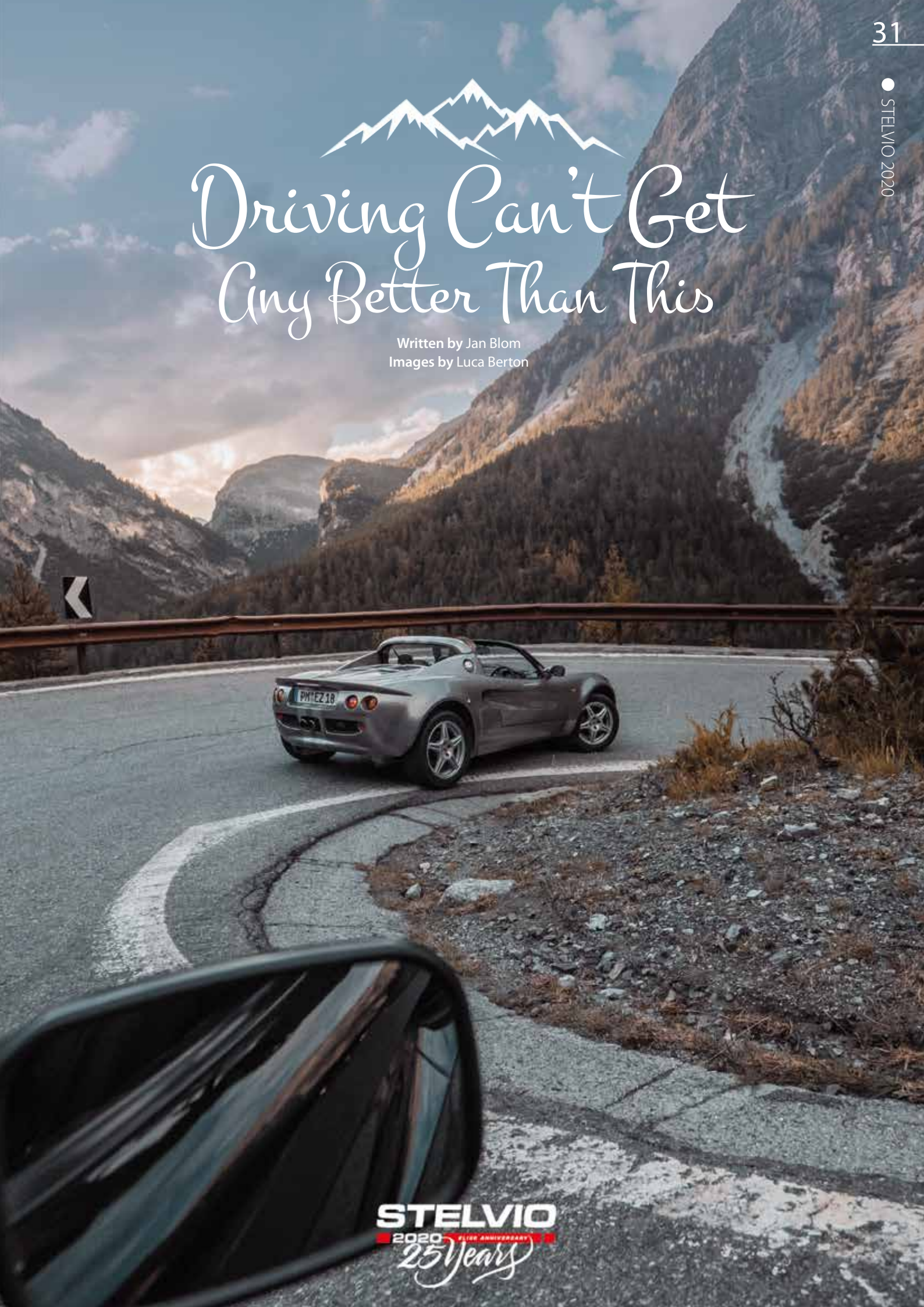




Driving Can't Get Any Better Than This

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STELVIO
2020 ELITE ANNIVERSARY
25 Years

12 September 1995, Frankfurt. On this windy and rainy day, in a blog and vlog free era, the IAA or Frankfurt Motor Show opened its doors to journalists. Peugeot introduced the 406, Renault its first Megane and Lada the, well let's say 'remarkable' 110. In that same design category Toyota presented the Prius concept. Elsewhere and more enjoyable the launch of the Audi TT concept car drew attention. The sports car admired by, for instance, Julian Thomson.

At some point during that day journalists and reporters assembled at the Lotus stand to witness the uncovering of Julian's own newborn. After the chassis had been revealed, from under a 'I am Elise' cloth on a rotating platform, three year old Elisa, granddaughter of Lotus owner Romano Artioli and name giver of the Elise, appeared in the brand new Lotus Elise concept car wearing yellow trousers and a 'I am Elise' t-shirt. The rest is history as they say.

How it all started

To commemorate test driving the Elise in the developing days on Stelvio Pass in the Italian Alps, from 1999 onwards Lotus owners gathered there to drive the famous mountain pass and then some. So, no better place to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Lotus Elise than at Stelvio Pass. Elisa Artioli, Joerg Uhr (Delightful Driving) and me (Bends and Curves road tripping) thought so at least and while across Europe car meetings and events were cancelled due to COVID-19, we started



to organise an anniversary event with just one goal: making memories. I think it's safe to say we've succeeded. Here's why.

Because of last year, when a big event took place to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first Stelvio meeting, organising a new Stelvio meeting for Dutch Lotus owners was already in my diary for 2020. Since I had to cancel the Spring Tour 2020 due to the virus, my plan was to extend the Stelvio 2020 trip to a full week. Ten cars had already signed up, when Elisa and Joerg contacted me to ask if I wanted to participate in the organization of the European meeting Stelvio 2020 - Elise 25th Anniversary. It didn't take more than a second to think about this.

The road to Stelvio

Long story short, this meeting was going to take place from 9 to 13 September. In order to get there with a convoy of by then 16 mainly Dutch Lotus cars (20 people), sponsored by Van der Kooi Sportscars, the Road To Stelvio road trip - as I named this part of the event - commenced on Monday 7 September. With an almost complete group - Kris and Marc had to drive back home due to a problem with the ignition switch and joined us the next day - after 7 hours of motorway driving we arrived in Friedrichshafen, near the Bodensee in Germany. Here Edmund Fitch from the UK joined us with his unique Project Kahn Elise. Sad was the fact that the Elise of Cees and Inge



broke down somewhere along the German motorway with a cooling problem. The local garage couldn't solve the problem

but after contacting Van der Kooi Sportscars, a solution was found. They joined us the next day too. After this, no breakdowns at all in our group, apart from a leak in the charge cooler of Aart's Exige.

Day 1: Friedrichshafen to Strengen 250 km (160 miles) & 5 hours

From Tuesday 8 September onwards, no more motorways, just curvy B-roads were ahead of us. All participants had received a road book with links to the routes (nav systems and Google maps) beforehand, so the well prepared stayed on route, the ill prepared got lost every now and then on that first day. As a stop was planned every 2 hours or so, the group re-assembled anyway.

The Bodensee area marks the borders of Germany, Austria and Switzerland and therefore it's no surprise that this region is part of Drivers Heaven. That morning no mountains yet, but the hills and flowing landscape and roads made up for it. After crossing the German-Austrian border several times, we headed south to the Silvretta-Montafon region in western Austria. A famous area for its ski resorts, but at this time of year it was easy going. Restaurant Alte Talstation in Gaschurn even opened up especially for our group for lunch. This was underlined by welcoming us with a 'Lotus green' aperitif on the house. Three courses of regional dishes were served by the friendly staff, who were a great example of Austrian hospitality.



Off we went in a southeasterly direction, sunshine on our heads. Blue skies were with us most of the time during the road trip, we couldn't have wished for better weather at all. The roof of my Elise had been tucked away from day 1, only to be mounted when I came back home.

The Silvretta Hochalpenstrasse which we were driving now marked the start of what was to come: Divine Driving. Our Lotus cars are made for driving this kind of mountain road, this was what we came here for! The joy it brings to drive the meandering alpine roads can't be explained in words or photos, if you want to experience this you have to go there yourself. Magic.

The day ended in Strengen, Austria. Posthotel Strengen was the place we stayed last year on our way back home, and I booked it again for this road trip. Super friendly staff, good food and spacious rooms. On top of that, the square in front of the hotel was cleared for us and was turned into private Lotus parking. We'll be back in Strengen for sure!

**Day 2: Strengen to Bolzano
300 km (190 miles) & 6 hours**

This route marked the transition from 'The Road To Stelvio 2020' to 'Stelvio 2020 - Elise 25th Anniversary'. But before we arrived in Bolzano, capital of Süd-Tyrol in the Italian Alps, to merge with the international group of participants, we were going to drive one of the best roads in this area.

From Strengen we warmed up the engines and tyres to Imst, more or less alongside the river Inn (suddenly the origin of the name of the city Innsbruck became clear). Then the fun started. First we drove up Hahntennjoch, almost 1900m above sea level following the Hahntennjoch High Alpine road for 29km/18mi (L246-L72). This was followed by the Berwang-Namloser

Strasse (L21) and the Fernpasstrasse to Lermoos. This was truly one of the best driving experiences yet.

After Lermoos another mountain pass was waiting for us: Timmelsjoch (Passo del Rombo in Italian). This mountain pass rises almost 2500m above sea level and somewhere along the way you will cross the Austrian-Italian border. Every so often there are very steep roads which lorries are not allowed to drive; mainly used by cyclists and tourists. Near the summit a road tax, which is almost as steep as the road is, has to be paid, but in return you'll get a brilliant driving experience on good asphalt, amazing views and let's not forget, a sticker for your car. If you have spare time to spend, which we didn't, a must see at the toll station is the highest motorcycle museum in Europe. Twins Alban and Attila Scheiber realised their 23 million euro dream in 2015 and motorcycle legend Giacomo Agostini was involved in the start of the building process.

The summit is, unlike Stelvio Pass, not crowded with small shops all selling the same memorabilia. This is a summit with plenty of space to move around, where you can let the views and alpine landscape sink in.

At the start of the descent, the road is quite wide so any slower traffic can be passed quite easily. After passing the tree line the road narrows until it becomes a bit wider than a single track, with so many curves it makes you feel like you're riding a roller coaster. Merano to Bolzano, our destination of this day, can be done quickly in less than 30 minutes but since we came to drive mountain roads our route was the SP98 with views on the rolling hills of Süd-Tyrol. A wonderful finale of this day.

After two days of driving and staying in sleepy rural, mountainous areas, Bolzano was quite a change. It's relatively a big city

with traffic jams that go with urban life. We found our way to the Four Points by Sheraton hotel which was going to be our address for two days and here we met some 30 international participants of the trip. Goodie bags, sponsored by Detailing Italia, with a very nice Stelvio 2020 polo shirt were handed out by Joerg and Elisa at the registration desk. The drivers were invited to pick a number for their car, after which two good looking roundels with the requested number and Stelvio 2020 logo were handed out. After refreshing and a hotel bar visit, participants were welcomed at dinner by Joerg and Elisa.

**Day 3: Discover
the Dolomites
225 km (140
miles) & 5 hours**

The route for Thursday was a round trip, Bolzano - Bolzano to discover the magic of the Dolomites. Some participants took the chance to discover Bolzano too; for them a shorter, 160km/100mi route was offered. The majority decided to drive the full run, about 225km/140mi. Joerg is, just like Elisa who is born and raised in this part of Italy and lives in Bolzano, very familiar with the region and he had volunteered to create all our routes in the Alps and Dolomites while Elisa took care of the good looking and practical (digital) road book - and a lot more of course. Organising events like this, especially while COVID-19 rules the law, is intense.

I had used MyRoute-app to translate the routes to different file formats so users of TomTom, Garmin, Google maps and other free navigation apps were able to drive the routes without having to check maps or paperwork. All routes could be



downloaded from the road book.

The Dolomites are in fact part of the Alps, but they are named separately and they have a different atmosphere altogether. These mountains are far more jagged than the Alps and have a yellowish appearance, if not too much weathered, because of magnesium.

At 10am at the Agip petrol station parking site, which served as the designated free and guarded parking for our cars, a short briefing was done by Joerg in which he expressed that everybody should drive at their own speed and should make as many stops as they liked. No need to drive as a convoy, which is impossible anyway with a group of some 50 cars. Smaller groups grew and it was a lot of fun to drive in different groups, meeting other participants.

The driving was again magnificent. What's not to like about Passo delle Erbe, Passo di Falzarego, Passo Campolongo, Passo Gardena and a view on Lago di Carezza! At Passo delle Erbe we encountered a bit of rain, but not enough to put on the roof. It urged us to keep the right foot as far away from the body as possible in these circumstances. Back in the hotel, late in the afternoon, stories were exchanged but one thing ran like a thread through them all: this is what road tripping and driving Lotus cars is all about.

Day 4: Alpine Lotus Drive 260 km (160 miles) & 6 hours

On Friday 11 September we had to pack our bags; at the end of the day we would arrive in Bormio near Passo di Stelvio



to stay in Hotel Vallechiara for two days. The contrast between urban Bolzano and this alpine hotel in the mountains couldn't have been bigger, as we would find out that day.

After the briefing had been done by Joerg, most of the participants drove an extra lap passed the Sheraton hotel; the staff had been very happy with our group and had asked politely if they could shoot some photos and video of our Lotus cars passing the hotel. No problem at all, even if this meant that we got caught in Bolzano's traffic that morning.

As soon as the city disappeared from our rear view mirrors another day of epic driving started. On the menu for today, for those who decided to drive the full run (again a shorter route was provided too) were Passo Palade, Passo del Tonale, Passo del Mortirolo (1852m) and alpine driving in the Livigno region.

It had been a conscious choice of the organisation to skip Passo Gavia. This infamous pass is one the highest alpine roads (2621m) and it featured many times in the Giro d'Italia. However, the road is very narrow, not a lot of road barriers are used and a lot of cyclists tend to conquer this mountain pass. Last but not least, the asphalt gets worse and worse when driving up Gavia Pass. To drive this mountain pass with a group of now about 60 cars - some participants booked for just two days driving - possibly in bad weather, circumstances could have led to incidents, so it was decided that this pass was a no go this year.

Passo Mortirolo made it to the final routes of Stelvio 2020. When driving up from southeast to northwest, the ascent is brilliant. As on Gavia pass the road is narrow, but the asphalt is good and stays good when driving up, the road is safer altogether and less cyclists to take into account. We had some light rain going up which made it somewhat slippery, but never dangerous. From the summit at Hotel Belvedere, where we had lunch, a fantastic view across the valley was presented to us and when other participants came into our view the scene was epic.

Going down Mortirolo Pass was a different experience. The road surface was not suitable for fast descending and some scrubbing of splitters and bottom plates was done; not causing damage by the way. Usually these kinds of roads are best to be avoided by low cars but making it part of the route was for a reason. In 1999 Mortirolo Pass was part of the first Lotus Stelvio tour and by adding it to Stelvio 2020 we paid respect to that pioneer tour. So Mortirolo was an obligation from Elise's past history, with that in mind descending the pass cautiously was wonderful to do.

With the Mortirolo box ticked, the day wasn't over yet.



Forcola di Livigno is a fantastic pass to drive, especially if you're looking for fast driving. It crosses the Italian/Swiss border so you have to be careful on which parts you do some fast driving; Swiss speed tickets are not the ones you want to receive in your mailbox. When arriving in Livigno, back in Italy, filling up with very cheap petrol is your reward. Some tax law says almost no tax has to be paid in this area which means that petrol 102 octane is just over 1 euro per litre. A popular fuel it seemed, because it was sold out almost everywhere. But 98 octane for less than 1 euro was also to our liking.

From Livigno to Bormio was the last leg, awesome driving roads seemed endless today. We had Hotel Vallechiara all to ourselves for two days, and these days should have never ended. The hotel premises is an absolutely magnificent place on a mountain slope, with stunning views on Bormio. The setting sun, dimming light and absolute silence created scenery from a fairy tale. Also this day ended with a joint dinner and some drinks in the bar. Even our Lotus cars enjoyed the relaxation this place brought to us, at least so it seemed when we walked back to our apartments and we watched the colourful line of parked cars against the Alpine backdrop.

Day 5: Grande Finale Elise 25th Anniversary

In the past few days we had done some of the best driving possible. Perfect weather conditions, amazing roads, the company of all these wonderful people and their beautiful cars. However, come Saturday, it was clear that we were near the end of this fantastic ad-

venture. This day marked the 25th anniversary of the Lotus Elise and what better way to celebrate than to drive up and down Stelvio Pass from all directions possible. For history's sake. From a driving point of view, Stelvio Pass, especially the eastern Trafoi side (with the famous hairpins) can't compete with the roads and passes we drove the days before. It's too crowded with slow driving cars, and motorcyclists unless you start at the break of dawn, as some did, and in the end driving 48 hairpins is fun but not the best of fun. These famous hairpins marked the last drive up Stelvio for us, but before that a commemorative lunch was organised at a restaurant on the borders of Lake Resia. This lake is famous for its bell tower, which is in the lake. It's a monument to commemorate the village that was once there where the lake is now.

On this day some 80 registered cars participated; during lunch extra Lotus cars arrived on the scene, to take part in the celebration. The parking lot served as concours d'elegance area; all participants had received ballot-papers to vote for the best Lotus car in show, the most desirable Lotus car and the most liked Elise.

After lunch, the valley road back to Stelvio was crowded, but we did have fun passing cars on the straights. The hairpin side was done as expected, quite slow, but after spending some time at the summit we had to go down again and since we stayed in Bormio we followed the Bormio descent, which is a superb drive and a worthy finish to five days of Divine Driving.

In the evening, after the votes of the concours d'elegance had been counted and dinner was finished, the prize winners were announced. Best Lotus car of the concours was the one and only 211 that took

part, a stunning example of Bruno Weibel (Schaffner Racing) from Switzerland, and it was rewarded with quality products of sponsor Detailing Italia. Most desirable Lotus was a Honda powered Lotus Exige S1 of René Le Grand from the Netherlands, who was rewarded by sponsor Swissvax with a professional detailing kit. The most liked Lotus Elise was owned by Raimundo Randon from Italy and he was rewarded with a beautiful drawing on aluminum of Elisa's Elise, made by Aldo Maria Sica. Lotus Cars had sponsored the event too and had made several store items, such as polo shirts, available. A lottery based on the car numbers decided who the prize winners were.

This evening marked the end of an amazing, unforgettable event. Memories have been made for sure. A more fitting commemoration of 25 years of the Lotus Elise and a better promotion for driving Lotus sports cars is unthinkable. A big thank you to all participants, the sponsors and especially to Delightful Driving hosts Elisa and Joerg for making it possible for me to, despite the organisational work, enjoy these days at least as much as all other participants.

