



## DRIVING RANGE

## MASTER OF DECEPTION

Photos: Warrick McLeod

The Flasher meets the motoring enigma that is the Lotus Exige S

**W**hat a clever car! This machine is a fantastic actor. In fact I'd happily nominate it for an Oscar. There aren't many cars out there that can pull off an act as well as this one does, and that's why it deserves a round of applause.

The Exige S is a two-seater sports toy and it doesn't pretend to be anything else. It's got the look, the sound and it definitely walks the walk. And yet: don't be fooled. You're not getting supercar performance here. But then you're not paying supercar prices either. Yet to the untrained eye, it ticks many of the same boxes as a supercar: that's the genius of this fella.

Like any true racer, there's no graceful way to get in. You've got to enter crab-style, and when you're inside you'll know you're in a cockpit. There's no attempt at luxury; this is no-frills stuff.

But when you start the motor, which sits right behind your head, there's a satisfying roar. Its initial burst of life sounds like it means business. You get a feeling of enormous, raging power before you've even touched a pedal.

But that's the illusion – and a smart one it is. With that racy interior, rearward engine, stubby design and a fantastically noisy engine, you could quite easily convince your passenger (and passers-by) that your car is a rocket ship.

But ultimately, the engine is no

monster. With a top speed of just 238km/h, the supercharged 1.8-litre straight four unit can't claim to be much of a brute. The fact that we got into top gear halfway along the little straight on our local go-kart track rather put things into perspective.

There's also nothing frightening about the power delivery. Getting it sideways was a difficult business; it's certainly a user-friendly plaything for an amateur driver. But in terms of out-and-out performance, there's little to get the pulse racing. Exiges



haven't done especially well in GT racing overseas, and when you drive this you get some idea of why the race versions don't usually have the legs on Ferraris and Porsches.

But despite all that, it can make you look like a boy racer as well as feel like one. In fact, you may even have a bit of bruising to prove it, because it's definitely sprung for the track rather than the road. Speed bumps are best avoided in this car – and farmers with gravel driveways had better give it a miss.

But the fact that it's road legal is what makes it unique. Most race cars stay holed up in workshops, but this one can come out to play on the streets. You can drive it to your local track day, have a good thrash around the circuit and then drive it home again.

It's cute that they've thought to include a boot – cunningly hidden in the back, it's the smallest one I've ever seen. Barely much bigger than a glove compartment, it's basically a work of art.

For this and a host of other reasons, the Exige S is never going to be suitable as an everyday runaround. But it's perfect for anybody with petrol in their blood and a few hundred thousand to spare for a second car. In many ways it's as pure an indulgence as you'll find – it has less practical use than some of the three million rand offerings out there. But then, life isn't all about being practical, is it? ▶



## THE FLASHER

His first love was golf; his dream to become a pro. But he lacked even a shred of skill, so he just packed it in and looked for comfort in fast cars. He got a job on a motor-racing magazine in London, started hanging around race tracks, learnt to fix engines, and – eventually – got to go racing. But just before he got stuck in Europe forever, Golf Punk rescued him, gave him a haircut and made him its car columnist.

## THANKS TO...

Lotus Cape Town. Call 021 419 0595 for more information.