

ABOUT HANDBUILT MODELS



A very brief history

THERE ARE MODEL-BUILDING ENTHUSIASTS AND MODEL-COLLECTING enthusiasts. Enthusiast builders of automotive scale models used to have two choices if they wanted a model: to assemble a factory produced model kit from injection-molded plastic, or to scratch build one using whatever materials they could find.

Model kits from makers such as JoHan, AMT, Monogram, MPC, and Revell were popular from the 1950s onward and were most frequently issued in 1:24th scale with only a few 1:43 scale kits issued. Then, one day in the early 1970s, Mikansue introduced a model kit of a 1940 Dodge in 1:43 scale which was made of white metal. A few other producers followed suit.

Model-collecting enthusiasts could buy kits or factory built-up models known as 'promotionals'. Reasonably priced and quite detailed, the quality of the finished product was heavily dependent on the skill of the builder. Another source for collectors was die-cast toy models, most commonly 1:43 scale metal models which were fairly accurate and affordable but very common and tended to be confined to only a few dozen popular automobile subjects.

Gradually model kit producers such as Mikansue began to have their white metal and resin models built-up and sold as fully assembled models. Collectors were willing to pay the premium to have a professionally assembled and finished model known as a 'handbuilt' that was not toy-like but bore greater resemblance to the original vehicle. These handbuilts became popular with collectors during the 1980s. At the same time as the white metal and resin builders produced their replicas, mints such as Danbury

and Franklin began to sell well-detailed die-cast models at much higher prices than toy models. Collectors now had yet another source for their models.

The scale model car hobby continues to evolve. The mints have been almost completely overtaken by companies such as Minichamps which produce accurate and well-detailed die-cast models at a low selling price of \$15-50. A few companies produce premium handbuilt models in the \$100-400 price range, although the supply has diminished substantially since its early 1990s heyday.

Die-cast models by Chris Sweetman

The scale of 1:43 has quite a history and is derived from an unexpected source – model railways! It is generally accepted that the first model road vehicles in this scale were the cars in



AN EARLY DIE-CAST 1939 OLDSMOBILE BY DINKY TOYS.
(COURTESY ROBERT M WOOLLEY)



1941 CHEVROLET SUBURBAN AND UTILITY PICKUP HANDBUILT WHITE METAL MODELS BY DURHAM CLASSICS WITH OMEN FIGURE OF MUSICIAN ACKER BILK. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)

includes most of the great Motorama display models such as the 1951 LeSabre and 1954 Wildcat II. Accurate in appearance and scale, these fine handbuilt white metal models sell in the \$200-250 range in the builder's eBay store.

Milestone Miniatures (UK) distributes a line called Forty-Third Avenue (or "FTA") that includes a 1947 Cadillac. It tends to produce at the lower end of the price spectrum (\$100-\$125) and detailing reflects this. Milestone Miniatures produces models for other companies and has a broad range of British models, especially Jaguar. In 2006, the company issued a white metal 1936 Buick at \$235 that is described in the Buick chapter.

Mini Marque (UK) issues 3-4 new, very detailed scale models per year. At \$250-275, it has concentrated on Hudson and Packard but has produced models from Chevrolet and Cadillac-LaSalle under a previous owner and name (Mini Marque "43"). Mini Marque announced a new 1948 Cadillac Sixty Special in 2007.

Motor City USA (USA) is revered for its exquisitely built models of the Motor City Gold line in the medium (\$125-\$150), and its top of the line models in the premium (\$275-\$300) price ranges. Motor City USA's accuracy and build quality are incomparable. The company's last GM models were from 2005-06 and were a 1959 Oldsmobile 4dr hard-top and 1959 Cadillac

75. Since 2000, the builder has focused much of its efforts on 1:18 die-cast, hot rods and service cars (i.e. ambulances and hearses). The company brings out a new 1:43 scale model about once a year.

Victory Models (USA) is dedicated to the creation of scale models of North American cars and trucks from the World War II period. In collaboration with small builder CCC Models of France, Victory has produced some stunningly accurate Packard, Studebaker, Buick, LaSalle, and Cadillac models from 1938-42. Victory's handbuilt resin replicas are priced in the \$159-239 range and seldom exceed 100 units of each model.

Western Models Limited (UK) was a renowned supplier of a broad range of models for other companies as well as its own range. Its North American automobiles include the 1941 Buick, 1941 Oldsmobile, and 1949 Cadillac of which it issued a new fastback in 2006. The company was in the business for thirty years and, up until the publication of this book, had issued a few new American models annually. Its founders retired and its doors closed. Western's products are slightly more detailed than Brooklin's and are produced in smaller numbers. They are moderately priced at around \$150.

For all of the model builders I have listed, please check on the internet or at the stockists listed in the Suppliers chapter.



NEARING THE HEIGHT OF THE INDUSTRIAL DESIGN MOVEMENT'S INFLUENCE, THE 1939 CHEVROLET COUPE SHOWS INCREASED STREAMLINING AROUND THE GRILLE AREA IN CONTRAST WITH THE 1937 SEDAN. USA MODELS NO USA-40 AND MADISON MODELS NO MAD-7. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)



1941 CHEVROLET CONVERTIBLE BY DURHAM CLASSICS. DC-5D. (COURTESY COLLECTORS ANTIQUES)



CHEVROLET COUPE BY USA MODELS, HANDBUILT WHITE METAL. USA-40. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)



ALTHOUGH IT IS FROM MOTOR CITY USA'S LESS EXPENSIVE USA MODELS LINE, THIS 1939 CHEVROLET COUPE IS HIGHLY-DETAILED AND LACKS ONLY MINOR SCRIPT-WORK, SOME WINDOW TRIM, AND INTERIOR PARTS FOUND IN THE



MAKER'S HIGHEST PRICED MODELS. USA-40. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)



1941 CHEVROLET COUPE BY DURHAM CLASSICS, HANDBUILT WHITE METAL. THIS PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THE TYPICAL DURHAM CLASSICS MODEL OF THE TIME, CIRCA LATE 1980S, WITH DETAILS SUCH AS MOLDINGS CARVED INTO THE PATTERN AND ONLY MAJOR PARTS SUCH AS GRILLE AND HEADLIGHTS IN NICKEL-PLATED WHITE METAL. CASTINGS ARE VERY CLEAN AND THE PAINT IS THICK AND GLOSSY. DC-5. (COURTESY D LARSEN)

DURHAM CLASSICS RELEASED A TOP UP 1941 CHEVROLET IN SEVERAL COLORS. THIS EARLY VERSION HAS FENDER SKIRTS. DC-5D. (COURTESY COLLECTORS ANTIQUES)



1953 BEL AIR 2 DOOR HARD-TOP COUPE AND TOP DOWN CONVERTIBLE. THIS YEAR'S CHEVROLET HAD A MAJOR STYLING CHANGE WITH ONE-PIECE CURVED WINDSHIELD AND WRAPAROUND BACKLIGHT ON MOST MODELS, AS WELL AS HIGHER REAR FENDERS THAT INTEGRATED INTO THE BODY MORE THAN ITS PREDECESSOR'S HAD. MC-7 AND MC-8. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)



1953 BEL AIR TOP DOWN CONVERTIBLE CREATED BY MARTY MARTINO, AN EARLY MODELER OF NORTH AMERICAN CARS. MARTINO MODELS' NO 3 HANDBUILT RESIN CAST MODEL. (COURTESY J RETTIG)



AT THIS POINT (NUMBER EIGHT IN THE LINE) MOTOR CITY USA'S SCALE MODELS ARE HIGHLY-DETAILED, WELL-PROPORTIONED, AND FLAWLESSLY FINISHED. THE SUNGOLD MODEL PICTURED HERE HAS COLORED INSIGNIA AND QUITE A LOT OF INTERIOR DETAIL. MC-8. (AUTHOR COLLECTION)

