

# A sleek, sporty two-seater

**By Pinion**  
There is a red one, a yellow one and a blue one, their incredibly sleek lines a balm to the eye.

And, with the breaks, there will be many more, in whatever colour. None having their genesis in the solder and transistor innards of some cold computer in Europe, Japan or America. None of them blocks from the old silicone chip.

"They," are the Heron Sport MJ1 mid-engined two-seater, prototype and its successors. Home-grown right here in Rotorua. Their lines were translated from mind to paper to timber mock-up, to mould to fibreglass body shell, to the road by Rotorua skill, innovation and craftsmanship. And with those same breaks the

production of the Heron Sports MJ1 could become an industry of which the city could be proud.

The Heron Sport MJ1 is Ross Baker. With 25 years experience of designing and building race and road cars, many of them very successful, Baker is now doing what he wants to do most. Using the latest in materials to produce a car for the individual, a car tailor made for the man or woman who puts the cheque on the desk. To produce a performance two-seater with the lines to match any of the much more expensive overseas exotica, to power it with the motor of the customer's choice, and to finish the interior as the customer wants it.

Ross Baker is convinced of the versatility of fibre-glass as a

car body material. He is convinced of the strength and resilience of the material, and also of its advantages

as a construction material for the limited production he envisages for the Heron in the future.

The Heron Sports MJ1 will bear out his convictions of that, Baker is certain.

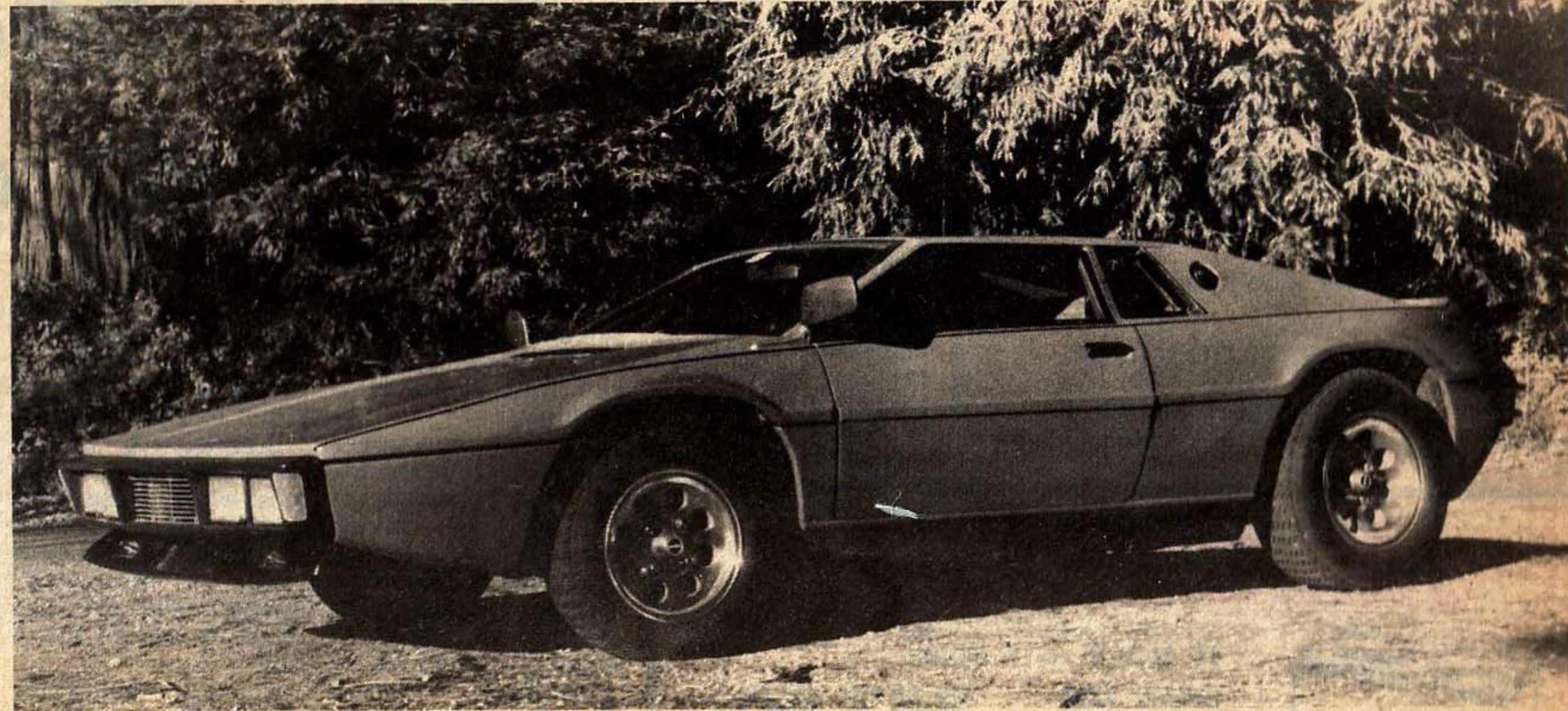
Back to the start of

the design and building business though to look at how it all began.

Ross Baker, a qualified A Grade

mechanic, built the Heron MK1 in 1964. A racing car, it appeared

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The Heron Sport MJ1 by Rotorua designer Ross Baker.



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at Pukekohe that year, with Marks 2 and 3 following, all with good success in sportscar competition.

The Heron Mark 4 was to be a replica of the famed Ford GT40, but changes to the local rules put this one out of competition, but it has since been completed as a road car.

Baker also designed and made a number of advanced production saloon car racers, winning the New Zealand saloon car championship in 1972 and taking second in 1974. His cars later won the newly introduced modified sportsman class in stockcar racing, taking both national and island titles.

More recently he designed and built a self-propelled orchard sprayer, but as Baker himself put it, he sold the whole thing to enable him to concentrate on the design and development of the

Heron Sport MJ1.

He learned a great deal about the pros and cons of fibre-glass from the spraying machine, and was satisfied it was the material for the car.

But first there had to be the design, the lines, and what he wanted the car to be. Those vital factors settled, there followed a difficult but essential task... the timber mock-up. This took a couple of years of hard concentrated work in heavy grade ply. From this the final moulds, steel re-inforced fibre-glass, were made in conjunction with Rotorua Fibre-glass Industries.

The moulds made Baker and the fibre-glass people make the most important move... they started to "lay-up" the prototype Heron Sport.

Essentially the body is in four pieces. The floor pan, which incorporates a massive-

ly strong central tunnel section, the roof and the lower side sections. These units are glued using very high strength glues, which Baker says give a bond 99 per cent as strong as the material itself.

He explained that the sections were laid-up with glass and resin to varying thicknesses, and the material itself enables the workman to taper up or down to whatever thickness is needed.

No steel plates or metal members are moulded into the glass structure as re-inforcement members, said Baker, as the two materials are incompatible in their expansion, contraction rates and in their degree of flexibility. A special metal mesh may however be used for additional strength at a stress point, as the glass will weave its way into the mesh and still be able to flex to its own rates.

There are steel bars either side in the B pillars to act as roll protection, and to which the seat belt top anchorages are bolted.

The underside of the body is especially gel-coated for protection, but as Baker says, there is no likelihood whatever of "rust."

He has preferred to paint the bodies, rather than incorporate the pigment in the "lay-up," even if only because a wider range of colours are available to the customer.

Baker is using proprietary running gear... suspensions, brakes wheels and rear drive transaxles, as well as things like door handles and winders, head and tail lights, so that replacements are readily available, and so that he does not have to have custom parts made, which are likely to be more expensive.

The prototype car, and the second one,

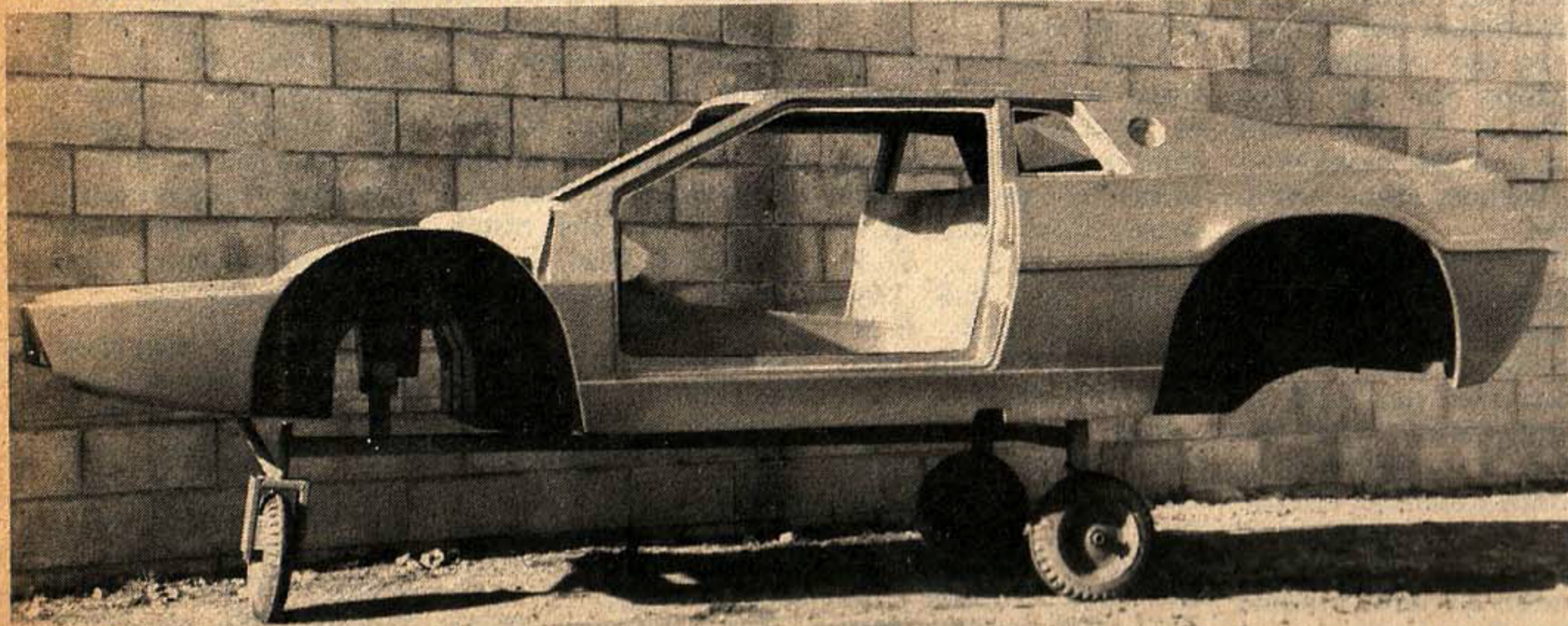
that in yellow, have rebuilt 1608cc Fiat 125 motors, the latter fitted with an AHI turbo at the buyer's request. The cars will, however, take other in-line fours or V6s and it is planned to fit a Leyland V8 in an extended body model, this model could also be a two-plus-two.

In the prototype, the gear shift and the hand brake are mounted on the central tunnel, through which run the wiring and water cooling pipes from the

front-mounted radiator. Referring to the radiator and the battery, Baker pointed out that an advantage of the fibre-glass brackets and holders were simply moulded in as a part of the overall design, and do not require bolt-on bits and pieces.

The painting by Alan McKay of Westside Painters and Panel-beaters was done with the body still an empty shell, when no masking was needed, and before it was fitted to the running gear and engine.

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The Heron's fibreglass body shell painted and ready for the motor running gear and trim. Alloy wheels are used and the seats are designed to fit the driver. Safety glass is standard and the...



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Baker said the trimming work was being done by Wayne Maisey Auto Trim just across the road from Heron Developments (Baker's company), and here too, the customer could specify the trim he wanted, even to how he wanted the instrument panel laid out.

Baker said he had six orders for the cars and would like to complete that series, and

then pause to enable both himself and the owners to really assess them, and to sort any problems and enable him also to assess the future of the Heron Sport.

Performance? Very fast, even more so on the turbo, with very quick and sure handling.

I did not drive the prototype as the seating was designed for Baker himself, and I

just did not fit. But I passengered through a very tight series of corners and the Heron sat down just as flat as one could possibly wish ... remarkably so, and Baker said it was just as good at even higher speeds. The suspension is a little hard at town speeds, but as it should do, it smoothes as speeds increase. Top speeds will be 200 kmh-plus.

Price? Baker quotes

\$15,000 with the Fi 125 motor as standard and he emphasizes that the Heron Sport is not a "kit-car."

