

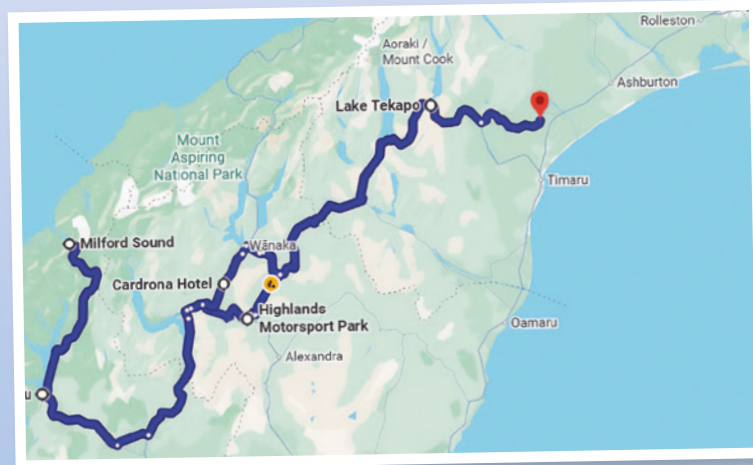
Road tripping

Malcolm organised a scenic tour around New Zealand's south island for a whole host of fellow Lotus owners

This year I had the pleasure of organising the Southern Lotus TransAlpine, which was true to its name in the most spectacular way. My journey from Christchurch, down to Milford Sound and back clocked 1600km (1000 miles) on the Elise in four and a half days, thankfully without a hitch. Of the 28 cars participating, six did considerably more distance, with four coming down from the North Island for the trip.

While most drivers hit the road on Thursday, the official start was at Lake Tekapo on Friday, on a beautiful sunny morning showing off the lake and mountain views perfectly. The day's drive time would be five hours, with a lunch stop at the impressive Highlands Motorsport Park in Cromwell, for some moderately paced touring laps of the track and a look around their motor museum. Then continuing to Te Anau, in the south-west corner of New Zealand.

An early start on Saturday morning enabled us to get the jump on the tourist traffic for the



first part of our two-hour drive into Milford Sound. The low-lying mist provided an atmospheric scene as the sun rose over the mountain tops, before we headed toward the divide that would eventually be traversed via the Homer Tunnel. Hard to believe that, only five days prior, this road was closed due to snowfall, and a week earlier it had been shut for several days following a major storm with torrential rain and rockfalls (not uncommon in this, the wettest part of New Zealand, though this storm was particularly significant).

The weather gods were extremely kind to us, however, and we couldn't have hoped for a better day. The majestic mountains loomed ever higher on all sides as we wound our way up to the tunnel entrance. Then, with snow down to road level, we entered on the green traffic light and plunged into the single-lane, rough-hewn passage that cuts 1.2km through the mountains, emerging on the west side to jaw-dropping views. With little time to take it all in, we were descending



Malcolm James
Car 2017 Elise Sport 220
Owned since 2023
This time A major road trip with a group of Lotus owners

down a zig-zag and on the windy path toward Milford Sound.

We got to enjoy the spectacle of the surroundings in the best possible way – on a cruise excursion – before docking for lunch and the return drive (there is only one road). Unsurprisingly, the traffic was now riddled with campervans and rental cars, but the scenery was such that a leisurely drive was not unwelcome. After we exited the tunnel and descended back into the real world, the road presented more opportunities to make progress past the slower traffic.

It would be easy to argue that the road to Milford Sound is the most spectacular drive in NZ. That





There's no shortage of spectacular scenery and photogenic backdrops in New Zealand



The Lotuses regrouping at Milford Sound. They vie with mother nature for attention

said, the entire route back from Te Anau to Queenstown, then over the Crown Range to Cardrona and all the way through the Lindis Pass and Mackenzie Country to Lake Pukaki and Tekapo is not exactly dull. In terms of driving roads, many of these stretches offer more enjoyable fast flowing corners and, if you're lucky, traffic-free passage where a Lotus can be thoroughly exercised. And the scenery is still not too shabby!

We parted ways on Monday after what has to be the most epic road trip I've undertaken in a Lotus. It wasn't just about the cars, the driving or the scenery, but the people too. Such is the trust and the camaraderie in the club that one member who couldn't attend lent his Elise to another member whose car had let them down the week before departure. We also befriended an Australian tourist, who briefly abandoned his wife and motorhome for a stint in our Elise and a V8 Esprit. He had an Exige back in Australia and was thrilled to get his Lotus fix in New Zealand!



But prior to all that, on Friday evening we were presented with a most unexpected opportunity. I was approached by a stranger who'd got chatting to the owner of an Evora parked outside the bar where we were dining. He said he used to work at Lotus and had just arrived on holiday from the UK a couple of days earlier.

I didn't recognise the name when he introduced himself, however when he started to elaborate on his career highlights,

it soon became apparent that I was familiar with some of his achievements! Most notably, his involvement in the selection of the Toyota 2ZZ engine for the Elise S2 is a story many readers will remember from Issue 43 of this magazine. Quite the coincidence then; this was none other than Nick Adams, who was thrilled to find the Lotus heart beating strong in the Southern Hemisphere, and we were delighted to have him join us

for dinner the following evening, when he shared more stories of his fascinating career. Thank you Nick, we couldn't have planned a better guest speaker!

Thanks also to fellow road-trippers Erin Oakley and Mike Grantham for many of the photos in this report. It's hard to do justice to the surroundings, but hopefully this gives you a flavour, and shows why you should follow in Nick's footsteps and put NZ on your list of holiday destinations!



The sun didn't shine for the whole trip, but it didn't dampen drivers' spirits



A brace of Esprits at a lakeside vista on the fourth and final day of the trip