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BEHIND THE WHEEL | 2010 LOTUS EVORA

# Watching Its Weight but Hugging the Curves



**LIVING LARGER** The Evora is notable for, among other things, cramming a small back seat into a midengine design.

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By LAWRENCE ULRICH  
Published: October 1, 2010

JENNY CRAIG, Richard Simmons, [Oprah](#) in her doughnut-denying prime — none can match Lotus Cars in a Biggest Loser contest.

### Multimedia



Slide Show

2010 Lotus Evora

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Lotus added luxury touches to the cabin, but some of them come up short. [More Photos >](#)

The English automaker made its reputation with slenderized sporting cars, from [Formula One](#) racers to street machines. Unprompted, car aficionados can recite the engineering ethos of the company's founder, Colin Chapman: "Simplify, then add lightness."

Lotus's mantra is one of the industry's burdens. Automakers would love to slash 1,000 pounds from every model to meet fuel mileage rules. But any crash diet is stymied by crash standards that stuff cars with safety features, protecting people but adding pounds.

Then, demanding consumers fatten up the cars further by asking for weighty indulgences like seats that heat, cool, massage and play DVDs on rear-facing screens.

As for performance cars, all else being equal, a lighter car handles better than a heavy one. That's why the [Lotus Elise](#) convertible and Exige hardtop — which, at less than 2,000 pounds apiece, are among the most feathery automobiles on the road — are more fun than a 5,200-pound [Bentley Continental GT](#),

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even if the Bentley can embarrass them in a stoplight drag race.

But the basic \$50,000 Elise — so good that Lotus let Tesla replace the gas engine with [lithium](#) batteries and proclaim that the \$110,000 Roadster had revolutionized the automobile — is suddenly 15 years old.

With its undiluted character, the Elise can be simultaneously loved and hated for its go-kart vibe, naked interior and zero tolerance for dessert-loving Americans.

Realizing that many drivers — don't forget passengers — have no patience for such uncompromising sports cars, Lotus offered the Evora for the 2010 model year. As for being distinctive, can you name another midengine car with four seats?

Compared with its siblings, the Evora is 22 inches longer, 5 wider and 4 taller; it is only 4.7 inches shorter than a Porsche 911.

The added size lifts the Evora's weight to 3,047 pounds. Yet that's 250 pounds less than a comparable 911 or Corvette, and 800 less than the burly Nissan GT-R.

How's that possible? For starters, the Evora's three-piece aluminum chassis weighs just 440 pounds, no more than a pair of well-fed occupants. If you grabbed the Lotus at both ends and wrung it out, it would take nearly 20,000 pound-feet of force to make the chassis twist by one degree. Lotus insists that the car's structure is 50 percent stiffer than the Ferrari F430's.

The result is a high-character British charmer that starts just under \$75,000 (about \$85,000 well-equipped), but looks and handles like a six-figure supercar.

The Evora certainly has style and exclusivity. There's a nearly Ferrariesque flair to its undulating profile, narrow cockpit and ridiculously saucy hips.

Lotus plans to build just 2,000 Evoras a year, with about 700 bound for the United States. Pull into any valet line — as I did for an event at a New York area hotel — and the attendants are likely to park the Evora front and center amid the Bentleys and Lamborghinis.

Given the wide door sills, entering or exiting still involves stretching, but it's nothing like the contortionist act required with the Elise.

Inside the Evora, Lotus has made a real effort to create a luxurious ambience, with a leather-wrapped dash and door panels, tremendous Recaro seats and even a tilting-and-telescoping magnesium steering wheel.

The effort isn't fully convincing: round metal control buttons, including one for the glovebox, are cryptically labeled, and their backlit labels wash out in sunlight. The Alpine audio system sounds fine, but it's shoehorned into the dash like a discount special and its tiny buttons and touch screen are awkward. Parked behind that navigation screen, however, is a nifty touch: a hand-held GPS unit that pops out for portable use.

During my test, a hunk of sound-muffling carpet came unglued and wound itself around the clutch pedal. I had to pull the carpet off the firewall to go safely on my way. Later, when a passenger pulled his interior door handle, its trim popped loose.

Ah, the Evora truly is a British sports car!

The driver's footwell is also too narrow to allow a dead pedal that you could brace your left foot against. But all told, the Evora is well-packaged, given its size and midengine layout.

As with the Porsche 911, the back seat is for toddler emergencies; more usefully, it provides space for a pair of suitcases or other cargo. The rear trunk adds another six

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cubic feet of storage, making the Evora a genuine traveling companion.

But don't think that Lotus has gone all soft. The Evora is still a purist's delight, as I learned at the Monticello Motor Club, a road course northwest of New York City.

A version of this review appeared in print on October 3, 2010, on page AU1 of the New York edition.

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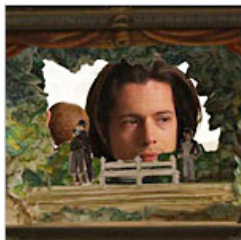
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# Watching Its Weight but Hugging the Curves

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Like the Elise, the Evora borrows a Toyota engine, this one a 3.5-liter, 276-horsepower V-6 that has been spared a life sentence in a Camry or Sienna. Lotus adds its own clutch, flywheel and exhaust system, and it tweaks the engine controls for more linear response.

### Multimedia



Slide Show

2010 Lotus Evora

The Lotus isn't slow, with a 4.8-second dash from a standstill to 60 miles per hour and a top speed of 162 m.p.h. But the engine, while smooth, remains unremarkable for a car in this class, whether in horsepower, torque (at a peak of 258 pound-feet) or stirring sound. When a [Nissan 370Z](#) at half the price can mount 56 more horses from its V-6, that's an issue.

The modest power and slim physique contribute to an economy rating of 18 miles per gallon in town and 27 on the highway. Cruising at 65 m.p.h. I got a Miatalike 30 m.p.g.

The Lotus's other sore thumb is a rubbery, long-throw shifter for the 6-speed manual gearbox. Considering Lotus's engineering wizardry, I'd expect at least the precision of a Honda manual. An optional 6-speed paddle-shifted automatic will be available next spring.

Yet as with the Elise and its 4-cylinder Toyota engine, it's to Lotus's credit that the Evora remains one of the most soul-stirring sports cars.

Lotus claims the Evora can top 1.2 g's of cornering force. That beats every car in the price class, from the Corvette Z06 and Porsche 911 to the Nissan GT-R. And without moving to the Amalfi coast, I couldn't find a public curve where I could sanely challenge the Evora's capabilities.

Though the Evora provides power steering — unlike the Elise — the feel is uncanny, with none of the woolen layers of electronic interference that mar some performance cars. There is a stability control system with a competition mode to sharpen the throttle response and raise the tachometer's red line past 7,000 r.p.m.

At Monticello, I was joined by a pair of dedicated Lotus owners: Ari Straus, the track's chief operating officer; and David Nagler, the former president of Lotus Ltd., which calls itself the nation's largest Lotus club.

Flanked by their teensy, old-school Lotuses, the men weren't entirely welcoming to this

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plush new sibling. "It's too big, too heavy," Mr. Straus said, ticking off his preconceptions. "It's not supposed to have a back seat."

Pouring rain at Monticello seemed another wet blanket. And then the Evora shook it off, hitting the track with dazzling balance and control. With a wheelbase 11 inches longer than the Elise's, the Evora proved less twitchy near its limits, and its fatter tires and supple suspension helped it lay down more power coming out of turns.

After riding shotgun, Mr. Straus — a Grand Am racer on his home turf — took the wheel, ripping off laps with a casual grace that belied the pelting rain. Both he and Mr. Nagler left the track paying their ultimate compliment: the Evora is a true Lotus, they agreed.

Yet one point sparked universal agreement: Some buyers will want more urgency. Last week at the Paris auto show, Lotus introduced the supercharged Evora S that goes on sale in the spring. That 350-horsepower version will have a better power-to-weight ratio than the Porsche 911S, a level that sounds just about perfect.

(Lotus created a buzz in Paris by introducing five concept models, including a radically redesigned Elise and a reborn Esprit supercar — with a midmounted, 620-horsepower V-8 — expected to go on sale in 2013 for about \$175,000. )

My test drive of the Evora began, like Mr. Straus's and Mr. Nagler's, with modest expectations. But by the time a car-loving, cigar-chewing truck driver named Joe came to retrieve the car, I was surprisingly sad to see it go. As I drove the Lotus onto the flatbed, two children stopped cold on my Brooklyn sidewalk to stare at this life-size Matchbox toy.

"Daddy?" one asked his father, his concern matching my own, "where are they taking that pretty car?"

I wanted to tell him: To sports-car heaven, son. A place where Lotuses run free and never shed their carpets.

•

**INSIDE TRACK:** Light makes right.

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