

88 Years!

If you think the company we know as Subaru is a latecomer, think again.



In 1884, Chikuhei Nakajima was born, the son of a farmer in Gunma Prefecture, 40 miles north of Tokyo. He entered a naval academy, then, at the age of 19, heard about the Wright brothers' incredible flights and started dreaming of adventures in the skies. Chikuhei's first aviation efforts were in developing aircraft for the Japanese navy. Being an intelligent and enterprising young man, however, he decided to go out on his own, so he left the navy and set up the Aircraft Research Laboratory in 1917 (the root of what would eventually become the parent company of Subaru). Reorganized as Nakajima Aircraft Co., Ltd. in 1931, this firm became Japan's leading aircraft manufacturer.

The demand for airplanes came to a screeching halt at the end of WWII, and Chikuhei's company restructured again to become Fuji Sangyo Co., Ltd. with the goal of finding other products and markets for the technical expertise gained in aircraft production. Its first success was the Rabbit motor

The Leone 4WD wagon helped differentiate Subaru from other makes.

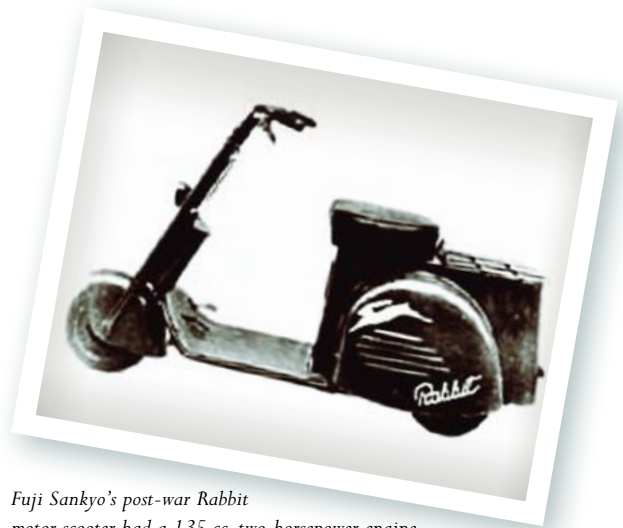


scooter, which had a 135 cc two-horsepower engine and rolled on the surplus tail wheels of fighter planes. Since Japan's transportation situation was in a state of dire disarray due to the destruction and upheaval of war, this new means of getting around met with great interest.

In 1950, Fuji Sangyo was divided into 12 smaller corporations according to the Japanese Corporate Credit Rearrangement Act, but between 1953 and 1955 four of these business entities and another corporation merged to form the Fuji Heavy Industries we know today.

The new corporation adopted the Subaru cluster of stars (we call this constellation the Pleiades) as the official logo for its line of automobiles. In 1955, Fuji Heavy Industries rolled out the P-1 with the consumer designation of the Subaru 1500. It was quite advanced for its day, having the first Japanese-manufactured monocoque body. Unfortunately, sales had to be terminated due to funding difficulties.

continued on page 30



Fuji Sankyo's post-war Rabbit motor scooter had a 135 cc, two-horsepower engine.

Introduced in Japan in 1966, the 1000 was the first Subaru to use what's become the company's trademark drive system: a horizontally-opposed "boxer" engine and FWD.



The Subaru 360 was powered by a two-stroke twin and got 66 mpg. It was imported into the U.S. starting in 1968.

Back on its feet in 1958, FHI introduced the Subaru 360, a cute, fun-to-drive four-passenger car powered by an air-cooled two-cylinder two-stroke 22 horsepower rear-mounted engine. It was an immediate hit in Japan.

Ten years later, due to various vicissitudes of the import business, Malcolm Bricklin and Harvey Lamm started to import the 360 into the U.S. It sold for \$1,297 (about 2/3rds of the price of a VW Beetle at the time) and got a sensational 66 mpg. It was bashed by the automotive press, mostly because those journalists were used to heavy American iron and the 360 was a flyweight. Regardless, hundreds were sold and a great advertising campaign established Subaru in the American consciousness. If you should happen to come across one in a barn somewhere, buy it. It's a collector's item. It also served to get Subaru of America started.

Then came the FF-1, the first front wheel-drive car from Japan, and also the first Subaru with a water-cooled four-cylinder boxer engine that was to become the company's trademark. It was sold from 1969 to 1972.

Besides the bulletproof opposed four-cylinder engine, Subaru distinguished itself with 4WD, a first for cars sold in the U.S. This came about when S.O.A. execs visited Japan and saw the vehicles Fuji Heavy Industries supplied to the country's Forest Service. A light went on, and, as the hackneyed saying goes, the rest is history — and an extremely successful history at that. As a mid-'70s ad puts it, a Subaru 4WD car, "Climbs like a goat, works like a horse, eats like a bird." ■

What's "Subaru" Mean, Anyway?



SUBARU®

"SUBARU" is the Japanese word for "unite," as well as the term for a cluster of six stars, which the Greeks called the Pleiades (part of the Taurus constellation). According to Greek mythology, the daughters of Atlas turned into this group of stars.