKE/MODEL	Lotus Type 23B Sports Racing Car
YEAR(S) OF PRODUCTION	1963
EXAMPLES BUILT	131 (Type 23 and Type 23B)
ENGINE TYPE	Lotus-Ford Twin-cam
ENGINE SIZE/POWER	1558cc/135bhp
TRANSMISSION	Hewland HD5 or FT200, 5-speed
LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT	140.0in/59.5in/27.0in
WHEELBASE	90.0in
WEIGHT	950lbt