

**CNG/LPG
CONVERSION
SPECIALISTS**

CNG **LPG**

Geysler Motors (1978) Ltd

FENTON STREET • WHAKA • ROTORUA
LMVD TELEPHONE 84-164 • BOX 1607 MVDI

AUTO SYSTEMA

The Daily Post
WEEKENDER

Friday, November 9 1984.

FIRST IN OUTBOARDS
EVINRUDE

Available from 2 h.p. to 235 h.p.

**BARRY MARSH
MARINE**

236 TE NGAE ROAD ROTORUA
PHONE 59-854

First in Value

Aggressive beauty Aust-bound

Rotorua's own carmaker, Summit Auto Manufacturing Ltd, has one of its two litre Heron MJ1 Sports cars on its way to Australia for evaluation... leather upholstery and all.

Bright yellow and beautifully aggressive, the Ross Baker-designed car will be on display in Sydney from next week, going successively to three major dealerships.

Arranged through Torino Motors, Auckland, the country's Fiat people, the Heron is now powered by a dohc two-litre Fiat Argenta motor and is complete with the smell of real leather.

With the car will be the man who started it all Ross Baker, who said this week that just what happens over there in Oz will have a very great bearing indeed on the future of Summit Auto Manufacturers Ltd, the Heron MJ1 Sport and, I suppose, on Ross Baker too.

Speaking to the Waters Street team — Ross Baker, the company's recently appointed general manager Grant Chapman and production manager Warren Denholm — I took the impression that they are optimistic. They know they have put together a good product, that they are improving it, and they have had good feedback from the dozen or so men who have bought Herons in the past years.

They understand that the Oz chances are not too bad. The authoritative motoring magazine, Wheels, is understood to be interested, and having met a couple of that team during the first Camira launch in Queensland a couple of years back, I feel they will give the Heron a fair assessment. And I know, and I am sure the men at Waters Street also know, that the car is going to have to earn what credits it gets from Peter Robinson and the Wheels lot.

What is this Heron then? I wrote of it first in the Weekender of July 8 last year, just before it stole the crowds at the Motor Expo in Auckland.

Then I wrote that there was a red one, a yellow one and a blue one... their incredibly sleek lines a balm to the eye."

I looked at the new yellow one and at the group of cars in the Waters Street plant this week, and I take nothing away from that description. I honestly do find the Heron's lines very attractive indeed, and I have just realised why they attract me so. It is because they are aggressive.

Ross Baker agreed with me the other day when we took the accompanying photographs in Kuirau Park.

We were talking of a car built by an Australian doctor, a good looking indeed, but with rounded, gentler lines, and that was when it gelled... the Heron allies its beauty with an aggressive air, the open road its only real ground.

Baker began the development of the Heron a few years back, basing his work on the cars he had done earlier, including a number of Heron sports racing cars and that remarkable GT40 Replica, which also made its mark on the 1983 Motor Expo.

But the new car was to be in new materials... fibre glass, a material he had learned about when designing and building a spaceage orchard sprayer which had everything — including power steering — and, if I remember right, stereo.

But fibre-glass is not a material in which to initially build a vehicle. So Baker went to work on a timber mock-up, the tough task, designing and modifying and making, over a couple of years. Then the fibre-glass moulds were made here by Rotorua Fibre-glass, and it was not all that long before the Heron MJ1 Sport Prototype (it can be seen in the assembly plant photograph) was on the road. It had its teething troubles, and so, as Baker freely admits, have its successors.

Initially the cars were powered by the Fiat 125 motor driving through a four-speed Skoda box, and using re-conditioned Skoda running gear, or a customer could nominate the motor and gear he wanted.

Baker is still as much convinced of the strength and resilience of fibre-glass as he was when he began. He names it as strong indeed, and says it has the great virtue that it allows the man doing the layingup to add here, and taper there, to put the strength where it is needed.

In many parts of the car where strength is vital the glass is very thick indeed, and just this week Baker placed a Heron door flat on the workshop floor and stood on it. It buckled not a fraction.

The November 1984 Herons are much better cars. They have new design features built-in on the basis of experience from the 15 cars built so far.

The Fiat Argenta motor is a powerful unit of 113bhp and it drives through a

PINION

Skoda box to which Baker, and the team, have added a fifth gear.

The car still features Skoda running gear and brakes... it has 260mm discs up front and big drums at the rear, and at 317kg lighter than the Skoda car, the braking is good. Triumph rack and pinion steering is now used and a sun-roof is optional.

Baker makes no apology for using Skoda parts. He has found them to be extremely robust and long suffering, and he has usually been able to argue down the occasional raised eyebrow.

He said his own company, Heron Development joined with the new Summit company a while back to expand the whole operation.

It is planned to move into larger premises with better space for each operation, including a special development shop for Baker, who will continue to operate as Heron Developments.

Rotorua Fibre-Glass will continue to make the components for the Heron and the assembly will be done by Summit.

At present the company employs seven and recently Grant Chapman was appointed general manager to bring the whole operation together in a business-like manner, and to be responsible for the



logistics.

At present the Heron is priced at around \$27,500 with the two-litre, motor, and for the really discerning customer real leather upholstery is an option.

That yellow car had leather in those fine form-hugging seats, and the work is done right there at Waters Street.

Wayne Maisey, a motor trimmer, was used to working with more conventional,

and mundane materials.

He had not worked with leather, but he was willing to try and now he finds it a dream material — docile, pliable and willing to do whatever the trimmer asks of it.

The leather comes from Tasman Tanneries in Auckland and each Heron fitted with the leather option, takes four hides... a Rolls Royce, one of the few cars still using leather takes eight.

It does have that feel and smell of distinction and that young man must earn a big "E" for his work, as indeed does the whole team there in Waters Street.

They still have some 16 orders for cars reaching ahead, most stemming from that Expo, and it is difficult to say just what the future does hold, as so much will depend on this Australian expedition. This will place the car before a much larger audience.

Success there, it would seem to me, will enable the Waters Street men to expand and in doing so make even better cars, and more of them and to do so competitively. Exports can be so much the name of the game.

Baker and Chapman feel they can do it and Baker said to me that he feels it must be done... "New Zealand must do it."

Rotorua must too and I do not think I can end this story better than by quoting again from the July 8, 1983, story.

In that story I tried to describe in a few words what has gone into the Heron, which, win or lose, is a remarkable effort and one Rotorua should be proud of.

Referring to those first three... red, yellow and blue, I said: "With the breaks there will be many more, in whatever

● The Heron MJ1 Sport poses before heading away to Australia... this is the bright yellow one.

colour. None have their genesis in the solder and transistor innards of some cold computer in Europe, Japan or America. None are blocks from the old silicone-chip. "... they are home grown right here in Rotorua from Rotorua skill, innovation and craftsmanship."
I stand by that.



● The yellow Australia-bound Heron with others in the course of assembly at the Waters Street premises.

INDEX

- Powerful cars that catch the eye..... P2
- French work to tall order..... P3
- New Alfa Romeo on way to NZ. P4
- Big advancements in cars in past 10 years..... P6
- Busy yacht, hard task for judges, women's golf — and Kiwi still remembered..... P7
- Computer you can carry in your pocket..... P8
- NZ film made for Tv..... P9
- DSIR seeks old potato varieties..... P10
- The vegetarian alternative.... P11



- WHEEL ALIGNMENT SPECIALISTS (only \$18.95)
- PUNCTURE REPAIRS while you wait.
- MAG WHEELS.
- NEW, USED & RETREAD TYRES.
- AIR SHOCK ABSORBERS & SPOT LIGHTS.

Firestone

BRANCHES:

TE NGAE ROAD (opp Lynmore School)
ROTORUA. PHONE 56-714 or 59-230

CNR OLD TAUPO ROAD & PURURU STREET ROTORUA. PHONE 82-063

