

WHEELSPIN

The Cars Are Small in Scale, But Not the Expectations

By DAVE CALDWELL

FERRARI collectors are an incredibly nitpicky bunch, according to Frank Lemire, who can say this with some authority because he has 14 Ferraris in his 124-car collection — and is very particular about the features of each one.

Mr. Lemire, a construction project manager from Montclair, N.J., is not a tycoon with acres of garages. The Ferraris in his collection, which focuses on racecars, are models.

But even if his cars are not 200 mile-an-hour autobahn missiles or multimillion-dollar restorations from the Italian sports car maker's past, he is demanding about the quality of their construction and the accuracy of their details. Some — even limited edition diecast models that sell fully assembled for \$200 and up — are not good enough out of the box to join his collection without a few final touch-ups.

Such lapses cause concern not only for collectors and the companies that make the models, but also for the automaker that licenses the reproduction. Ferrari wants people who buy anything with its name attached to be pleased.

"Analyzing the market, and from the recommendations coming from collectors, we understood they were not happy because the model is not accurate enough," Giulio Zambelletti, director for brand development of Ferrari, said in a recent telephone interview from Italy.

It is not easy to shrink a car and make its proportions look right. And the challenge of pleasing customers can get tougher when the model is large enough — cars done in the popular 1/18th scale may be a foot long — to include interior trim and mechanical systems.

Tweaks need to be made when scaling down a car. Michael Staskin, marketing director for motorsports at Mattel, explained in a telephone interview from Milan. The company, which makes several lines of 1:18 models as well as the more famous line of 1:64 scale Hot Wheels toys, has a licensing agreement with Ferrari.

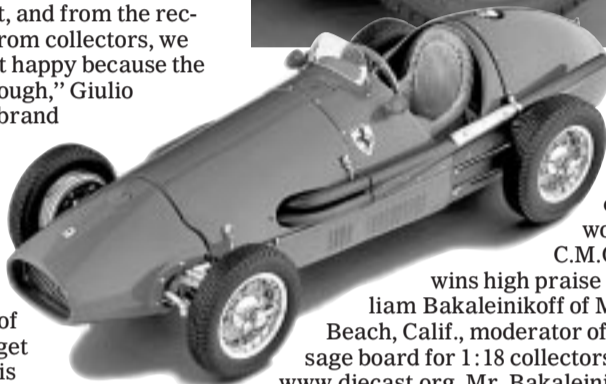
The curvature of body contours may need to be altered slightly. The roof on a model cannot simply be 1/18th as thick because the metal would bend or wrinkle like aluminum foil. A windshield 1/18th as thick as that of a real car would be too fragile.

Ferrari has licensing agreements with several other model manufacturers, Mr. Zambelletti said, including Classic Motor

A detailed 1:18 scale model of a 1961 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta by C.M.C., right, costs about \$250. A full-size 250 GT sold at an October auction in Geneva for \$1.8 million.



A vintage Ferrari racecar by C.M.C. has real wire wheels and wood trim, left and center above. Above right, the wheels of the 250 GT can be removed to expose the disc brakes.



Cars. The precise detail work of C.M.C. models wins high praise from William Bakaleinikoff of Moss Beach, Calif., moderator of a message board for 1:18 collectors on www.diecast.org. Mr. Bakaleinikoff unabashedly compares C.M.C.'s products to the work of Da Vinci.

For example, C.M.C.'s recently released model of the 1961 Ferrari 250 GT Berlinetta Short Wheelbase has, among other things, a hood that opens to reveal a finely detailed V-12 engine, leather-covered bucket seats and carpet in the trunk. Buyers with deft fingers can even open the gas cap.

C.M.C. cars like the Ferrari 250 GT may have more than 1,000 parts and are finished with the same paint the automaker uses. C.M.C. is allowed to make one Ferrari model a year; these sell for about \$250 each.

"We try to make it as high-precision and as high-value as we can," Shuxiao Jia, C.M.C.'s director, said from her office in Rochester. "It's very fine work."

Rich Sufficool, who reviews models for diecast.org, wrote in an e-mail message that

"these models must be packaged, transported and displayed, so maintaining the illusion of perfect scale with operating features like opening, hinged panels and functioning suspension is an art and science in itself."

"With part counts in the hundreds, every component must be of perfect scale and shape to allow for assembly. These models are a product of computer generation, laser measurements as well as 3-D laser and machine cutting to make each master component."

It is a meticulous process. Ferrari helps Mattel by providing raw data from the road cars, Mr. Staskin said. Mattel then measures the real Ferraris and takes hundreds of photographs — exterior and interior, wide shots and close-ups.

A model takes from six months

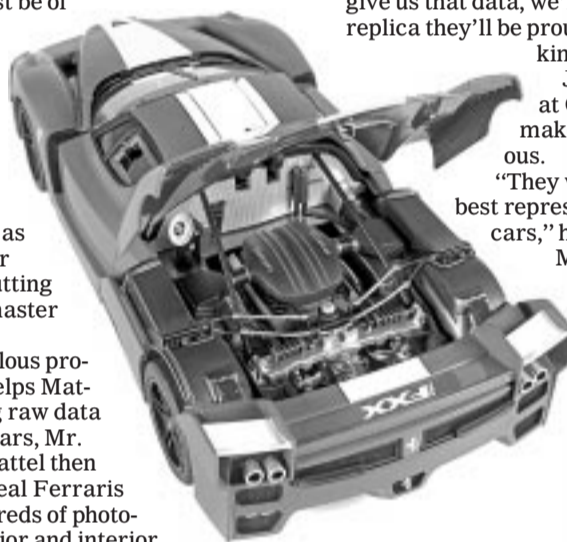
to a year to develop, he said. Mattel engineers make an initial prototype, which they take to Ferrari for comment. They revise the model until Ferrari likes what it sees; only then is it put on the market. "We think we've built that level of trust, that if they give us that data, we'll be able to make a replica they'll be proud of as well," Mr. Staskin said.

James Zhao, a director at C.M.C., said some automakers were very generous.

"They want us to make the best representations of their cars," he said.

Mr. Zambelletti, the Ferrari brand director, said there were physical and technical reasons to make slight changes from the real car, but what was important was the final product.

"This product is an official product," he said. "It has to be very, very, very close to the real thing."



The Ferrari FXX is part of Mattel's Super Elite line.

12 Worth Collecting

AVID toy car collectors tend to gather on the message boards at diecast.org. The Web site has reviews of cars, many with photos, made by some 50 manufacturers. William Bakaleinikoff, whose *nom de vroom* is Paul Theriot, is moderator of the forum on 1:18 scale cars. He made a list of 12 models that created the most excitement on release and reflected collectors' tastes. Manufacturers are in parentheses. **DAVE CALDWELL**

- 1953 Kaiser (Highway 61)
- 1937 Lincoln (Ertl Precision 100)
- 1966 Ford Fairlane 500 (GMP)
- 1961 Morris Minor (Minichamps)
- 1933 Pierce-Arrow (Signature)
- 1956 Lincoln convertible (Sun Star)
- 1968 Ford Mustang GT 390 from the movie "Bullitt." (AutoArt)
- 1965 Chevelle Malibu SS (Lane)
- 1957 Continental MKII (Yat Ming)
- 1956 Chevrolet Bel Air hardtop (Precision Miniature)
- 1929-30 BMW Dixi (Ricko)
- 1963 Chaparral 2 (Exoto)

Or at least it has to look very close to the real thing.

Collectors have been known to hold models next to the actual vehicle just to pick out inconsistencies. But they are willing to take price tags into consideration. A \$25 model simply cannot carry the detail of a \$250 model.

"C.M.C. cars have real leather interiors, gas lines, brake lines," Mr. Lemire said, noting a few of the details that makers of less expensive models can hardly be expected to include.

Stepping up from the Hot Wheels toys loved by many children, Mattel is expanding its line of diecast collector models. A range of special-edition cars, which will cost about \$250 each, includes the Ferrari FXX supercar; Mattel says it will sell only 2,000 of these. In February, Mattel is also planning to unveil six commemorative 1:18 Ferrari models, one for each of the six decades Ferrari has been in business. The price for those will be \$69.99.

"The accuracy of a car can go to an unbelievable level," Mr. Zambelletti of Ferrari said. "Mattel does understand the importance of this anniversary. It's smart marketing. And this is what the collectors are looking for."

Mr. Bakaleinikoff, the moderator of diecast.org, said that models provided the thrill of an exotic car, which for most people is unattainable.

"They'll never be able to afford the car, and probably never will be able to sit in

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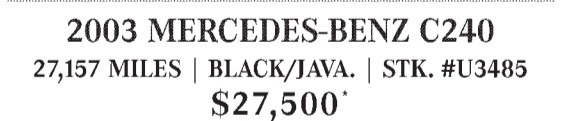
4.9% FINANCING ON C-CLASS
2003 MERCEDES-BENZ C230
2 DOOR COUPE | 36,472 MILES
PEWTER/ASH | STK. #U3511
\$24,900*



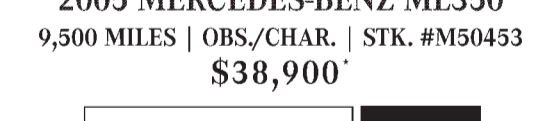
2003 MERCEDES-BENZ ML350
44,950 MILES | SILVER/ASH | STK. #U3439
\$25,900*



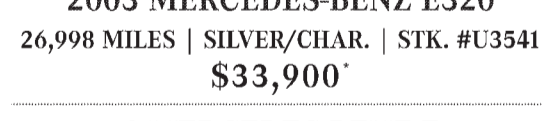
1.9% FINANCING ON E-CLASS
2003 MERCEDES-BENZ E320
14,266 MILES | BLACK/CHAR. | STK. #U3513
\$36,900*



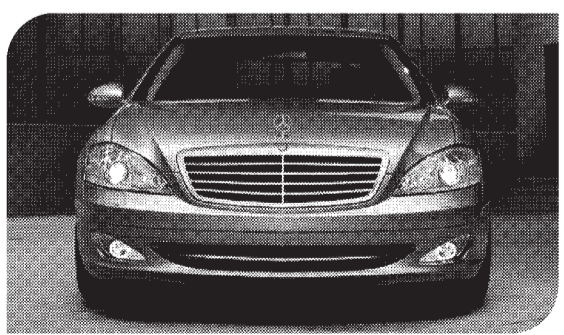
2003 MERCEDES-BENZ C240
27,157 MILES | BLACK/JAVA. | STK. #U3485
\$27,500*



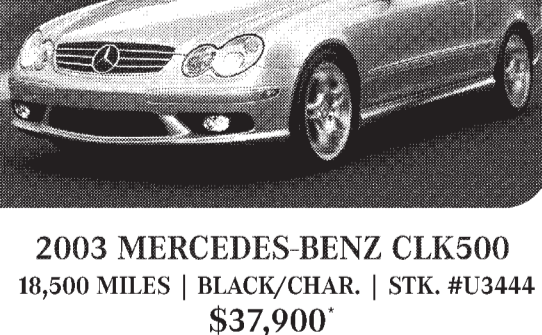
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