

# **New Zealand Manufactured Cars**

## **A Cottage Industry**



Patrick Harlow





## Short Spyder 1990

being inspired by the Paton is clearly different to it and reeks of Jims own styling ideas. Jim would drive from Tokoroa to Rotorua almost every weekend to check on progress and suggest changes to the buck that Ross was building. Jim wanted his car to be reminiscent of the famous sports cars of the late fifties and early sixties such as the Ferrari Monza, D type Jaguar or Maserati of that era. Upon moving to Auckland in late 1989 Jim still made regular trips down but not quite as often.

Consequently Ross made some changes to the car as he built it without first consulting Jim. This is how the first car came to have a square, Baker designed, air intake on the bonnet. Ross had discovered that the Rover motor was too high for the body and the car would need a bonnet bulge to get the V8 air cleaner in. This and a couple of changes that Ross had made to the rear suspension were the only parts of the car that Jim was not totally happy with. He would later change the air intake to a more rounded and period looking one.

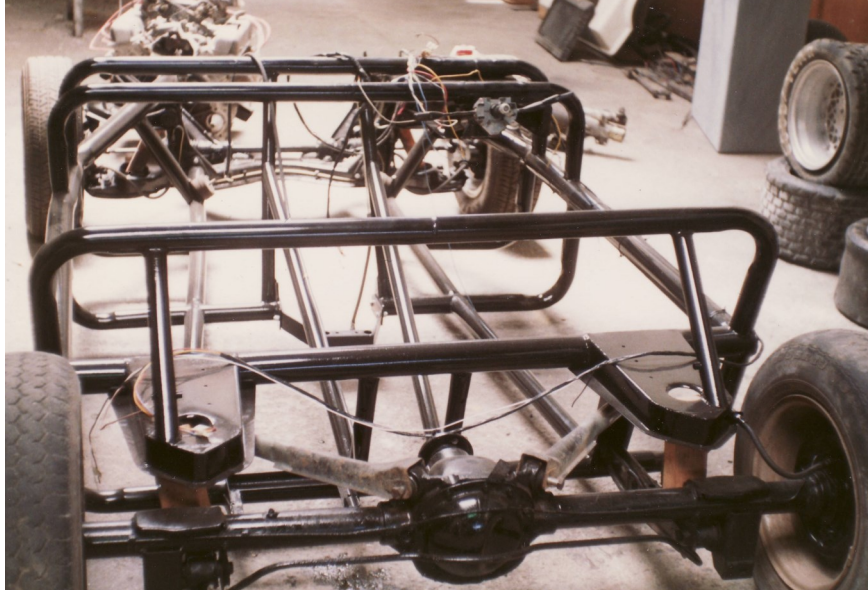
**F**or thirty years Jim Short had owned and raced a nifty little sports car called the Paton Ford. It had been very successful on the track and Jim had a dream of building his own car that would use the legendary Rover 3.5 V8 and did not have the power limitations of the Ford four cylinder motor fitted in the Paton. The Rover engine weighed about the same as the Ford Cortina motor but produced almost twice as much power.

Jim approached long time friend Ross Baker who had just finished producing the Heron MJ1 a few years earlier and asked him if he was interested in assisting in building a car which Jim intended to sell as a ready to drive car. After Jim had shown Ross a few pictures of what he wanted the car to look like Ross agreed to do it. Using the Paton Ford as a starting point Ross designed a chassis using 75mm and 50mm diameter exhaust tubing. The result was a very strong lightweight car that has clearly stood the test of time and one serious 160kmh accident! The body whilst





Apart from the Rover engine and Nissan 5 speed gearbox the rest of the drive train comes from the Mark 4 Cortina which also provides the front suspension sub-frame, rear axle and the handbrake lever. Although Jim had started thinking about it in 1970, he would not actually start to see the fruits of his dreams until 1989. After such a long gestation it took only about eight months to build the prototype. It was never intended to give the car a soft top or windscreen as sports cars of the era of which it was modelled never had them. Instead he moulded a Perspex wind deflector off a PA Vauxhall rear window which had just the right rake and curve to keep most of the wind out of the car.



*Chassis under construction during December 1989*



*First body out of the moulds*

Jim was more than happy with it and once it was on the road started working on spring rates, setting up wheel cambers and shocks to get the handling right. The design proved to be tough as once when travelling at about 160 km/h Jim hit a pothole the car careered off the road. Jim survived the crash with a

few bumps and bruises but he expected the car to be written off. When it was pulled back onto the road he discovered that it was not too seriously damaged and that his insurance company were happy to pay for the repairs to it. It was while it was being repaired that Jim discovered the chassis had become twisted during original assembly and welding. Crashing the car is not necessarily a good way trying to straighten it but when he got it back it was in better condition than before he had crashed it.

Meanwhile once Jim had the first car on the road Ross started building a second body and chassis. Already Jim was getting a lot of public interest in his car but no sales and the intention had been to set up a small production line to start producing the cars. Ross after his last experience with the Heron, wanted to build the car so that sales would start happening believing that the car would sell on looks alone. Jim was a little more hesitant and wanted to have some orders on the table before he

committed to the financial outlay that such a venture would require. He also wanted to have the car fully developed before he started seriously marketing it. Ross was not prepared to continue with the project on those terms and Jim ended up driving back to Auckland with the second car and moulds in a trailer.

Although other people expressed an interest in buying the car, as is often the case with small volume

*The only time both spyders are together*







would have liked to see a few more cars built he had no regrets. The kit car market can be a fickle one and it sometimes hard to explain why one car does not catch public interest as much as others.

The second car was fitted with a Rover 4.1ltr V8 and eventually found its way to Perth in Australia where as far as Jim is aware it still lives.

***Bibliography***

***Thanks to Jim Short***

***Pictures by Patrick Harlow and from Jim Shorts collection***

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manufacturers, the orders were not forthcoming so only two of these cars were ever made. It was a pity really as Jim had a lot of success on the racetrack with it and has driven all over New Zealand to road sporting events and at no time did the little car let him down. The car weighed only 725kg which is 225kg lighter than the MX5 and with almost twice the power it was certainly competitive.

When I saw the car, almost twenty years after it was built, it was still in excellent repair and after being offered a ride in I was surprised to have experienced none of knocks or rattles that you would expect from an open top sports car. Although Jim

***Below: as finished by Ross Baker.***

