AUTO BIOGRAPHY

Lotus Cars
In October 2007 UCL commemorated the 25th anniversary of the death of Lotus founder Colin Chapman (UCL Mechanical Engineering 1948) with an event celebrating his legacy and the future of sustainable automotive engineering.

The UCL Front Quad hosted 32 Lotus cars, including the F1 championship-winning cars driven by Jim Clark and Ayrton Senna, as well as examples of the Seven, Elan, Esprit and Europa. Lotus Cars was founded in 1948 when Chapman created the Lotus Mark 1, an Austin 7-based trials car which he entered into local racing events. This marked the beginning of the now iconic company whose road and racing cars are characterised by lightweight and precision handling.

James Bond
Sir Ken Adam (UCL Bartlett School 1938) designed the sets for seven James Bond films, including ‘The Spy Who Loved Me’, which famously features a Lotus Esprit which transforms into a submarine – modifications designed by Adam. An Esprit Turbo was Bond’s car of choice in ‘For Your Eyes Only’, also designed by Adam.

Williams Formula 1
Patrick Head (UCL Mechanical Engineering 1970; Fellow 2005) founded Williams Formula 1 with Frank Williams in 1977. It has since gone on to become one of the most successful teams of the last 20 years, with nine world Constructors’ and seven world Drivers’ Championships to date.

Speed cameras
Groundbreaking research led by Professor Benjamin Heydecker, UCL Centre for Transport Studies, proved there has been a 40 per cent reduction between 2001 and 2005 in the number of people killed or seriously injured at sites where safety cameras have been in operation.
Architecture and cars

Professor Iain Borden (MSc UCL Bartlett School 1986; PhD 1999), Director of the UCL Bartlett School of Architecture, is conducting research into how people experience cities from inside cars and how this changes their engagement with, and understanding of, architecture. Part of his research is being conducted from behind the wheel of a Lotus Elan.

Volkswagen Beetle

Dr Bernhard Rieger (PhD UCL History 1999), UCL History, is undertaking a cultural history of the Volkswagen Beetle. He will endeavour to explain why despite its origins in the Third Reich, the Volkswagen became an international symbol of freedom and irreverence in the hippy 1960s. Incidentally, Volkswagen began talks in 2005 with Proton – the majority owner of Lotus – to buy the company, although these petered out in 2007.

SolarFox

A team of staff and students from UCL Mechanical Engineering completed a 3,012 km race from Darwin to Adelaide as part of the 2007 Panasonic World Solar Challenge. They researched, designed and built SolarFox from scratch, using advanced technologies which may one day be used in the development of practical solar cars.

Formula Student

A team from UCL Mechanical Engineering competed in the 2007 Formula Student motor sport competition in a Class One car designed and built entirely by departmental members. The competition takes students through the process of developing a machine, from initial design, through construction, testing and modification.

Batman

‘Batman Begins’, directed by Christopher Nolan (UCL English Language & Literature 1993; Fellow 2006) – part of which was filmed at Senate House – has a much darker tone than previous Batman films. This moodier feel extends to Batman’s car, which combined elements of both a sports car and a 4x4 and was never referred to as the ‘Batmobile’ in the film. Nolan is reportedly a big James Bond fan, his favourite film being ‘On Her Majesty’s Secret Service’.