

CATERHAM 7 – Open Road Hire Ltd – Iain Sommerville

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Acceleration – Fast

Co2 – Yes

Price – from £180

“I have got to get me one of these” (at least for a day)

As one famous Hollywood actor said **“I have got to get me one of these!”** (Will Smith, Independence Day). Not that I expect you to race out and try to get your hands on the next space ship you see but I do expect you to call Open Road Hire and get your hands on a Caterham 7 for a day.

Ok for most of the people reading this they won't have even heard of a Caterham 7 but none of you had heard of “Google” a few years ago, including me. Now whilst one of these will help you find almost anything you want the other will give you as much fun as is legally possible with your clothes on!

As a few of you who either know me or have been reading my articles over the past couple of months you will understand that I have a passion for performance cars and that I have been fortunate to drive some of the best cars on the market as well as having driven a number of road and race cars around a few tracks over the years. So when Andrew Still of Open Road Hire comes up with an idea that you can rent a Caterham 7 for a day (or longer if you wish) then I just had to get in touch with him and sample things for myself!

First of all though a little history lesson, the Caterham 7 is a car that takes its soul from the very best of British Motorsport having first been designed and produced as the Lotus 7 by, in my opinion, the best racing engineer of all time, Colin Chapman. He designed and built the car with a simple thought in mind that it was a “race car for the road”. Take this along with the fact that the legendary late Jim Clark who raced for Lotus was born in Fife at Kilmany and you will soon realise that when you sit in the Caterham 7 you're not just getting into a car but it's like stepping back in time and getting a glimpse of what it was like to be them.

The cars themselves are basic and that's the way they should be. If you're looking for all the modern day comforts then just get back into your box and “peddle on down the road”. These cars are built to be enjoyed for what they are, “open road sports cars”. Andrew was very kind in letting me try two of his machines. On the Saturday I was up early and picked up his 2004 registered Caterham at approx 9am. This car is the one with the K series Rover engine with the 6 speed gear box and will give you all the drive and excitement you need and then some.

When you rent one of the cars you get a number of suggested routes to try so that you can get the most from your day but as the British Ladies Open Golf was on in my home town of St. Andrews I decided to head back there using some of the well known back roads through Fife that I have come to love.

Once you work out how to put the “full harness” safety belt on and you’ve adjusted your seat to suit you soon realise that this experience is going to be fun! With the roof off, even if it did look as if it would rain, I was on my way with a “wee boy’s smile” on my face as if I’d just walked into the sweet shop to be told everything was free! The feel, the sound, the acceleration is something else. This experience isn’t all about driving fast it’s about getting a chance to enjoy driving the way it should be.

These cars are just a pure joy with all their quirky little switches for the indicators etc. Oh and you don’t need to worry about a heater your legs run along the side of the engine and there’s plenty heat coming off that to keep you warm in this lovely summer we’re having!

The brakes the steering, in fact everything about driving one of these cars just tingles your senses. The steering isn’t power assisted and before you wimp at this thought just let me tell you that the car doesn’t need it.

Having spent a full day driving in and around St.Andrews being stopped by friends and strangers who wanted a look at the car, to the little lads who would shout out “cool car mister” and even the tourists taking a photographs because they, like some of you, had never seen a Caterham before. This is one “fun day out”

I headed back to Perth later in the afternoon to meet Andrew where we talked about the drive and what I thought of the car. What could I say? Can I have another go please?

I then jumped into one of his new 07 registered models which run on the new Ford engine and even before I started her up you can notice the subtle differences in the car. This one had softer seats, the steering wheel was a little chunkier and you were back to 5 gears. Starting her up you notice a different tone but this engine has a little surprise up its exhaust, it tends to backfire slightly. For any of you that have been close to a real race car you will know what I mean, it all adds to the fun!

Back onto the open road and this one’s definitely a little more user friendly for the novices amongst you there’s not so much feed back through the steering as the dampers and suspension are softer on this model. This means that for those of you who may be a touch nervous about driving a Caterham, don’t be, it won’t bite.

I headed home toward St.Andrews this time taking the slower route through Newburgh towards Cupar and out the back roads towards Strathkinnes. There is something about driving at this time of night in an open top sports car that needs to be done to be appreciated. The only thing I didn’t appreciate was the call from my son to take him to the driving range, with a set of golf clubs! I managed but it was a bit of a squeeze.

Sunday morning and it was time to head down the coast towards Crail and then around towards Anstruther and Pittenweem. The Pittenweem Festival was on so the roads were a bit busy which I didn’t

mind because I wasn't in a hurry I just wanted to enjoy the experience. By the way if you've never been to the Pittenweem Festival I can highly recommend it. Its arts and crafts etc.

I then turned inland and took the back roads up through Largoward towards The Peat Inn. It's around roads like this that you really get a feel of what a car like this can do. Don't be afraid to put your foot down just make sure you know your limits and don't push your luck. Then it was to the sad part of the day when I realised it was time to take the Caterham home, but not before I had one more blast up the back roads of Dundee to Coupar Angus and then down to Perth, I couldn't resist it.

There are simply some things you have to do in life and hiring a Caterham from Open Road Hire has to be on your list. You will experience one of the best cars ever built and be able to take in some of that superb Scottish countryside you have been talking about seeing. What could be more enjoyable?