



This catalogue shows Schuco cars of the 1960s.



A Japanese tin-plate battery-operated James Bond car came in this box. No mention of Bond appears on it or the vehicle itself - obviously the payment of royalties was hopefully being avoided! The car imitates all the gadgetry of the film vehicle. It was priced at £250 on a stall at a toy show!

Toy Cars - or Models

by Jack Tempest



This is the famous Schuco 'Fex' that actually rolls over and rights itself after making a sharp turn at speed. The springs in their mechanisms suffer badly with this action and many surviving examples need new springs! The modern Schuco company has or is re-issuing this toy and its price may have a bearing on the value of its predecessors!



This clockwork German-made racing car, the 'Silver Bullet', unusually commemorates a loser! The winners normally appear in toy form! Yet it offers sufficient interest to be perhaps worth £1,000!

The most collectable of toys are probably those made in the image of the motor vehicles that have travelled our roads since the 'horseless carriage' made its appearance towards the end of the nineteenth century. The toy manufacturers in Germany were quick to produce toys based on these new vehicles, but they were expensive and affordable only to the wealthier classes. They were generally beautifully made with examples being powered by steam, clockwork, or electric battery. Clockwork became the most popular and convenient form of power source. Steam was too messy, though there were real steam cars around. Batteries were then too bulky and weighty and their appearance was short lived.

Developing mass production methods led to the wider availability of less expensive toy road vehicles. They were still generally accurately produced and still worthy of being described as models, rather than toys. The cheapest kinds, however, often tended to not represent any particular vehicle and simply consisted mainly of a tin-plate box with a 'bonnet' up front and four wheels. This satisfied most of the children. Such examples might have the luxury of a cheap clockwork mechanism or a less expensive friction flywheel drive. Or simply had to rely upon its young owner pushing it along.

Many novelty vehicles were to appear in the years between the two World Wars, mainly from Germany, a country internationally noted for the production of ingenious tin toys. The products of Schreyer & Company became very popular and sold under their 'Schuco' trade name. They introduced many novelty cars, of no particular outline, onto the market in the 1930s, including a 'Command' car that could be started and stopped by blowing a special whistle. Also there was the 'Fex', a similar car that would roll over whilst taking a bend at speed. Although Schreyer's finally closed down in the post Second World War years, a company reintroducing a variety of the firm's original products has more recently revived the name 'Schuco'.

Schreyer's also, prior to closing, brought out a series of interesting 'Old Timer' models, a selection of racing cars, and entered the die-cast model market. The interest in die-cast motor models was fired mainly by the appearance of the imported American 'Tootsietoys', and Frank Hornby's well known 'Dinky Toys'. Hornby, who ran Liverpool's famous Meccano factory, is said to have introduced his Dinky Toys purely as a result of the importation of the 'Tootsietoys'. His idea, anyway, was to produce model road vehicles to add interest to layouts built around his Hornby Trains products.

'Dinky Toys' became very popular and probably helped trigger off the collecting of die-cast motor vehicles internationally. A few collectors' clubs began to make their appearance around the country, all with a strong leaning towards 'Dinky' models. It was these clubs that started off today's toy collectors' swapmeet craze, though the events of today display a much greater variety of collectables. Even so, stalls dedicated to serving die-cast vehicle collectors usually outnumber all others. Nowadays there are many makes competing with the Dinky products that were produced up to the factory's closure in 1979.

Other makes of die-cast models were introduced and began to catch the eyes of many model motor enthusiasts. The products of 'Corgi' were

more detailed than the 'Dinky Toys'. The inclusion of 'real windows' in their miniature vehicles added extra interest. 'Corgi' was started up by the tin-plate toy company of 'Mettoy' in 1956 and was based at the Company's new factory in South Wales.

'Mettoy' itself owed its British existence to the German Nazi Party's anti-Jewish activities. Phillip Ullmann, the Jewish head of the well known German toy manufacturing concern 'Tipp & Co' fled to England in the 1930s. Here, with the help of the model engineering company of Bassett-Lowke, he created his new venture in Northampton. Soon 'Mettoy' became well known for its tin toys of all kinds, including motor vehicle and motorcycle models. Their designs tended to reflect those of 'Tipp & Co', which had been taken over by the Nazi government.

The 'Corgi' range of motor models was launched in the same year as Lesney's introduced their 'Models of Yesteryear' series. These were commemorating classic and sports cars, and other vintage vehicles such as steam-powered fairground engines. They were immediately popular and became very collectable. Lesney was also famous for its other successful models in their 'Matchbox Series'. These smaller models quickly caught on. The series was limited to some 75 examples that, at the time, could still be spotted on the roads.

Other die-cast examples came and went, some, like those from the English 'Benbros' company that tried to copy Lesney's products,

disappeared after a few years. 'Benbros' appeared in 1952 and existed into the late 1960s after making a variety of models, including their 'TV' and 'Mighty Midget' ranges. Their 'Zebra Toys' were in a larger scale, but didn't save the firm from extinction. Successful, too, were the tin-plate (later plastic) Minic models manufactured by Tri-ang from 1935.

The 'Minics' were popular additions to many 0-gauge railway layouts but, although interesting items, were not very accurate models. Originally they had clockwork mechanisms. Later, after the war, some friction drive versions, advertised as 'Push and Go' models, made their appearance. Several model service stations and 'Minic Garages' with petrol pumps were available for housing the models. The vehicles were still made in 1939 but only for a short time. Production was resumed when peace returned.

Tri-ang were also responsible for the now very popular, but short-lived series of detailed die-cast vehicles known as 'Spot-On' models, which were made in the company's Northern Ireland factory from 1959. Curiously sales were poor and the factory was closed down in 1967! Now examples are highly sought after by many collectors who appreciate them for their accuracy of scale and design.

Many series have now made appearances in special limited editions in a bid by their manufacturers to convey a suggestion of investment potential. Difficulties of one kind

or another have affected several of the leading producers. Those who have not gone out of existence are carrying on their famous names under American ownership, having their products created in Far Eastern companies. Even the last of the big British manufacturers, Lledo, has now completely lost its independence, with most of the firm joining the American owned Corgi concern!

Values of the more popular collectable models are now in a volatile state. Only items in absolutely mint condition and complete with perfectly preserved original cartons are generally acceptable. Some high prices are reported from auction sales, but selling from fairs is not all that easy at the moment. Perhaps people are at last realising that specially created limited editions are being over produced and are not working out as earners. Maybe values have become too high for collectors who circulate around the toy fairs? Maybe the best sales are achieved at auction. The way ahead for collectors is to search for what they want long enough to find the item they desire. Then buy it, perhaps after a spot of haggling, enjoy its ownership, and leave the rest to the ever-unpredictable future!

Regarding prices, some items appear to have increased in value, others have dropped. The rest have remained static. Mint and boxed 1950s Trojan vans remain, for instance, in the region of £130. The rarer 'Oxo' mint version is rated at £250. This model never came with its own carton and was only available for a year.



It's the same with this trade box of Castrol tankers. Individually they are catalogued at £120 each, mint and boxed. The boxful might go for £550 or so.



Tri-ang Minics came singly, or in boxed sets like these.



This is a special cut-away demonstration Prämetta model revealing the quality clockwork motor for which these models were famous. The car is still capable of operating perfectly. It can automatically follow different courses. These German cars were made in Cologne at the end of the Second World War.



This Dinky Toys 'Heinz' Big Bedford Van is rated at up to £400. If it shows a bottle of Heinz Tomato Ketchup, then its top value is assessed at £750!



Trade boxes of six are more difficult to sell and such a box of Dunlop Trojans would probably sell for £600 - or less!



This quite rare diecast civilian miniature motor car by Britain's sells at over £1,000.