



A car of many parts: The desktop version of the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren consists of some 1,400 hand-assembled components.

tomers of the original car a stylish miniature which recreated everything from their individually-specified interior to their chosen license plate number.

And Mercedes' plans are coming ever closer to fruition. Twelve of the 16 colors are now available and the remaining shades are set to follow shortly. Added to which, customers can also choose from the full range of interior colors. Next to every model that crosses the path of quality control expert Zhenping Lee there is a pad of paper. "Here I can see all the options ordered for the car and the current production number," she explains. She is currently examining SLR no. 101, a silver model with a red/black interior. The idea of building a Mercedes-Benz McLaren captured Shuxiao Jia's imagination

immediately: "At the same time as producing the 1:12 model, we've also started work on a 1:18 version."

Up to now, CMC has made its name making replicas of vintage cars, such as the Mercedes W196 Silver Arrow, the 1924 Mercedes Targa Florio, and the 300 SL Carrera Panamericana. "Mercedes model cars are exceptionally popular all over the world," says CEO Shuxiao Jia. Indeed, the best-selling model in the CMC range is a Mercedes – and a unique example at that. The model in question is a legendary blue racing-car transporter from the 1950s, which can be ordered complete with a 1:18 Silver Arrow in original style as an option. And the Chinese firm's model range now has a 21st-century edge to go with its historical refer-

ences. The 1:18 scale model provides ample evidence of the popularity of the SLR in mantelpiece form, with sales already into five figures. However, the CMS management's eye is on the spectacular presence and beauty of its latest creation rather than the statistics it has generated.

The development costs for the super sports car have also been left very much in the shadows, but industry insiders estimate the start-up costs for production at a minimum of 300,000 euros.

Proof, if proof were needed, that the likeness between the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren and its model car offshoot is not limited to appearances alone.

www.cmc-modelcars.de



SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

WORDS ANDREAS A. BERSE

PHOTOS MARKUS BOLSINGER

A keen eye, dexterous fingers, around 1,400 individual parts, the luxury of time and, of course, the odd cup of tea all play a key role in perfecting a display-case model of the Mercedes-Benz McLaren in Shenzhen, China. The miniature SLR lacks none of its big brother's quality and is likewise an example of fine hand-craftsmanship.



A stitch in time: A 1950s sewing machine is used to turn cowhides into SLR seats.

The similarity is amazing – it is as if the vulcanized rubber of the tires, beautifully forged light-alloy wheels, exquisite leather seats, and reflectors with clear-glass covers have been taken from the Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren super sports car and shrunk to a fraction of the size. Under the ultra-light hood of the junior model is an 8-cylinder engine reflecting the delicate precision of a Swiss watch mechanism. The two gullwing doors open to an angle of exactly 107 degrees and its paintwork glistens with the allure of a precious gem.

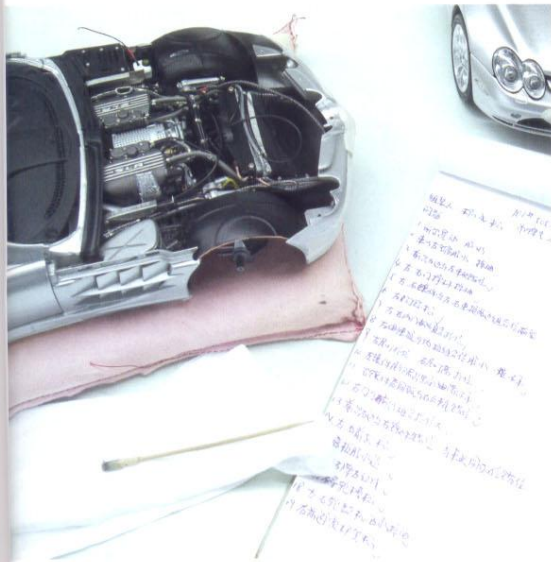
The miniature Mercedes-Benz SLR McLaren is still not quite as desirable as the man-size original, of course – at twelve times smaller than the actual car, it is simply not large enough to pack in all of its master's features. However, with a price tag around 242 times lower than the road car's,

it will also make less of a hole in your pocket. Given the reduced proportions of the model car, you could be forgiven for thinking that the roadgoing SLR had been transported to the fairytale land of Lilliput. This, however, is Shenzhen, a specially designated economic area located 35 kilometers (22 miles) from the former British colony of Hong Kong and currently experiencing explosive growth. CMC, a company based in Denkendorf, Germany, owns a production facility here, one which enjoys an impeccable reputation within the industry.

It is tempting to see the factory, which is normally closed to the prying eyes of cameras, as the Far East equivalent of the SLR's birthplace in Woking, England. "Every manufacturer has to fill a niche, and ours is quality," says Shuxiao Lia, who founded CMC eleven years ago with her German

husband Herbert Nickerl. The small-scale SLR is the latest product to emerge from the CMC subsidiary, which is based on the Si-Lian Road in the Heng-Gang district of Shenzhen. The model consists of 1,400 individual components and the body is made from pressed copper sheeting with a thickness of just 0.5 to 0.6 mm. Its outer skin displays the deep shine of at least five flawlessly applied coats of paint.

These high-quality miniatures possess a unique character, one refined by a series of key elements. Hand-craftsmanship is at the core of the creative process. "We don't work with the CAD surface data that the original uses," reports works manager Li Jiang. "Instead we start by building a sophisticated basic model, which is one-and-a-half times the size of the eventual miniature." However, before this process could begin,



Listed model: The equipment options are fitted with meticulous precision.



Next please: Making an SLR demands surgical skill.

the Chinese specialists traveled to the SLR's back yard in England to take the fingerprints of the original super sports car. "We spent three days in Woking and took well over 500 photos of the original," recalls CMC boss Shuxiao Jia.

But why do the Chinese prefer to rely on a trained eye in the design of their product rather than following the modern path of bits and bytes? As Li Jiang explains, the masterly design of the life-size SLR provides the heartbeat for each completed miniature. "We have to overstress certain ridges, reduce other proportions and revise some radii — all to scale — in order to ensure that the model has a harmonious look about it." The scale of the basic model is larger than that of the end product, allowing any errors or inaccuracies to be identified more effectively. The stamp of approval from Mercedes

provides the necessary guarantee of authenticity. "We have several correction processes in place, initially for the basic model and later also for the first 1:12 pre-production models," explains CMS founder Shuxiao Jia. Next up on the path to perfection is the production planning phase. Each new project has its own pre-series dry run. This allows the experts to quickly identify any problems with a component during production. After all, what use is the best fixture or fitting if it doesn't leave the assembly line in perfect condition? CMC also carries out constant checks on the manufacturing process during the course of a production run. The third, and arguably crucial,

provides the necessary guarantee of authenticity. "We have several correction processes in place, initially for the basic model and later also for the first 1:12 pre-production models," explains CMS founder Shuxiao Jia. Next up on the path to perfection is the production planning phase. Each new project has its own pre-series dry run. This allows the experts to quickly identify any problems with a component during production. After all, what use is the best fixture or fitting if it doesn't leave the assembly line in perfect condition? CMC also carries out constant checks on the manufacturing process during the course of a production run. The third, and arguably crucial,

Hectic working conditions are shunned in favor of unhurried attention to detail. Calmness is the key to quality at the Shenzhen factory.

step to achieving a flawless result is the firm's approach to time management. If you've ever been to an Asian toy factory, you'll know that the importance of time is what makes the Chinese approach to detail is what makes the Chinese touches are applied.

factory, you'll know all about the impressive scale of this landmark project. The SLR model car is a masterpiece of artistic achievement. Watching He Lan-zheng using a gleaming black and exquisitely decorated 1950s Hua-Nan sewing machine to sew together the red leather seats for an interior merely confirms this impression. The seats are made of the same cowhide used for the road-registered car.

The smaller-scale model could not possibly be any closer to the original. The SLR job of bringing design sports cars from the road to the desk. Production is divided into different areas, each working on a different scale of model – 1:24, 1:18, or 1:12. The latter assumes the status of haute couture at the Shenzhen factory. "Mercedes-Benz came up with the idea of the larger-scale SLR model car," says Shunxiao Jia. The marketing department was looking to offer cus-



light work. Front and rear lights for the car.



Wheels of fortune: stylishly forged links.



Wheels of fortune: Stylishly forged rims.