For some Herons, it is a while before they can fly.

BY WALTER WING

As hard as it is for me to believe, I bought this 1984 Heron MJ1 back in September 1987. It was the sixth Heron built and the last one with the clamshell bonnet. I won a tender for the car from a car dealer in Whakatane. It was bought sight unseen. The Halliday three-piece mag wheels and tyres had been stolen off the car.

After buying a set of old Skoda wheels and tyres and I headed to Whakatane to drive the car back. Unfortunately, it was actually in worse condition than I thought. The rear wheels had to be fitted in backwards to clear the inner guards. For the entire trip home I had to fight the gears to get them to engage and there was a bad cam cover oil leak. When I got home I ordered a new set of Halliday mag wheels for $1000, and some new tyres @ $180 each.

I took the transaxle out and took it to a gearbox place in Otahuhu. He informed me that the gearbox was badly worn and needed to be rebuilt. This was an expense I could not afford so I put it back into the car, and drove it home. The Heron remained in the garage when I went overseas for my big OE. On return to New Zealand, I bought a factory which I moved into along with all my car bits and pieces and finally to my new home where the latest photos were taken. Since the time I purchased it, it has remained parked up and undercover with a rare excursion out in 2002 for a sports car expo in Auckland, where there are photos on the CCC website of the car outside.

As time and money have permitted I have been planning and collecting parts to get the Heron back on the road as a restomod. Although it was fully road legal in its earlier days,

My Heron is the last to have the clamshell bonnet.

Right and Bottom: The Heron as it looked outside my garage recently.

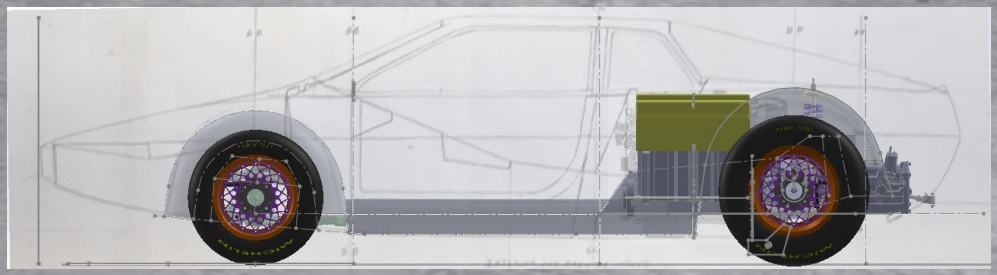
Below: The 2.2-litre Honda engine with the Subaru WRX transaxle.

the modifications and improvements I intend to make to it will mean that the Heron will have to go through the LVVTA certification process.

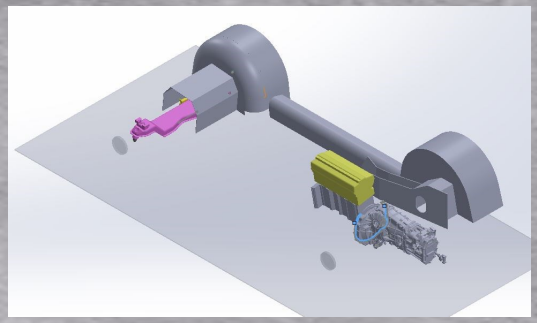
Although progress has not been rapid since the late '80s, it has always been at the back of my mind and on the to-do list. In that regard, I have bought a 2.2-litre Honda H22A 150kW (200 bhp) engine which will be mated to a Subaru transaxle that has been converted to 2WD. The transaxle will be turned upside to get the correct rotation, as the early Honda engines rotate counter clockwise. I will need to fit an oil pump to circulate the oil to the crown wheel and other gears. This will involve the construction of a new flywheel to mate a Subaru clutch and pressure plate.

Fortunately, the Honda starter motor will fit the Subaru ring gear, but I may need an adapter plate to fit the starter to the Subaru transaxle. A photo shows the engine and gearbox in position, and I need to make a 22mm adapter plate. I will need to cut the bottom of the Subaru bell housing for clearance and fit a sump guard.

All the mods will be modelled in CAD. The front suspension is still the standard Skoda S110/

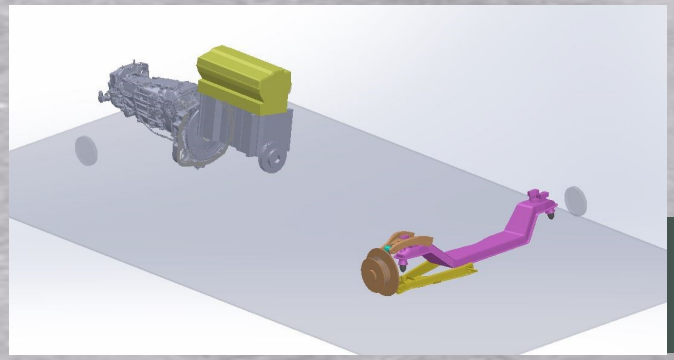


S1000 double-wishbone and subframe complete. Spacers and different wheel offsets were originally fitted to the Herons to widen the track by 130mm. The last few manufactured Herons had the subframe widened instead. I intend to bolt in a new widened subframe and double wishbones suspension. Hopefully, reduce the weight of the original suspension which was 69kg. I have the front and rear uprights and brakes from a 1998 WRX, which I intend to fit. The CAD models show the Heron with narrowed Mazda MX5 suspension front and rear. However, this suspension will not fit, although it seemed a good idea at the time.



The original rear suspension is a swing axle, and I will replace it with a multi-link suspension. I will try to use the original mounting points so the car can be restored, if wanted, by a future owner to its original drivetrain which was a Fiat 1600cc DOHC mated to Skoda transaxle. Another bonus in keeping with the original mounting points is that certification should be simpler too.

To date, the drive from Whakatane to Auckland has been the longest drive I have done in the Heron. Hopefully, I will be able to change that soon.



This page: CAD drawings showing the Honda engine with the WRX trans and Skoda front suspension.