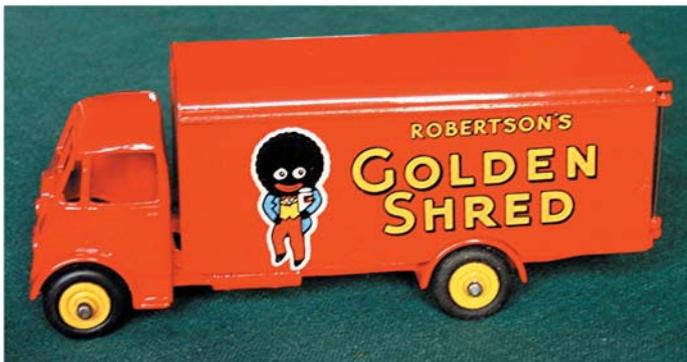
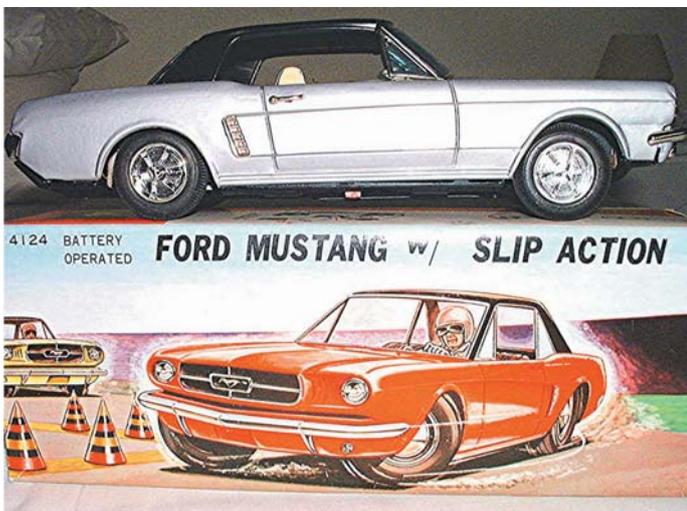




Two 1930s 'Ford Light Van' tinplate clockwork models from Tri-ang's Minic series. Note the petrol can on the running board of one model - a feature removed from later models.



An example of the 1950s Dinky Toys 'Supertoys', a model truck in 'Roberts Golden Shred' livery, complete with their famous Golly trademark.



This 1960-70s Japanese tinplate Ford is battery-operated and runs forward and develops a screaming skid, spinning round to regain control - only to screech into more skids!

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## Toy Motor Vehicles

by Jack Tempest

The interest in motor vehicles of all types is widespread. These days no self-respecting steam rally will refuse to include a section dedicated to bygone horseless-carriages that have appeared on our roads from the early 'veteran' to the more recent 'classic days'. The interest in the 'horseless' vehicles has long been reflected in toy form from the earliest days, when steam, electricity, and petrol/diesel-powered examples made their appearances. An attempt to power motor-vehicles by means of 'liquid air' literally ran out of steam, though similar experiments using liquid nitrogen are still taking place in the attempt to reduce air pollution.

Almost as soon as the horseless carriages hit the roads towards the close of the nineteenth century toy-makers began producing the various vehicles in miniature. At this time mass-production methods had not been fully developed and toy production was dependent very much on the arts of the skilled craftsmen and many manual skills were used in creating the tin-plate pressings and decorating the finished items. The toys were, in those days, available only to the upper classes at a time when the wealthy were wealthy and the poor remained so. Most of these marvellous playthings came from Germany, the country that was destined to rule international toy markets for many years.

Though toy vehicles were available that could be powered from their miniature steam-engines the clockwork motor became the most popular means of mechanical propulsion. A few electrically driven motor cars were eventually produced in the early days of the dry battery, but the batteries then were too weighty and cumbersome and were only tried out on larger motor models. Electric battery and steam power fuelled the larger ship models of those early days and the only toy then suitable for powering by electricity and steam was the model railway. Steam-railways enjoyed popularity for many

years. There were plenty of clockwork examples but electricity from the mains could be fed to a mobile toy railway via the metal tracks upon which they ran, just as they are still powered today. There was no need to find room for fitting a hefty battery into a toy locomotive.

The motor vehicles were later to be manufactured in die-cast metal. Frank Hornby entered this side of the toy business when he noticed the growing popularity of the American 'Tootsie Toys' that were imported into the UK. He started up production of his famous 'Dinky Toys' (originally sold under the name of 'Hornby Modelled Miniatures') made to a scale that generally matched the Hornby 0-gauge scenic layouts built by enthusiastic Hornby customers. 'Tootsie Toys' remained popular, though most were of American-style vehicles, and 'Dinky Toys' kept their popularity through the 1930s and into the post Second World War years.

'Dinky Toys' are very collectable. Their values escalated rapidly through the 1950-70s, but today remain static and, with the exception of the rarest pieces, have tended to be more difficult to sell in the present climate. When the outlook was rosy many people were offering examples that were repainted and redecorated models they had purchased at low prices. This led to wise collectors only buying mint examples that still came with their original boxes. Collectors who had genuine mint examples, but lacking their original cartons, found a noticeable drop in interest when they came to offer them for sale!

Reproductions in general are often invidious. Will reproduction boxes adversely affect the future of the hobby in the longer term?

Today they have the opportunity of finding reproduction boxes for their mint, non-boxed examples. There are several people producing copies of these coloured cartons, some good, some poor. An astute collector would be able to recognise the best of these fakes. It appears to be a legal way of printing £10 notes, which is about the price charged for one of these copies! Quite a disconcerting state of affairs which must be affecting the future of the hobby! Most of this business has been directed at 'Dinky Toys', but reproduction boxes are now turning up for the products of Corgi and other companies!

Die-cast models are still probably the most popular toys to collect. You can see this for yourself if you ever visit one of the many toy swapmeets that take place around the country. In fact, it was the die-cast collectors who started off the toy fairs in the first place back in the 1960-70s. These collectors had banded together as local clubs and it was these clubs that promoted the idea of 'swapmeets', a borrowed American expression for the equivalent of our 'car-boot sales'. The success of these early shows was observed by entrepreneurs and soon we had more and more events being introduced around the country!

Tin-toys are found at these toy shows, though always in smaller quantities. Tin-plate playthings in general have been replaced by plastic models, for safety's sake, though modern plastics allow industrialists to make bigger profits. Regulations ban tin-toys as dangerous because children might cut themselves. True enough in the case of some of the cheaply produced models that were once marketed. Today's tin-plate toys, often copies or based on pre-Second World War examples, are made in Germany, East European countries, India, and in the Far East. They can only officially be imported to the UK for collectors, not for children!

The exquisite 'scratchproof' 'Rollo' cars, originally made around the 1960s by Kellermann of Germany are now made in the Czech Republic. In England Tri-ang introduced their series of small 'Minic' tin-plate road vehicles before, and in the wake of, the Second World War. Most had clockwork mechanisms, some had friction-drive flywheel systems. Probably the best range of motor-model clockwork and battery-operated tin toys came from Germany and post-war Japan, including 'Schuco' of Germany and 'Bandai' of Japan. Some good clockwork examples were manufactured in the UK by such firms as Chad Valley, Mettoy, Tri-ang, Whitanco, and Wells in the pre and post Second World War years. The top tin toy cars, from the leading early German manufacturers such as Märklin, Bing, and Carette, can realise prices that are apparently too high for toy fair visitors and tend to generate their thousands of pounds values in specialist auction rooms!



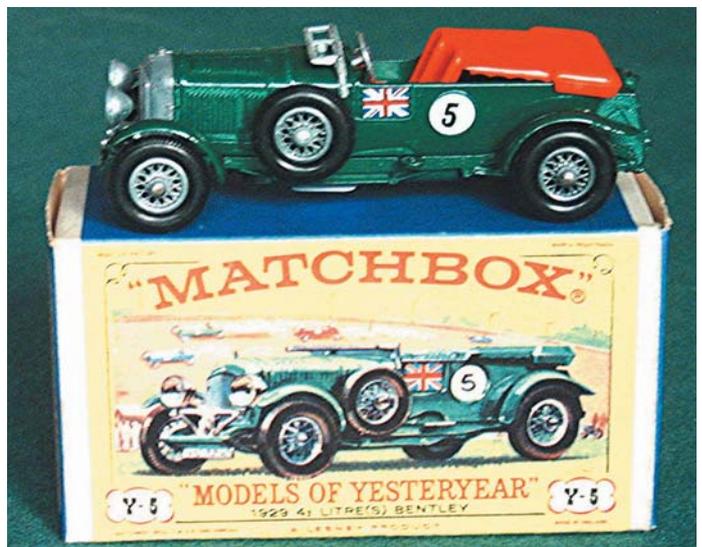
This toy racing-car was made in England in the 1930s by Wells-Brimtoy.



This clockwork London Taxi was one of the most popular Tri-ang 'Minic' tin-plate models.



A 1940s clockwork 'Express Transport' van with 'Wells of London' trademark.



One of the very popular Lesney 'Matchbox' series of the 1950s. A die cast model of a 1929 Bentley.