



The *Big Issue*

Racer's founder and former Editor Alan Harman just couldn't resist coming out of retirement to drive and review the Baja 5B such was the pull of this monstrous off road machine...



When I first saw the HPI Baja 5B I just loved it. I've been around RC model cars for nearly 30 years so I've seen them all, and reviewed most. Rarely does one come along these days that excites me and motivates me to want to drive one, let alone own one, but the Baja did just that.

The first time I got my hands on one was in early 2006. First of all is this car is big, really big but unlike many other large-scale cars it retains poise and delicacy in design. The wheels, pencil thin chassis design and semi retro feel of the real Californian Baja Race buggies are captured perfectly. This car just looks right and the more you look, the more you see the design and manufacture is as close to perfect as it can be.



THRASH TEST

HPI RACING WHO ARE THEY?

HPI are now one of the fastest growing RC Companies, just a little over ten years ago they started making RC cars and to have grown into the HPI of today is quite a feat. The Baja represents a real RC first, it is just so ready to run and user friendly that it could well inspire a whole new class of RC just like their Nitro RS4. With a UK based European HQ HPI is unique and represents a brand that can be followed by committed racers and by mainstream users just out to have fun. HPI seem to be ever expanding with an RC car for every possible user but they are also moving into other areas such as die-cast models and we hear even robots could be considered!

FROM THE GROUND UP

The Baja is a massive project and investment for HPI. To design and tool a vehicle of this size to HPI's standards is an enormous task. The design leader of the Baja Mr Akira Kogawa is no stranger to this style of car being involved in the iconic Ultima and Scorpion 1:10 cars from Kyosho. What HPI have done is capture the original magic of the styling of those cars in 1:5 scale and in a true ready to run package (you just get everything in this box!).

The Baja is a 2WD, rear wheel drive off road buggy with long stroke suspension. It has fully adjustable suspension and oil filled coil over dampers. A petrol powered (two-stroke) engine and single speed gearbox propel the car and it has disc brakes to stop it. It comes with a FM two-channel radio and a re-chargeable battery in the car for the radio. All of this is installed, set-up and ready to go. Even the body shell is finished and fitted to a very high

standard. All that is required is to add fuel (for which the oil is supplied), charge the battery in the car, fit the aerial, place batteries in the transmitter and read the instructions and you are off!

ALL IN THE DETAILS

Every part on the Baja has been designed with passion and by people who love RC cars – you can just see it, even the supplied wheel nut driver is multi purpose for wheel nuts and shocks and is perfectly moulded and could teach a number of other manufacturers how to produce a decent mould.

There are so many nice parts to this car. Just take a wheel and tyre. These are light and strong, they use bolts to hold the tyre in place so tyres can be changed. There are no hideous gluing exercises here to keep tyres in place. The wheels replicate the real items and the tyres are beautifully detailed. They bolt into place with anodised alloy nuts and of course run on fully

ball raced axles.

The suspension on the Baja is long throw and controlled by oil-filled shocks which are adjustable to five settings without changing the oil, single springs on the front and dual rate on the rear – this means two springs are joint together by a collar to give the perfect ride for the rear of the car. The shocks are works of art with threaded collars, chunky ball joints and rubber protective covers to keep the shafts clean and free of damage. Suspension is actually very adjustable with camber and caster and toe-in all detailed in the instructions of adjustment



Front shocks utilise a single spring design and rubber protective boots

BAJA'S FUTURE

HPI are intending a range of parts to improve performance of the Baja, sneak previews of these are on-road tyres as the kit tyres are designed for off road use only. As with all HPI cars the marketplace produces more optional parts for them than any other so expect sportier, modified Baja's to appear rapidly, (front disc brake sets are available already!)

Although the Baja is not specifically designed to race, it does bring race like handling and enjoyment to anyone in it's ready to run form, but expect there to be a plethora of after market parts to personalise your example.

RACER TIPS

Make sure you charge the car battery for a full six hours with the supplied charger.

Make and sure you get the oil/fuel mix right: 25 parts fuel to one part oil (25:1)



The HPI Baja 5B is an awesome package with spare parts, tools and more all included as part of the RTR set-up



Above: The radio unit can be removed containing the servos, receiver and 2000mAh battery pack



With the spur gear assembly stripped, you can see the yellow inserts that help to absorb any shocks that pass through the transmission

A SAFE PURCHASE?

If you are considering paying this much cash for an RC Car you need to consider the future. HPI have put massive investment into the Baja but you need to know that back up and spares will stay readily available. We questioned HPI on this and they laid out the facts of their extensive program including the after sales team that are available on the telephone to any customer. They are pre-trained and ready to take calls on the Baja. HPI products are generally the most widely available now in the UK with them making big efforts to be in every model shop so expect not to have problems with spares locally. Add to this HPI's market leading website with forums and technical information and the future of the Baja seems secure.



WHAT: hpi baja 5b SPEC: 2wd alloy chassis CLASS: off-road COST: £774.95

THRASH TEST



Right: The Fuelie 23cc engine is easy to use and offers long run times from the 750cc fuel tank



and what will happen if you do this to the car's handling.

The main chassis is an anodised T6 alloy channel, this is designed to be slim yet strong and protect and house the RC, engine and other components. It is this slim and clever design that gives the Baja its cool sprightly look. The chassis can be seen as the lexan and roll cage body shell allow the chassis to show along each side.

CORRECT CONTROL

The RC system is a 27MHz FM system; using the FM system of modulation is more expensive than AM and is not normally found in an RTR but it does prevent glitches from the spark plug. The radio also features a failsafe, which means that if there's a problem with the control of your car it will return to brakes on and come to rest, a clever system. The steering servo is a giant

WHAT WE USED

Nitro

- Transmitter:** HPI TF-10 27MHz steervheel (kit)
- Receiver:** HPI RF-10 27MHz (kit)
- Steering Servo:** HPI SFL-10 (kit)
- Throttle Servo:** HPI SF-4 (kit)
- Engine:** Fuelie 23cc (kit)
- Exhaust:** Silencer (kit)
- Fuel:** Unleaded (plus HPI two-stroke oil)
- Battery:** HPI 6V 2000mAh (kit)

ball raced item that is man enough for the job whereas the throttle is a more standard look RC unit. The transmitter is a steer wheel style – I have no problem with this as I still feel this is the best way to introduce beginners to our hobby- a wheel to steer seems more sensible to me than a stick!

The engine in the car is a Fuelie 23cc, this means little to me but HPI give you a detailed



With the braking system in component form, you can see the rotor that sits between the discs to aid cooling

A supply of air filter oil, two-stroke oil and heavy-duty grease are supplied in the box

An array of tools will allow you to carry out any necessary maintenance



With the attractive, chassis hugging body work removed, the full glory of the anodised alloy chassis is revealed

The Akira Kogawa designed chassis is unique in its design. Made from 4mm thick 6061 T6 aluminium, it provides an incredibly rigid platform for the Baja

Neat covers for the top of the shocks protect them should the Baja roll over

The multi part rims eliminate the need for glue as the tyre is clamped in place by the ten-fixing bolts. Note the 24mm wheel nuts

Ribbed tyres up front and square block rears offer excellent grip on all surfaces but are ideally suited to the loose where you can really enjoy the Baja at its best

DO'S AND DON'TS WITH THE B5

Do build yourself a ramp – but get the scale right, make sure you find or make a jump big enough – HPI claim 15 feet jumps in strength testing but don't tell them we told you! (Skatepark jumps are to scale but only when empty.)

Always take care when driving a car like this – not on public roads – not with people around – not if there's any chance of you hitting anyone or anything – be sensible at all times, you get the picture.

Don't run the car on long grass – the side pods on the car look great but collect grass fast, scoops are needed to keep the engine cool.

Don't run the car on tarmac – it will go great! But the tyres will not last they are designed for off-road (on-road tyres are coming soon).

Always mix the oil and petrol in a can and get the ratio right – it's important – read the instructions.

Always make sure the batteries are charged – this car will run around 50 minutes on a full tank so charge it up for each run or change to another fully charged battery. HPI are promising higher capacity batteries but come on 50 minutes is a long time...



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ON TEST

The ultimate driving machine?

So I went and got a brand new petrol can and put in two and a half litres of petrol (unleaded). I then poured in the 100ml of the supplied HPI engine oil and shook like mad. Filling the Baja up is easy but so that I didn't make a mess I only filled the tank two-thirds of the way.

A quick three or four pumps of the little rubber primer and the carburettor was full of fuel. Radio on first, car on, all charged up and ready to go – but don't forget to put the aerial into the tube on the car and test the failsafe as per instructions.

First pull, nothing. Second pull, nothing. Third pull and a crackle from the exhaust as the Baja fired into life. Wow that was really, really easy...

My head told me to be careful for a while with this car so our test drive here is not the ultimate driving test, this will have to come later after the car is fully loosened up and tuned in. The instructions show you how to adjust the top and bottom end needles on the carburettor for engine setting.

OK so driving the Baja. At Racer we have a four-acre field so we have no lack of test space but the grass was a little long so we kept to the short grass and gravel areas. Response is really quite good; this is a big heavy car so I didn't expect it to leap instantly. At first the engine takes a while to warm up but the car still feels lively and sharp. Steering is positive due to the high power servo and brakes are good. The car's suspension was moving nicely soaking up the bumps and the tyres gave ample grip.

Slowly I started to use more and more throttle and the top speed of this thing is fast, it also seems even faster as it is so big! It is easy to get a bit of a sway on, the suspension leans into the corner and takes time to recover so you need to concentrate!

Serious point though – this thing needs space, good job there are many parks and football pitches around – it is fast, it is big, it is heavy so please be very careful – there were a few moments when the Racer photographer looked very scared and rightly so as I wasn't totally sure if I was going to recover the Baja in time!

This car feel sprightly and agile, it also looks so cool leaping around the ground and spinning it's wheels it is just an all round really great kit on so many levels.

So far I'm impressed, easy starting, easy to drive and fast. Jumping will be next... Racer is off to the Baja test day soon with HPI so we will report back on 15 feet jumps that are achieved...

Verdict: Amazing fun and handling to match the design and look, a winner full stop.

INSTRUCTION BOOK

The instructions for the Baja 5B are very extensive. The first section covers the overall car in guide form and moves onto a starting guide including mixing the fuel. All along the way there are clear diagrams and hints and tips. It can be very basic in places for the experienced RC driver, but they are just carefully covering all the bases for the first time user. There's a comprehensive trouble-shooting guide, which has a clear format to follow.

HPI also gives in chart form a maintenance guide, outlining how to keep you Baja in perfect working order. This is very clever where each step is shown with how to do it and when. There are just too many details to go into here but HPI take 70 pages to clearly explain and show every aspect of owning the Baja.

HPI also give you a "tuning" guide, this covers suspension and engine tuning and is again nicely and clearly laid out and explained. Toe-in, camber, rich and lean for the engine – all covered professionally.

These instructions are first class and tie in nicely with the tools that HPI supply and indeed the number of spare parts you get included in the box bringing confidence to the owner that you really can take it to pieces and find out how it all works!

A full parts list is also included in case you need spares.



TOP 5 BAJA POINTS:

It's completeness: This car comes with everything, engine oil, heavy duty servos, failsafe RC, tools, ready painted body, full instructions and maintenance guide – it just needs petrol and eight AA batteries.



Wheels and tyres:

These are awesome, so beautifully detailed and also you don't need to buy new wheels when you want new tyres – it's a giant step by HPI to make bolt together wheels.



Scale look: Everybody loves this car – I'm the boss at Racer so I get to keep it but I had to fight off the others in the office even the girls!



Front shock protectors:

Small point but typical of this kit – beauty is truly in the details, these little plastic covers just keep the tops of the shocks safe if you end up upside down. Lots of body clips for the roll cage and chassis protector are nice too.



Driving experience:

See panel elsewhere but driving this thing is fun. It's fast, feels light and responsive and is so easy to use and start. It's been driven by everybody here at Racer as well as a seven and nine-year old little girls – they all love it.



"This one of the best and most important RC Cars ever, the Baja 5B raises the bar higher than ever before."

THRASH TEST



The Baja features hubs that bolt together and gaiters on the driveshafts



The chassis comes in two parts with a moulded cover plate for the rear section - see right



Older readers may recognise the chassis design from the Kyosho Ultima/Scorpion car



A moulded section covers the screws that holds the rear suspension and gearbox in place



Fuel tank is held by quick release clips. The cap indicates the required fuel/oil mix



An extension piece bolts onto the silencer to keep the oily exhaust residue off the chassis

“The engine is a structural part of the Baja’s chassis design. The rear suspension and main chassis actually bolts to the Fuelie 23cc.”

exploded diagram of the unit and a maintenance guide and schedule, with the speed this car produces I would suggest it is more than ample for the job. That’s my first reference to driving this car but it won’t be the last...

The car has a differential, which aids handling in a very clever way by a series of pressure washers behind the gears. These increase pressure as the gear speeds up and induces a stiffer limited amount of slip. The gearbox and clutch are all really big and chunky! They look more like full size car components and feature clever anti shock parts to make sure the car keeps going under the toughest driving. Power is transmitted to the rear wheels via dogbone drive




shafts, which are protected by rubber boots at each end to reduce maintenance and wear.

When you get the Baja out of its considerable box and place it on a flat surface you just can’t resist playing with it, looking at it from different angles and pushing that suspension up and down – you can see the guys are all RC nuts at HPI from the owner Tatsuhiro Watanabe to the guys in charge Shawn Ireland and Jason Dearden to the engineers and service people in the UK, this car screams that they have gone the whole way to get this right.

FUN IS THE KEY

The whole concept of this car is just right, it looks good, feels good and is so well thought out and designed that it is an instant classic. The performance

just amazes anyone who sees it go and its responsive reactions to transmitter inputs make this big 820mm car feel like a sprightly buggy – just don’t stand in it’s way!

HPI have truly brought petrol powered, high speed off road real action to the RC world – if you can afford this car then get one. It will impress your friends and continue to impress you – just like it has with me... 

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SPECIFICATION

Model:	HPI Baja 5B
Scale:	1:5
Class:	Off-Road
Application:	Fun/Executive RC
Format:	RTR
Power:	Two-Stroke
Chassis:	Alloy
Drivetrain:	2WD
Transmission:	Gear
Differentials:	Geared
Shocks:	Oil-filled
Bearings/Bushes:	Bearings

TECHNICAL DATA

LENGTH	820MM
WIDTH	460MM
WHEELBASE	570MM
FRONT TRACK	460MM
REAR TRACK	480MM
WEIGHT	9600G

OPTION PARTS

- Range of on-road tyres
- Anti-roll bars

SUMMARY

SO GOOD IT’S GOING TO LIVE IN THE LOUNGE!



VERDICT

- ⊕ TRUE COMPLETE AND RTR / BEAUTIFUL DESIGN / SPEED
- ⊖ NEEDS BIG RUNNING SPACE /
- NEEDS BIG STORAGE SPACE / HIGH COST (BUT WORTH IT)

RACER RATING ★★★★★