

XI



A Blast From The British Past

story & photos by
Harold Pace

Small-displacement sports-racing cars have a very special appeal to seasoned racing drivers. With little power or torque, they demand precision in driving technique as any loss of speed cannot easily be made up with a heavy throttle foot, yet they can frequently become giant killers in the right hands. In the 1950s Lotus built the Eleven, an 1100cc racing car with a lovely aerodynamic body styled by Frank Costin. They were usually powered by Coventry-Climax racing engines, although the cheapest model used Ford side-valve mills.

The Eleven had a fantastic racing record, frequently humbling much more powerful cars through its superb handling. Today mint condition Lotus Elevens sell for over \$100,000 to wealthy vintage racers, who still use them to good effect. However, thanks to English kit car builder



Westfield, you don't have to spend that kind of money to enjoy a lovely little sports car that looks and handles like an original Eleven.

In 1982 Chris Smith started the Westfield company with a single model, a replica of the Lotus Eleven called the Westfield 11. It was based on a sturdy steel space frame mounting running gear from 1964-1973 MG Midgets or Austin-Healey Sprites. It sold well, but popular new Westfield models pushed it aside in

1986 and, like the Lotus that preceded it, the Westfield 11 passed into history.

Fast forward to 2005. Westfield is cranking out their blisteringly fast SE-Series sports cars (see *Kit Car Builder*, Oct. 2006), but customers kept asking about the old 11. Finally Smith relented and the mildly revised Westfield XI was born. The fiberglass Westfield body is expertly molded in a variety of gelcoat colors to a much higher quality level than any Lotus of the period.

The headrest fairing behind the driver is optional, as it was only used on some Lotus Elevens.

The powdercoated space frame with aluminum paneling is very stiff and once again mounts Spridget (Anglophile slang for Sprite/Midget) running gear. The most popular engine is the 1275cc "A-Series" units made from 1966 to 1973 that produced 65 horsepower when topped with twin 1-1/4" side-draft SU carburetors (the 1500cc engine and wide-ratio gearbox

introduced in 1974 were markedly inferior and should be avoided).

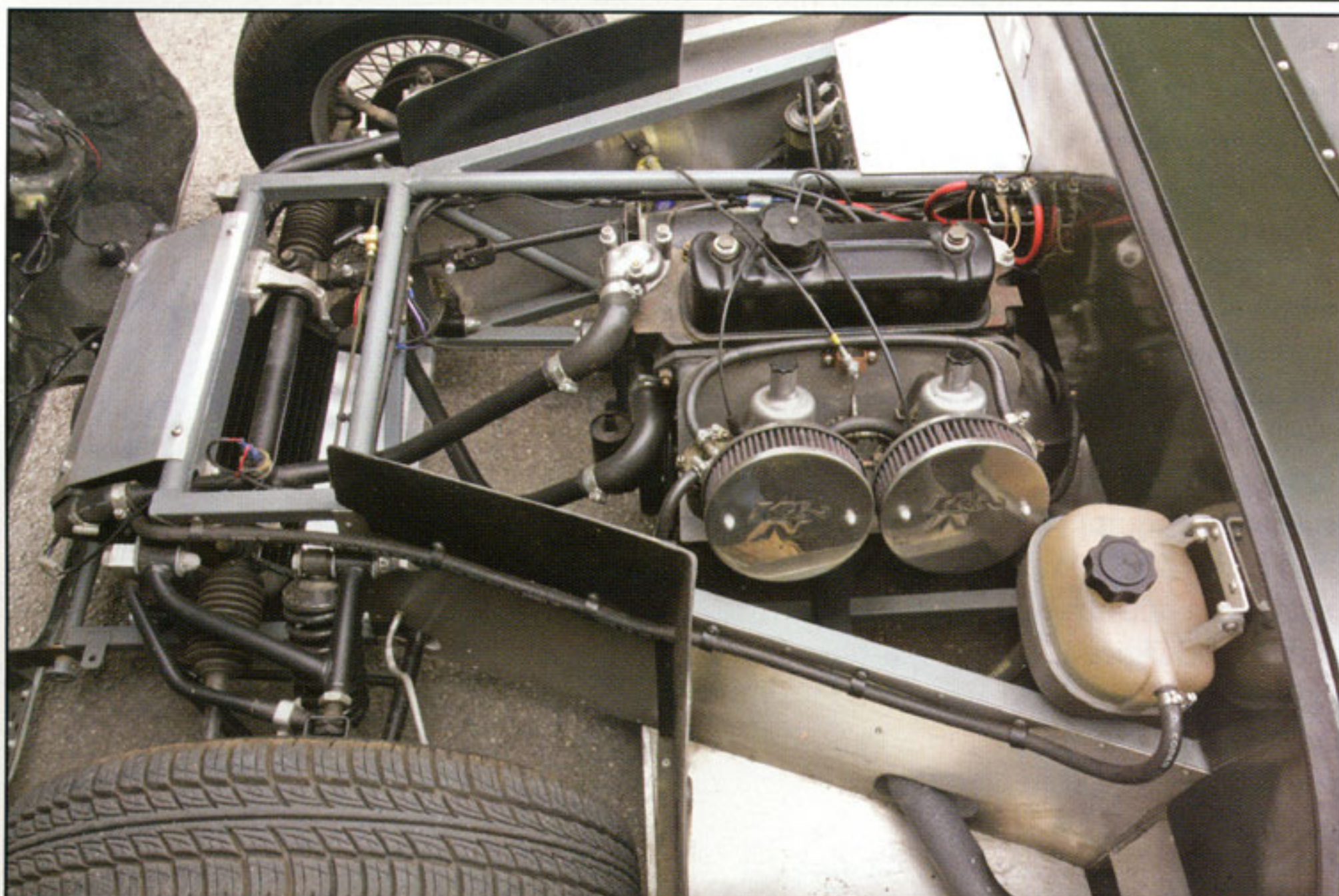
Of course, builders can do what they want with the venerable A-Series. At one time it was the flathead Ford of UK tuning firms and a ton of speed equipment is still available that will push outputs to over 130 hp, but at a cost in durability. For those who desire more Spritely (sorry) performance, all that is needed is a mild cam, headers and rejettted SUs (or a side-draft Weber DCOE). At 75 to 85 hp the little four-banger sounds great and delivers plenty of performance once installed in the 1100-pound Westfield. In fact, it has the same power-to-weight ratio as a new Mini Cooper S!

The Westfield front suspension is based on double A-arms mounting the Spridget hubs, disc brakes and rack-and-pinion steering assembly. Springing is by coilover shock units. In back the modified Spridget rear axle is sprung by coilover shock units instead of the donor car's leaf springs. The axle is located by four trailing arms and a Panhard rod, and the rear brakes are drums.

Spridgets came with either 13" Dunlop wire wheels or steel wheels with hubcaps. There are many aftermarket mag wheels available, including the popular Panasport mags that resemble the classic Minilite wheels from the 1960s. By using tall (165/80R13) Avon tires the XI retains a 1950s look.

Inside the Westfield XI has a pair of fifties-style racing bucket seats upholstered in vinyl and a full carpet set. The Smiths instruments from the Spridget donor are installed in the flat panel dash. A leather-wrapped steering wheel is included, along with an acrylic windscreen. There is no provision for a top, heater or windshield wiper.

Also included in the kit is a gas tank and filler, acrylic headlight covers and an exhaust system. The donor car will provide the engine, gearbox, front upright assemblies, steering rack, instruments, radiator, wiring harness, handbrake, rear axle, wheels, driveshaft and engine mounts. The kit price in the U.S. is \$17,995, and American distributor Manik Technologies is ready to deliver them in kit or turnkey-minus form. Manik President Tom McClintock is very excited by the agile roadster's potential for track events and as a fair-weather fun car like Super 7-style kits. In England Westfield 11s have been fitted with Lotus twin-cam and Ford pushrod fourbangers, and even Rover V-8s, but the Spridget engine is plenty enough for lots of fun, particularly



when you get those skinny Avons drifting around a corner!

I had the opportunity to try out a new Westfield XI on the famed Shelsley Walsh hillclimb course on a recent visit to the UK. It's a perfect venue for a vintage-style car, with lush scenery and a restored paddock straight out of the 1930s! The dead-stock 1275 and 4-speed Spridget gearbox delivered exciting performance with a vintage spirit. The gearbox is a delight to use, with short, direct shifts. Although I didn't break any records, climbing to the top of the inclined 1000 yards in the XI,

it gave me the opportunity to be Graham Hill, Mike Hawthorn or any of the other famous pilots who drove to glory in the original Lotus 11, if only in my head. For less than the price of a new MX-5, it seems like quite a bargain.

KCB

Manik Technologies

Dept. KCB

819 Arapaho Suite 24-B #164

Richardson, TX 75080

972/358-1460

www.manikllc.com