

Huron race car back on track



DAF Owners Club helps to get unique car restored

Earlier this year, I received an email from a local company which owns a number of older racing cars. They also provide an ongoing maintenance programme for other peoples' racers.

They had a problem with a Huron, and I have to confess to only vaguely knowing the name Huron, but I didn't have much of an idea about the car.

They told me that it had a Cosworth BDA engine and it ran on a belt drive, but in a testing session, a shaft in the transmission had broken and the owner wanted the car back in working order because the car had been invited to attend the Festival of Speed at Goodwood. Amazing! The car must be very desirable if it was invited to have a run up the hill climb course at prestigious Goodwood.

The question, though, was which shaft did they need?



Huron racing car on the track in 1972

They quoted various part numbers which they had found cast into the gear casing but the

numbers meant nothing to me and I didn't recognise any of them.

As they were quite local, I agreed to go and have a look.

On arrival, the transmission was in pieces on the bench and it looked very familiar, but rather than being in steel as we have on our DAFs, this casing was cast in an alloy, and the numbers quoted must have been numbers relating to the casting and put there by whoever cast the casing.

Anyway, having recognised the primary unit, I offered to return with a suitable transmission which they could dismantle and rob of any parts that they needed, and whilst there I was given a tour of the premises to see the various cars that were being worked on. That was truly amazing and there were a number of employees beavering away on the various cars, all of which were in differing stages of dismantling or assembly.



The familiar but slightly different Variomatic

The Huron was sat on stands awaiting the transmission, but it was so obviously a DAF transmission system that was in use. Yet there was also another Huron in another part of the workshops but this had a Hewland box hanging out of the back.

They weren't at liberty to disclose who owned the cars, but having seen the automatic Huron, it seemed pretty obvious to me who owned the car and I offered a name, and it was confirmed that I knew who the owner was, which surprised them all very much.

One thing I didn't like, though, was the pair of belts in use. They had DAF embossed into their surface so these were original DAF

belts from around 1972, and I was concerned that they might not like having the power of a BDA put through them at almost 40 years old.

It wasn't long before I was back at the workshops with a suitable transmission. Or so we thought!

The chap looking after the Huron was absolutely amazed that I had been able to locate a transmission for them to butcher for the Huron, and I left saying that I would call to collect any surplus bits when I was next passing.

A week later I got another email telling me that they couldn't use the transmission so when I was next in the area I called in.

Both transmissions looked the same until they were placed side by side, and then it became apparent that the race car transmission had been made at about 1½ times the size of the original, presumably to enable it to be strong enough for the power the BDA delivers.



The restored Huron at Goodwood 2010

Their plan was to have a new shaft made from scratch but the pressure was on if the car was going to get to Goodwood.

At this stage I expressed my concern about the belts and mentioned that the club was having new belts made and I would be sure to let them know when they became available.

In the meantime I borrowed a new set of Volvo belts from Simon Westerby and delivered them so that they would have spares in case the belts broke at Goodwood.

I didn't get to Goodwood but I saw in the motoring press that the Huron did get up the hill and caused quite a stir because of the way it held constant revs all the way up the hill.

So what is a Huron?

It is a special prototype race car which uses a DAF Variomatic transmission and was conceived in 1971 to run in the Belgian Hill Climb championship. This was to prove that the Variomatic was competitive, sporty and reliable. And the car did just that going on to win the 1972 Belgian Hill Climb Championship. This was remarkable and remains so to this day, as it was the first time an automatic race car had won a championship.



Huron on the track in 2010 proudly displaying Variomatic logo

The cars were built in London with quite a bit of McLaren know how going into them, but the Huron company folded in mid 1971. The cars then had a chequered history until quite recently when Paul van Doorne, grandson of Hub van Doorne, tracked down the cars in 2009 and purchased both the Variomatic and the Hewland versions.



Huron in the pits in 1972

Paul has researched the cars and had them returned to their original specification, and it was on its first outing testing at Mallory Park that the transmission needed attention.

A special first customer

Since the Festival of Speed at Goodwood, the club has taken delivery of a range of drive belts for our DAFs, and in an unbelievable twist, Paul van Doorne has purchased the first set of belts from the DAF Owners Club.

I like that.

Steve Bidwell



Huron generates motor sport press interest

The discovery, restoration and recommissioning of the DAF Huron was a significant moment and story. Although Huron is not an everyday name, its history, especially from the DAF point of view, is not to be underestimated. *Motorsport News* recognised this and reported this story in July. And Paul van Doorne not only owns the car, but he was at the wheel at Goodwood.

Rare Huron in Festival return

Classic machine stars at Goodwood after 39-year break

By Paul Lawrence

Thirty-nine years after it last ran in public, the one-off DAF Variomatic-driven Huron 4A sports-racer took part in the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

The car last ran when it won the 1972 Belgian Hillclimb Championship in the hands of Jean-Louis Haxhe.

The car was conceived for the 1972 season as proof that the

Variomatic transmission was sporting and competitive and was sanctioned by Martien van Doorne, president of DAF. Now, four decades later, his son Paul has brought the project back to life in conjunction with Simon Hadfield and his team.

"I looked for this car for 30 years," said van Doorne, who was helped by Hadfield to track down the chassis in the USA. They have spent 18 months rebuilding the car,

using the original Variomatic transmission system.

The twin-belt system, which mates to a standard Ford BDG engine in the place of a Hewland gearbox, was retained by DAF when the car was sold to John Calvert at the end of 1972. The system was then used by Jan de Rooy in his rallycross DAF and it still uses the original drive belts.

The Huron chassis, designed by former McLaren man

Jo Marquart, was later raced in the USA but has now been returned to original specification, with simply one forward and one reverse gear. Hadfield has tested the car at Mallory Park and, despite low gearing for hillclimbing, it drove well ahead of its FoS run.

"This is a tribute to my father, who always believed in the competitiveness of his father Wim's invention," said van Doorne.



Van Doorne drove the car at the Festival of Speed

Another unique DAF puts in an appearance at Goodwood Festival

Another special DAF also appeared at Goodwood this year.



as a beach car at their Italian hideaway, Porto Ercole.



There was a display of one-off prototype and rare cars from around the world all with a leisure theme. They were gathered as part of "The Cartier Style et Luxe" in Class 2: Beach Bambini – The Essential Summer Accessory, 1955-1975 display. Most were convertibles and it was a surprise to see that the DAF Kini had been brought over from the Netherlands for this year's Goodwood Festival of Speed event.

Based on the Daffodil with the 746cc air-cooled engine and Variomatic transmission, it boasted a highly unusual body design and wicker basket seats. Ideal for cruising the Italian beach in style.



We have mentioned the DAF Kini before, and many of us have seen the car in the DAF Museum in Eindhoven. This one-off DAF was created by Giovanni Michelotti in 1966 for DAF to present to the Dutch royal family as a gift on the birth of Prince Willem-Alexander. The family used it for many years

