



Mike Potter 1931-2025

Mike was an active member of the Lotus Club for many years, a familiar sight on Club Runs and events. Members often place other members by the Lotus members drive. Mike's Lotus 7 was likely known by its driver. What follows is a reminiscence of photos: *Mike through the Years*, a character sketch *Mike Potter: Words of Wisdom*, and a story he wrote. Mike didn't write for the newsletter with one historic exception, an account of his trip to the legendary 1957 Le Mans: *Sojourn to LeMans 1957*. Mike witnessed Jaguar win the race and Lotus take two class wins plus the Index of Performance. It is reprinted here. Reading his account you hear Mike talking again.

Editor

PHOTO M. EDDENDEN





Mike through the years



Mother and child 1931



This attempt to document Mike Potter's life in the Lotus Club of Canada is flawed. It suffers from too many shots of British Car Day, too few of other Club events like back road Runs, and gaps: no monthly meetings. There are however photos of rare events like the MG Club's one car show at the Distillery District in Toronto in 2005.

Quality varies. Not a surprise considering the changes in technology we suffer and benefit from. Some of the photos were taken on Kodak Brownies over 90 years ago, some on film cameras with their photos scanned, some on digital cameras (both

point & shoot and full frame) and some on the now ubiquitous cellphone.

The photos lack written information. This is about Mike; I felt it was better to let the photos speak for themselves unencumbered with captions, dates and attributions. (Most were by Mike McGraw, Anonymous, and myself.) The shots are arranged chronologically starting in the mid-1990s and ending at Mike's memorial. A few very old non-Club photos, like the one on the left, made their way in because I couldn't resist.

Editor





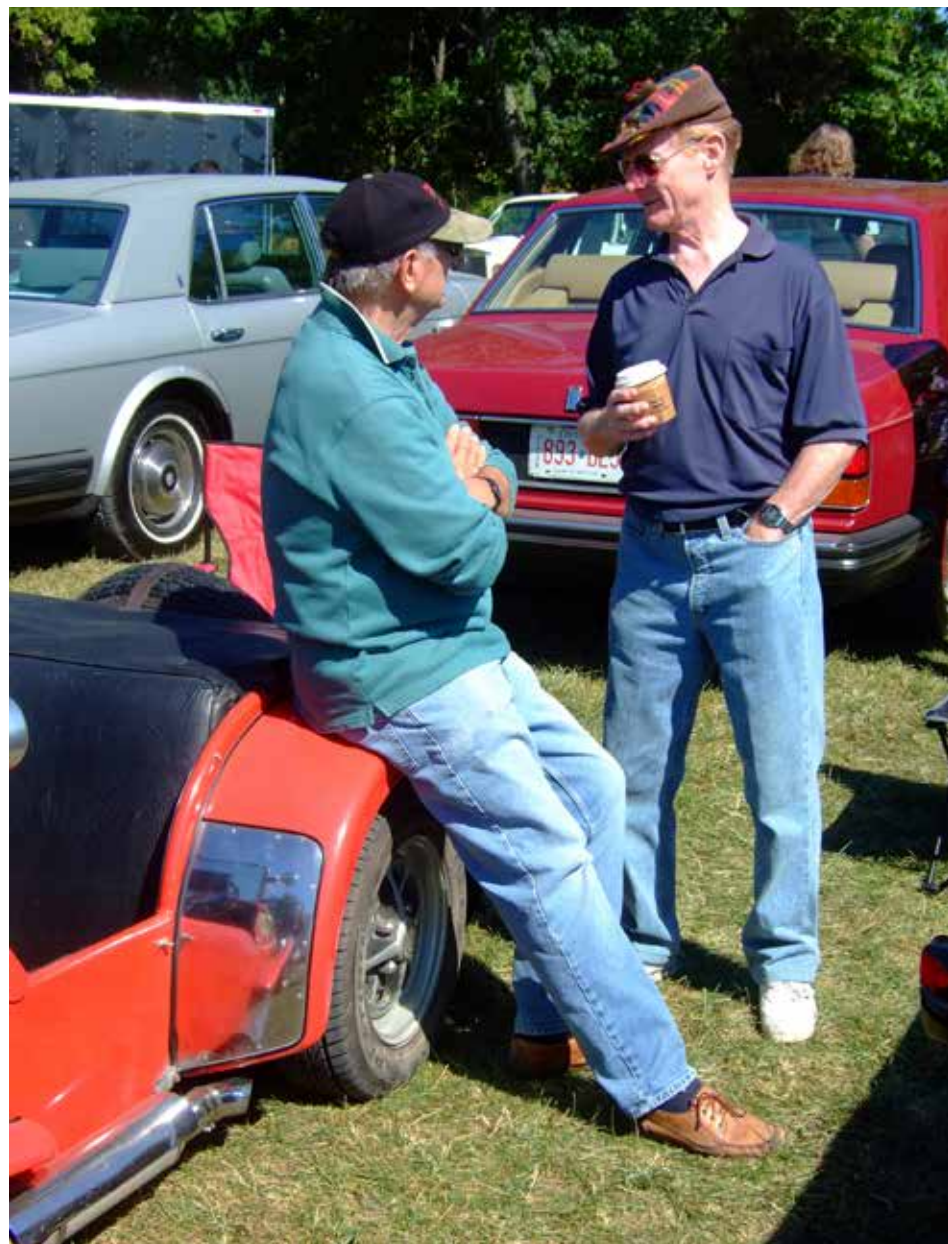




















Mike Potter words of wisdom

*Excerpted from Why Build a Seven?
written & illustrated by Michael Eddenden*

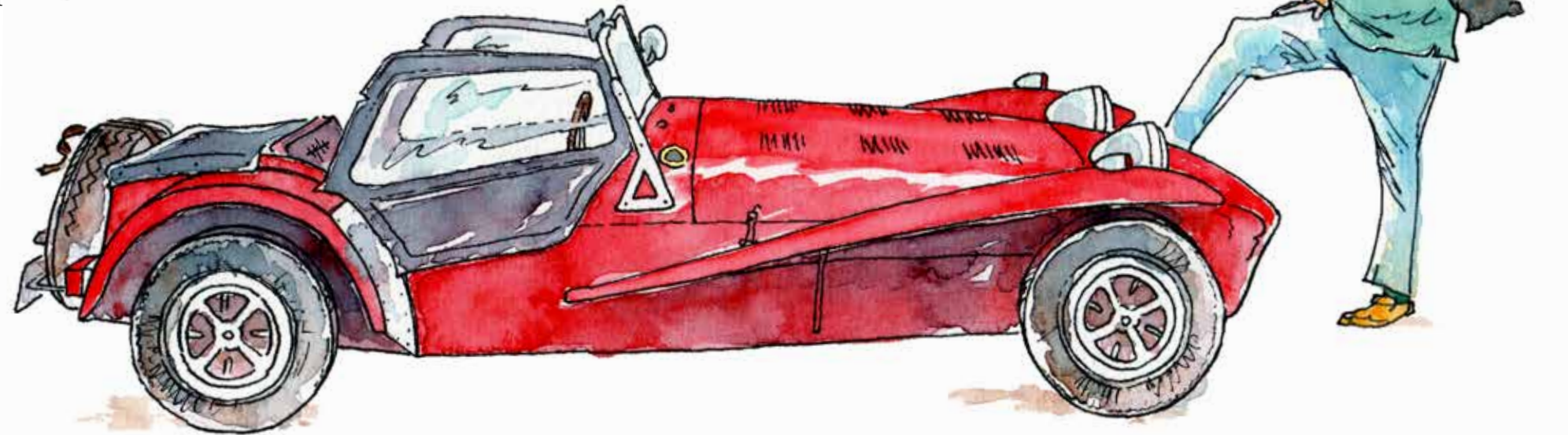
Then there were the Seven owners...Mike Potter, whose immaculate red Series 2/3 Lotus Seven was parked outside, and Duncan Lamb whose black and yellow Series 3 was always threatening to come apart at the seams, but who, at the head of the pack, set the bugs-in-the-teeth pace for Club Runs. It's a small club, under a hundred members; Mike and Duncan were major props of the small active core.

Mike's Seven always drew attention at car meets. People recognize authenticity. Polished without appearing concours in any way, the car looked like it had been driven to the meeting, as Mike always did.

It had also driven all the local tracks on lapping days, especially Mosport, the Canadian Grand Prix circuit in the sixties and seventies. The car was memorably clean, free of grease, oil and road grime. It had the patina old, well-maintained and well-driven cars acquire. There were no strange, late seventies mods, or staggeringly inappropriate parts installed because Canadian Tire was so convenient and finding the correct replacement so difficult. Like all Sevens it did have its own distinctive features.

Built on the cusp of the change from Series 2 to 3, Lotus had built the car with bits from both parts bins. But all the right bits were there, working and worn just enough to look better than new. The seats looked sat in, the steering wheel looked like hands had held it, the engine looked like it had endured traffic and started on cold November days at the end of the season and revved as high as Mike dared around Mosport. The car looked driven and ready to drive. (Duncan's Seven was the same age, but like the friend you meet twenty-five years later who has lived more than you have and much harder than you have, experience had left its mark.)

...For reasons which thankfully escape me now, Pierre Berton's famous definition of a Canadian came up: "*A Canadian is someone who can make love in a canoe.*" To which Mike, who in his slightly askew leather flying helmet, is as English as a character strayed from a P.G. Wodehouse story, said, "A Seven owner is someone who can make love in a Seven." Then whispered in the voice of a conspirator, "And I can prove it."

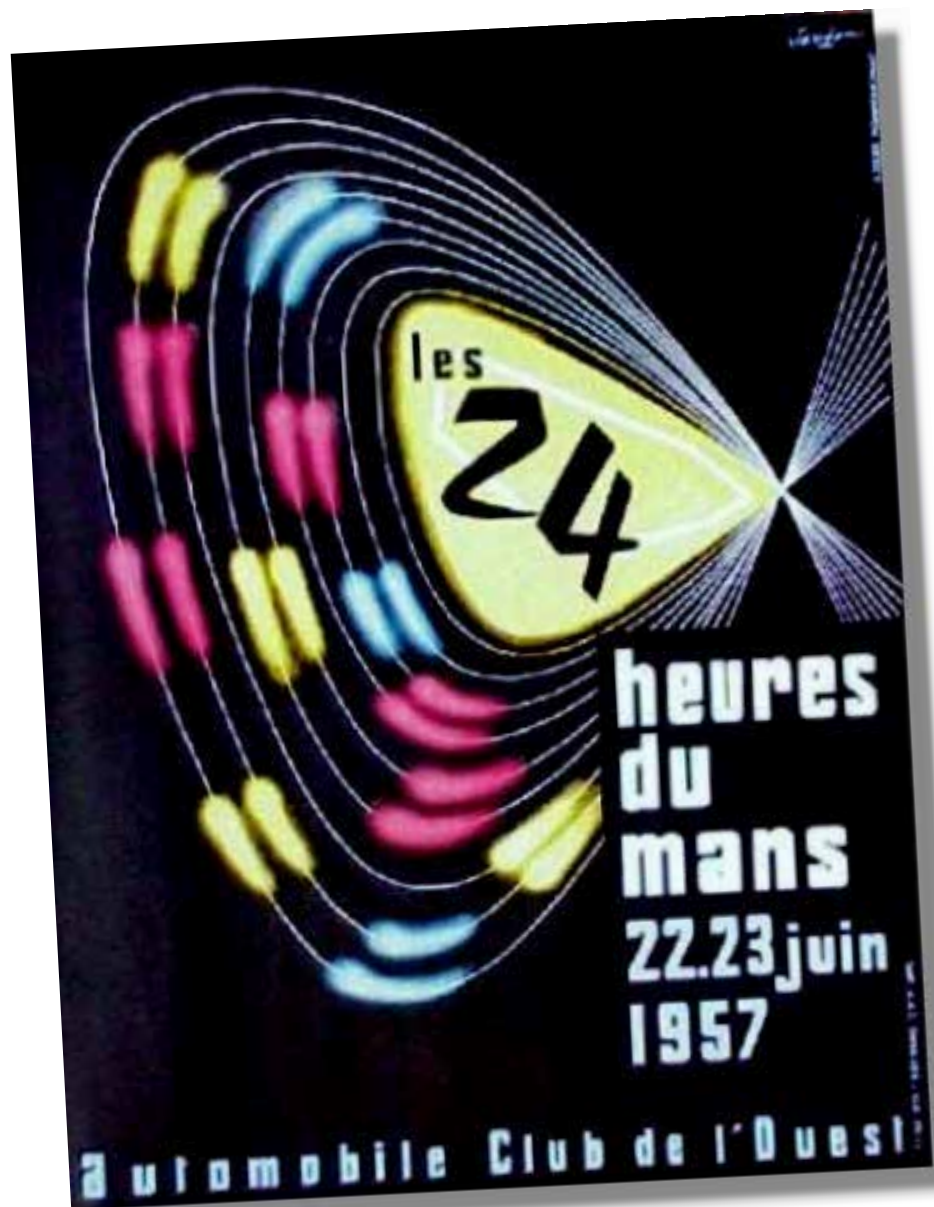




Sojourn to Le Mans...1957

Mike Potter & John Swift...1957

Historic photos courtesy of The Lotus Eleven Register website



*In 1957 **Mike Potter** was an impecunious engineering student in England. At the end of term he took off for Le Mans and witnessed the historic race that saw the Lotus Eleven take the coveted Index of Performance. His story of the event is published here 69 years after he wrote it. It was printed in the 2004 Christmas LOTUSletter..*

F*ORMIDABLE!” exclaimed the little Frenchman perched next to us on top of the grandstand. Sixty cars streamed away. We had just lived through the echelon start of the 1957 Vingt-Quatre Heures du Mans.*

To see the cream of the world's sports cars and drivers competing in this, the most famous of all motor races, was a fitting climax indeed to the adventures we had experienced since leaving Newcastle.

The five of us had loaded ourselves and our gear into Peter's estate car just before the 'witching' hour the previous Tuesday, all of us looking forward enthusiastically to our brief holiday. Peter was the chef d'équipe being the owner of the Estate Cambridge, as well as a delectable Aston Martin. We drove off amidst revellers returning from a college ball - the method of transportation of one party surprising us a little, as resplendent in evening dress, they majestically punted their way home on the Cam.

*The Official 1957 24 Hours of Le Mans poster.
Title Page: Lotus Elevens await the start of the 1956 Le Mans.*



LEFT *Mike Potter, banjo player.*

RIGHT *The English University student, mid-fifties. (Mike is the only one wearing glasses.)
Students wore suits, vests, ties, and smoked pipes in those days.*

Despite a delay due to a puncture, we arrived at the airport at Southend in good time, and after breakfasting, saw the car being driven into the huge Bristol freighter. After attending to the usual customs formalities we took our seats in the rear of the aircraft. By the time everyone had been issued with their quota of duty-free cigarettes and liquor, we were surprised to find that we were already touching down on French soil. What a refreshing change from the usual nauseating sea crossing!

After quickly downing our first cup of French coffee in the airport restaurant, we got into the car and pointed its nose in the general direction of Le Mans. Our aim was to motor slowly down to the course, taking two or three days over the trip, leaving plenty of time to enjoy a dip in the sea and an aperitif in the local bars whenever possible; the weather subsequently proved to be too cold for bathing!

The first night was spent at Le Touquet, two of us sleeping under canvas on the beach, whilst the other three, not being in the impecunious students category, slept in luxury in a hotel. The following day we pottered down the coast through Deauville, the weather being rather too bleak, however, for our planned swim. To make up for this, George and Peter introduced us to our first of many bottles of St. Raphael - there's harm can come to young lads drinking that brew! The previous year, Peter told us he had christened the trip to Le Mans the '*Martini Le Mans*'; we later resolved that this trip would go down as the '*St. Raphael Le Mans*'!



*“Memory fails on the eye candy in the main square,”
Mike said on asked about the grainy photo above..
“But it was probably Fifi, Gigi, or Mimi.”*

Due to the unkind weather, it did not require much persuasion on the part of the others to entice us to sleep in a local hostery at Yvetot for the night. Friday saw us nearer our goal, as we motored south to Alencon, in company with a growing number of cars bearing G.B. plates, and obviously bound for Le Mans.

It was here that an unexpected piece of entertainment was enjoyed. After dinner we watched some wrestling on French television. Peter and Jack soon became bored and elected to go out for a stroll. Shortly afterwards, George and ourselves followed suit, but after a rather uninteresting walk, decided to return to the hotel. On the way back we heard the strident sounds of 'hot' dance music. The noise proved to be coming from a large house in a small side street. We entered the garden which was illuminated from the uncurtained windows. A female form, draped over a balcony, greeted us in a most seductive broken English accent-she must have put deux et deux together on seeing George's handlebar moustache, hacking jacket, and trilby hat! We soon found ourselves in the house, which was full to overflowing with young people dancing with gay abandon; we had stumbled on the local students' '*end-of-examinations*' celebrations.

The welcome was very enthusiastic, with speeches of greeting and a bottle of champagne thrust into our hands. Not to be outdone, George proffered his box of a hundred cigarettes; in next to no time the contents had gone. Our impressions of the next few hours are distinctly hazy, but we think we managed to further the



“...An aperitif in the local bars whenever possible.”

left to right:

George, Mike Potter, John, Jack and Peter, somewhere in France, 1957. Within a few years Mike lost touch with the group. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

entente cordiale, aided by many more bottles of champagne. Since we had much to do on the morrow, the day of the race, some inner sense prompted us to stagger away from the house after about five hours, although the strains of the cha-cha-cha were still blaring forth. On getting back to the hotel, in the wee small hours, we found Peter still awake, and wondering what he had missed. On being told about the party, he insisted on our returning. However, George and Mike did not feel up to it, so that it was left to Peter and John to return to the fray, much to the amusement of the hotel night porter. Very much the worse for wear, they returned to the hotel in time for breakfast, after concluding the party in a coffee house, where they took great delight in operating the Espresso machine.

Apart from Jack, whom we suspected secretly regretted having missed the previous night's activities, it was a very bleary-eyed party that set off that morning on the last leg of the journey to Le Mans. We lunched in the town, and spent some time viewing the wonderful sights in the main square. We then made our way to the circuit, amidst thousands of fervent motoring enthusiasts.

The Sarthe Circuit was like no other we had experienced before; the magnificent pine woods, the sideshows, the cafes and the gay multitudes of people conversing excitedly in many tongues, all competed with the racing scene for our attention.

The start was at 4 p.m., and as the hour drew nearer we jostled our way through the massing crowds to a strategic, if somewhat precarious, position on top of the stands. The sun was beating down on our necks as we waited for the last few minutes to tick by.



The four Lotus Team cars enroute for Le Mans from their stable at Mayet, 18 miles away. From Ian Smith's article in Sports Car and Lotus Owners magazine.

Zero hour was reached, the drivers sprinted across the track, were into their cars, and away on the first lap almost before we realised it. "Formidable!" exclaimed the little Frenchman next to us. "Voila- Stirleeng Moss!" Yes, formidable summed up the awe-inspiring sight perfectly we thought.

From various vantage points, we watched the race until about midnight, interspersed with short sessions of drinking in some of the many bars scattered around the circuit, where Peter Lewis, motor racing correspondent of the Observer, joined us on one occasion for a 'noggin and natter.' We also investigated one of the sideshows—a good 200 francs worth!

Two of us then retired to our tent, which we had pitched in the pine woods, although John, standing up to the effects of the previous night's activities rather better, first walked down to the Esses and Tertre Rouge to see the cars through.

THIS WAS A NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN SIGHT, as the headlights stabbed the darkness, and the roar of exhausts and scream of protesting tyres disturbed the quiet of the night.

The following morning we arose rather later than we had planned, but before going back to the track to see how the race had progressed as we slept, we took advantage of a free shave (supplied by a French electric razor manufacturer), and had a somewhat embarrassing experience in the typically French communal cabinets.

We then joined the other three, who had spent the night in the town, and were very thrilled to see that not only were the British Jaguars in the lead, but that the little 750 c.c. Lotus, co-driven by Keith Hall and Cliff Allison, was winning on Index of Performance.



Shift Change: Mackay Fraser leaps for the 1100cc. Eleven & roars out of the Pits.

PHOTO MIKE COSTIN



*Above:
One of the winning Lotus Elevens and Ecurie Ecosse Jaguars. Jaguar won first and second place at the 1957 Le Mans.
The 750cc Eleven took 1st in Class and 1st in the Index of Performance while the 1100cc Lotus Elevens took
1st, 2nd and 4th in Class and 2nd in the Index of Performance.*



*Above:
Mackay Fraser (driver) and Jay Chamberlain celebrate victory in the Lotus Eleven.
Photo by Mike Costin*



Cliff Allison / Keith Hall's winning 750cc Eleven.
Colin Chapman is on the right.

Fortified by this news, and innumerable cups of coffee, we spent the morning taking photographs and lap times of the cars. After lunch, we were fortunate enough to get into the pit area, and from there into one of the trade stands.

This was a superb vantage point, being immediately over the Porsche pit. An added attraction was the fact that the pit also contained a bar, so that we were able to keep cool on that sizzling hot day by drinking an apparently inexhaustible supply of (free) Pernod.

We watched the closing stages of the race.

As 4 p.m. approached, the crowds became thicker, partially controlled by gesticulating gendarmes. The excitement reached a climax as the gallant *Ecurie Ecosse Jaguars* received the chequered flag, to take first and second places in the *Grand Prix of Endurance* and the Lotus became *Le vainqueur a l'Indice de Performance*. It made us feel very proud to witness this over-whelming British triumph.

The Pernod had proved too much for Peter we are sorry to relate, and it was George who drove the car into Le Mans, through a mass of waving Frenchmen.

After a celebration dinner we motored through driving rain to Rouen where we spent the night before pressing on to catch the 'plane back to England, and hence home.

What a truly magnificent holiday this had been for us. We firmly resolved to return to Le Mans at the first possible opportunity to renew our acquaintance with Les Vingt-Quatre Heures.

And the vins du pays.



LOTUS WINS AGAIN at LE MANS

For the first time in 22 years a British car wins the —

INDEX OF PERFORMANCE **1ST LOTUS 750** Cliff Allison and Keith Hall
2ND LOTUS 1100 Mackay Fraser & Jay Chamberlain

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 750 cc CLASS | 1ST | LOTUS 750 | Cliff Allison Keith Hall |
| 1100 cc CLASS | 1ST | LOTUS 1100 | Mackay Fraser Jay Chamberlain |
| | 2ND | LOTUS 1100 | John Dalton Rob Walshaw |
| | 4TH | LOTUS 1100 | Roger Masson A. Hechard |

and the 4 cars which started all finished —
9th, 13th, 14th and 16th in the general classification

LOTUS ENGINEERING CO., LTD.
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The photo to the left, was taken after the 1957 race at a café where the team retired to celebrate; the women were models who were sitting at the next table.

Cliff Allison, along with Keith Hall, drove the 750cc Index of Performance winning Lotus Eleven while Jay Chamberlain and Herbert Mackay Fraser piloted the 1100cc Eleven which took second in the Index and first in its class. Mackay Fraser would be killed a few weeks later at Rheims, the first driver to die racing a Lotus.

Original 1957 photo caption, referring of course to the trophies:

“Keith Hall, Mackay Fraser, Cliff Allison and Jay Chamberlain...with the spoils.”

To the LCC Editor, October 2, 2004

Michael,

Keith Hall, in the photo, is proudly wearing a Kings College, University of Durham blazer. This is the link with my story. I and my friend John Swift, were post-grad students at Kings in Newcastle, I doing Agric. Engineering, and he doing Civil Engineering, both of us impecunious car nuts. Somehow we got involved with three more elderly types (Peter, George and Jack), and through them, with Keith Hall. He had bought an Eleven in kit form, and was sorting out the assembly problems. As tyro engineers, we were invited in to help, although I don't recollect doing anything very significant. Anyway, the end result was sufficient to convince Colin Chapman to enter the car at Le Mans - the exciting results are for the record.

Mike Potter LOTUS SEVEN

Mike Potter, for the record.



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MONTHLY MEETINGS

WE MEET LAST WEDNESDAY,
MOST MONTHS TO TALK SHOP
AND HAVE A BITE AND A BEER.
VENUES CHANGE REGULARLY
SO CHECK THE WEBSITE FOR
THE CURRENT PUB WE ARE
PATRONIZING.

DUES ARE CHEAP: \$20/YR.

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NOT BE USED WITHOUT THE
WRITTEN PERMISSION OF
THE CLUB...WHICH PROBABLY
WON'T BE HARD TO GET.

THE CLUB STARTED IN 1977.
WE ARE NOW IN OUR 49TH YEAR.
IT IS AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN
RUN BY VOLUNTEERS

lotusclubcanada.ca



Mike Potter meets **Stirling Moss**

(bald man in the foreground.) or as

Mike captioned the photo : Moss & Me.

You cannot say Stirling was a childhood hero.

They were born two years apart.

Photo taken at the 2013 Goodwood,

not at a monthly meeting

of the Lotus Club.

LotusClubCanada

