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:: 1967 Hino Contessa 1300

Rear Guard Assault

1967 Hino Contessa 1300

You might be forgiven for thinking that we're continuing our story on the origins of the Triumph Dolomite when you look at the photos here – but mechanically, and geographically, you couldn't be further from the truth

WORDS TIM NEVINSON | PHOTOS JARED CLARK



HINO

Originally T G E or Gasuden, established in 1910, Tokyo Gas and Electric went into automotive manufacture in 1917 using a completely new factory in Omori.

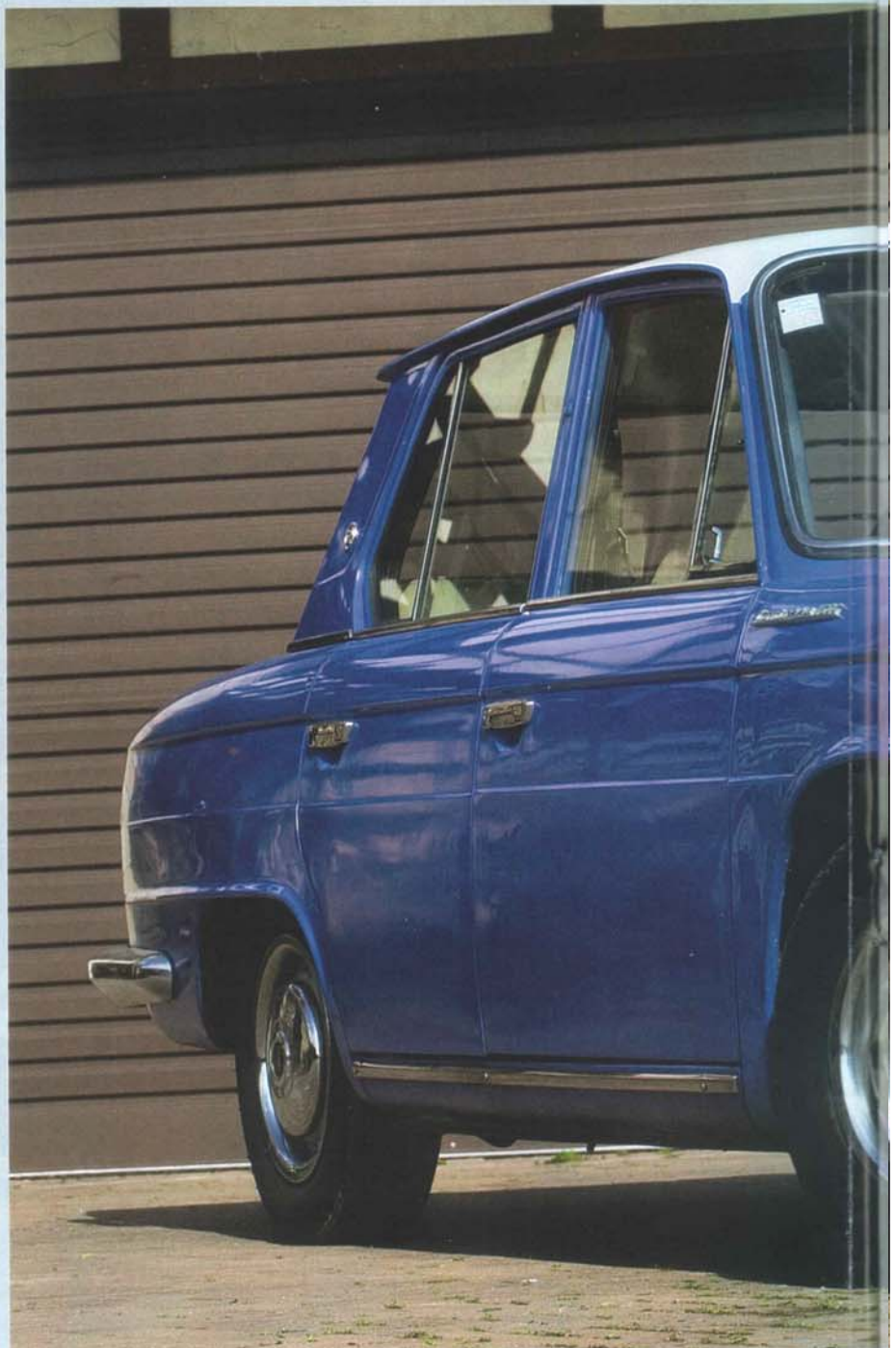
Car manufacture disappeared back to Tokyo after a number of mergers involving Hitachi and what would become Isuzu.

In 1942 former Gasuden employees built the Hino plant and independently established Hino Heavy Industry, making trucks and buses.

In 1953 Hino started assembling CKD Renault 4CVs, and at the end of the 1950s, its own 900cc sedan. After the Contessa quite a few projects were started, but no more production cars. The company is nowadays a very powerful player in the truck and bus sector. Satoshi Ezawa, who worked for the car manufacturing operation, is a keen historian of the marque. His website is www.hinosamurai.org.

The front looks uncannily like the early Triumph 2000 sedan, and the treatment of the rear cabin is near identical to the Triumph 1300. However, whilst our featured car is powered by a 1300cc engine, it is at the opposite end to a Triumph's, and owes more to Renault than it does to any British manufacturer.

Not from the established British or French automotive empires in the 1960s, this European-looking sedan comes from a Japanese car industry at the start of an export drive that would later become an onslaught. The manufacturer of this handsome little car no longer exists as a car brand, but still operates; under the massive Toyota combine making trucks and buses which are very familiar to us here in New Zealand – Hino.



Michelotti

The look is indisputably Michelotti of Italy, and if you are thinking this is just another Japanese copy, then the period of August 1961 should be of interest, as that was when the specification was sent to Michelotti from Hino Motors in

and if they did, did they care, or was it too late when they found out? We will probably never know, but in the autumn of 1964 any Triumph representatives at the annual Tokyo Show would have had quite a rude awakening. The Hino Contessa 1300 was announced at that show, and

car engineering Hino had learned was from constructing Renault 4CV kits between 1953 and 1961. Hino went from being a constructor of kits to a supplier of cars within five years.

Middle East

Triumph was a past master at CKD manufacture; that is providing countries with tariffs on imported goods with kits to assemble the cars themselves, just as in New Zealand until recently. When Triumph approached Autocars of Israel to assemble its Triumph 1300 in 1965, it was told that would be fine as long as it could put a 1500cc engine in it because Autocars was already assembling the Japanese Hino Contessa 1300s – indeed they were being used as police cars!

Triumph was able to do the 1500 conversion, so the Israeli company had a range of products that had a real family look to them, but the

Did either Triumph or Hino know about the similarity in designs that Michelotti was selling to them?

Japan. Triumph 1300 styling was not requested until a year later.

Did either of the manufacturers know about the similarity in designs that Michelotti was selling,

soon after one went on to Paris for publicity shots and an investigation into the European market.

Paris may have been chosen as most of the small



:: 1967 Hino Contessa 1300

engineering of which could not be more different – and we thought Triumph's front-drive rear-drive saga was confusing for the public!

In 1970, when manufacture of the Contessa discontinued, Triumph was allowed to supply kits to Israel with the standard 1300cc motor.

Mr Uchida of Hino was also successful in convincing NZ company, Campbell Motors, to buy Hino Contessa kits. In February 1966 an arrangement was made to supply 300 Contessa kits between March and June, with a target of 300 cars per year, and a few fully built up cars

were brought in to start with. Mark Webster takes up the story in his book *Assembly*:

Campbell Motors

"Hugo Bedford and Blair Webster, the young guns at Campbell Motors, knew Lance Moller and how positive his experience with Isuzu had been from his trip the year before, so they headed off to Japan together, despite criticism from the older principals in the company. They also had the foresight to see that Japan was becoming a powerhouse. "We wanted a Japanese franchise. Our chairman, Mr Elliot Bedford, was 100 per cent against our going. 'Let's get on with Peugeot'. I wouldn't call my uncle small-minded, but I mean, he didn't focus very far ahead, but we were just youngsters and



Wrightsons, Fletchers and Cable Price. Getting desperate and with only a few days to go, they fetched up at Hino Motor and managed to get the franchise for the Hino Contessa, a smart rear-engined car reminiscent of Italian designs

1967 HINO CONTESSA

◦ Engine	Rear-mounted four-cylinder
◦ Capacity	1251cc
◦ Valves	ohv
◦ Max power	55bhp (41kW)
◦ Max torque	70lb/ft (95Nm)
◦ Transmission	Four-speed manual
◦ Steering	Helical rack and pinion
◦ Suspension	Front: torsion bar, rear: coil springs and single radius arm
◦ Brakes	Drum/drum
◦ Tyres	5.60x13
◦ DIMENSIONS	
Length	4150mm
Width	1530mm
Height	1390mm
Wheelbase	2280mm
◦ PERFORMANCE	
Max speed	81mph (130kph)

In February 1966 an arrangement was made to supply 300 Contessa kits between March and June, with a target of 300 cars per year

we were as keen as mustard." Hugo and Blair only had one month in Japan – they went to Mitsubishi, having spoken to the Mitsubishi agent in Auckland – and everyone else they could think of. Toyota was already being imported CBU to New Zealand by a consortium consisting of

(Hugo's wife had one of only three Hino Contessa coupés in New Zealand, and Hugo remembers the Contessa as a "wonderful car"). There were plans to assemble the Hino in the near future, at the rate of 300 per year, and in fact the first Hino Contessa came off the line on





MOTORSPORT

Mr Uchida was aware that, outside Japan, motor sport sold cars, so he entered Erik Carlsson in the Safari Rally in a Hino. Hino was similarly ambitious with its export drive to the USA. Noting that racing on the west coast had an impact on sales, it formed Team Samurai with Peter Brock to promote the Contessa at the beginning of 1966. Brock – with NZ's John Ohlsen – had been instrumental in the development of the Shelby Daytona Cobra. As well as the very pretty Hino Contessa coupé that was raced, some fabulous-looking prototype sports cars were made, but the Toyota take-over shut it all down. Once again the honourable Hino employees, in this case Mr Miyako, introduced BRE (Brock Racing Enterprises) to Toyota and Nissan – leading to Brock and Bob Sharp getting works contracts to race the 240Z and 510 sedan.

the July 22. Hugo drove all the Japanese Hino VIPs and their wives from Auckland to Thames for the launch. All the Japanese women arrived wearing kimonos and it was freezing, so Hugo's wife Helen got coats for them, which dwarfed them utterly. When Mr Uchida, head of Hino Motor, arrived in Thames, he was quite surprised to see an enormous Japanese battle flag flying, which young Charles Webster had borrowed from the Thames Library. This flag had been banned in Japan since 1945. "Aah, many years I



don't see!" said Mr Uchida, while embarrassed Campbell's staff tried desperately to stop the press getting it in their photographs. President of Hino Motor Corporation, Mr Uchida, here to witness the first Contessa 1300s coming off the Thames Campbell Industries line, held several press conferences on his New Zealand visit. In them he predicted that Japanese cars would have 10 to 15 per cent of the New Zealand market by 1971.

"In 1966, the Japanese share of the market had been only half a percent. Mr Uchida went to Wellington after the Hino launch to ask for a doubling of the 300 per year assembly license for his car, making the point that the minimum economic assembly figure for his company in New Zealand was 500 a year."

(Excerpt from *Assembly* – Mark Webster's book on the local industry, available mail order from NZCC.)

The final Contessa

This was all to prove academic, as whilst Mr Uchida was to prove accurate in his forecasts, it would not be with Hino products, good as they were. The Toyota motor company was competing heavily with Hino Truck division in Japan, so the



two companies came to an agreement which was basically that so long as Hino stopped competing with Toyota cars, Toyota would stop competing with Hino trucks. The result was that Hino ceased production of the Contessa quite smartly. Toyota and Hino eventually merged, but not until quite recently.

The agreement in Japan meant that New Zealand was the last place to build Hino motor cars.

The ever-gentlemanly Mr Uchida came over personally to break the news to Hugo at Campbell Imports; as a thank you, Mr Uchida helped smooth the way for Toyota assembly at Thames. No doubt stung by the turn of events in Japan, and showing Campbell Motors goodwill, the Japanese Hino agent gave Campbell the



:: 1967 Hino Contessa 1300



introductions it needed to build Toyotas. Whilst the 'shovel front' Corona was already being manufactured in Christchurch, Corolla could replace the Hino in Thames, so Consolidated Motors was formed to sell all Toyota models built by the Consortium in Christchurch and Thames.

Rare

Domestic production of the Hino Contessa in

NZ-ASSEMBLED NEW CAR PRICES, 1965

Campbell Motors Hino Contessa	£1050
Renault R8 1100 (contract assembled)	£1075
Dominion Motors Morris 1100	£938
Austin 1100	£945
Vauxhall Viva de luxe	£832
Simca 1000 saloon	£959
Volkswagen 1200	£915
Triumph Herald	£918

Reprinted from Assembly by Mark Webster

Japan only lasted just over 30 months from mid 1964, and now there are only 105 examples left in Japan. Of all the cars assembled at Thames during 1966-'68 in New Zealand (and we assume that is 600, two years' supply, as it is difficult to separate them from other cars in Campbell's records) there are now only four registered in New Zealand; one each in Hamilton, Tauranga and Thames, all 1967 models, and one 1968 car in Whangarei. Of the 247 Contessas landed fully built up in Australia, none are known to exist there now, but lately New Zealand has become an exporter of old Contessas both to Australia, and back to Japan.

On the road

We drove the Hamilton car belonging to Keith Clausen, who has a weakness for very unusual, but technically worthy motor cars. He bought his in October 2002 with three owners and 80,000km on the clock. Keith's car cost £860 new, which is interesting because the official retail in 1965 was over £1000.

Everyone I have told about this project has said, "Oh I remember those, so-and-so's Mum had one." The family of our everyday classic editor, Mark Webster, owned one when Mark was a kid, and were very proud of it.

The Contessa seemed to fill a niche for a high

Domestic production of the Hino Contessa in Japan only lasted just over 30 months from mid 1964, and now there are only 105 examples left in Japan



quality second car. Looking at the pricing, it was not cheap so quality would have been expected, and by all accounts it was provided, although apparently they were prone to overheat, often due to water pump issues.

Keith Clausen's example was a nice car to drive, with steering and gear change being light and precise. It was quiet and easy to place, simply because of its squared-off shape and large window area.

We didn't think it was appropriate to go testing the ultimate handling, but suffice it to say that it has a comfortable ride and at sensible speeds it cornered quite nicely, and although my experience of similar cars is limited to Skodas, it seemed quiet and refined to me.

Whilst the ohv crossflow engine and drivetrain is entirely Hino's design, it would certainly be interesting to try it alongside the Renault which influenced Hino's engineers. ■