



# INTRODUCTION

Anyone who was a child in the 1950s or 1960s will recall with a nostalgic glow the days when toy shop windows were full of brightly coloured Dinky Toys' miniatures sitting on top of their yellow boxes, and how the weekly pocket money allowance would just about stretch to the purchase of a model of the family Triumph Herald or Ford Anglia.

Even in today's computerized world toy cars still have an irresistible appeal for many youngsters, as the success of the Disney film *Cars* and all its spin-off merchandise proves, while the diecast toy industry has gained a further lease of life by catering for an entirely different clientele: adult collectors. In fact, there are probably more diecast models of classic cars of the 1950s-1970s in production today than there were at the time!

This book does not try to provide a comprehensive guide to every toy car ever made. The closest thing to a definitive catalogue is the Italian collector Paolo Rampini's monumental *Golden Book of Model Cars 1900-1975* which lists some 25,000 items.

Nor is this the kind of book that provides minute descriptions of colour variations, different types of wheels or introduction and deletion dates of every model. Detailed information of that kind is already available in the many excellent specialist one-make histories of companies such as Dinky Toys, Corgi Toys and Matchbox listed in the bibliography on page 123.

Instead, the present volume gives a broad overview of the development of diecast toy car production in Britain, mainland Europe, the USA, and beyond. Most of the major brands are



*Children playing with Dinky Toys cars and trucks on the living room floor. This 1957 photograph sums up the nostalgic appeal of toy cars – perhaps the most powerful motivation behind the adult collecting hobby today.*

covered, but particular attention is given to providing background information on the more obscure manufacturers.

While these manufacturers are looked at individually, the links between them are also stressed. For example, some brands emerged in direct competition with more established ones. Sometimes a good idea was copied by others.

Sometimes the success of a newcomer posed a threat – as in the case of the late 1960s Hot Wheels phenomenon from America, which forced Matchbox, Lone Star and others to develop similar types of models. Thereafter, toy cars became increasingly 'gimmicky': children expected them 'to do things' rather than simply to be representations of a particular vehicle. For this reason, most collectors consider the 1950s and 1960s to be the classic era of the diecast toy car and the models pictured here are, therefore, drawn from this period.

With so many thousands to choose from, it has inevitably been necessary to be very selective in deciding which models to show. A representative selection of models by the major brands such as Dinky and Corgi has been included, but the bias in the illustrations is towards the more unusual items, many of which have not been pictured in any other publication. Where possible, at least one example of the products of each manufacturer has been included.

This book would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of some of the world's most prominent collectors who kindly contributed photographs. Special thanks are due to the



# FRANCE

When Meccano Limited opened a factory at Bobigny in the outskirts of Paris, the Dinky Toy range caught on as quickly in France as it had across the English channel. However, several other companies were already producing toy cars in France, and French Dinky never enjoyed a monopoly of the market like its British counterpart.

Although much of the early history of French diecast remains obscure, it is known that companies identified by initials such as 'AR,' 'CD' and 'SR' made simple diecast toy vehicles in the 1920s. Initially, some of these looked similar to American Tootsietoys, but models of French cars soon began to appear, such as AR's Peugeot 201, 301 and 601, and Renault 40CV delivery van.

## Solido

In 1929 Ferdinand de Vazeilles, owner of a pressure diecasting business in Nanterre, suggested to one of his clients in the car components industry that he could make a small wheeled toy which might be used to promote Gergovia sparkplugs ('bougie' in French). That strange little item led to the Solido series of metal diecast cars. Described as 'Automobiles à Transformation,' they could be taken apart and different bodies fitted to the same chassis powered by a clockwork motor. The earliest body styles comprised a streamlined 'Torpedo' racing car, a coupé, closed cabriolet, saloon, lorry, van, single deck coach, and something described as an 'Autobus Anglais à Imperiale' – a kind of double deck bus with open seats on the roof. These were not exact replicas of real vehicles, but they did resemble the style of the cars of the prewar period.

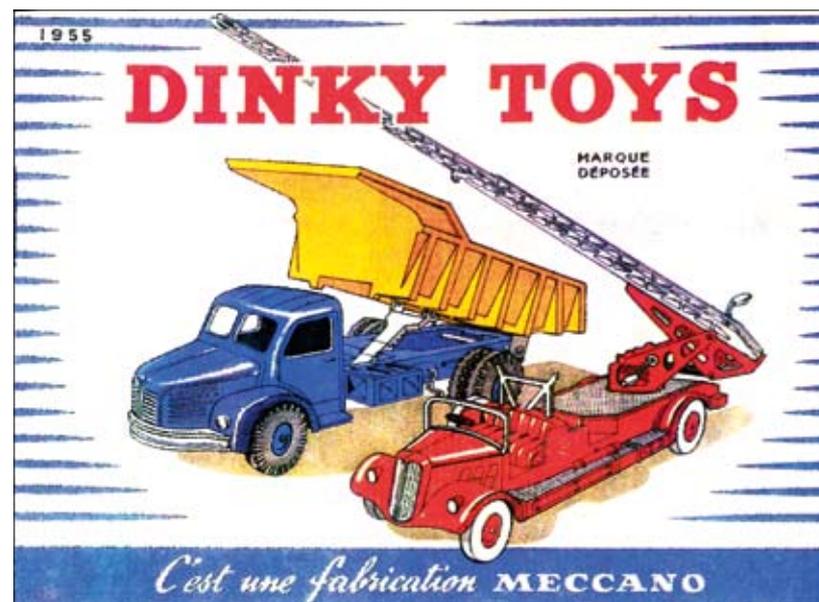
This early group of Solidos was known as the 140 series because the chassis was 140 millimetres in length. Soon afterwards, a smaller 100mm 'Junior' series appeared.

After Solido moved to a new factory at Ivry-la-Bataille in 1938, new cars were added to the Junior range which continued to be developed further after the war. The cars were now based on recognisable prototypes though they were not named as such, being identified instead by the names of French towns. Thus, the Cadillac carries the name Vichy, the Delahaye is called after Antibes, and the Packard is named Royan.

## Dinky Toys

Although Solido was already established by the time Dinky reached the French market in 1934, the two ranges were not in direct competition as the Dinkies were smaller and cheaper and did not have clockwork motors. Some Dinky Toys were imported from Liverpool while others were made in the French Meccano factory. The French Dinky expert Jean-Michel Roulet has pointed out that Meccano France was at this time "quite firmly ruled from Binns Road" and, as a result, most French Dinkies were similar to English ones, even when made from separate moulds at the Bobigny site. Nevertheless, some models of French vehicles were made before the war, the first being a Peugeot 402, also available as a taxi. Other distinctive French subjects included the small Simca 5, and a model of the famous green and white Paris bus.

After the war French Dinky further developed its own identity. From 1949 onwards new models of postwar French cars started to appear, such as the Ford Vedette, Citroën Traction Avant, Peugeot



Typical period artwork on the cover of the 1955 French Dinky Toys catalogue.

# GERMANY



## Gama 942 DKW F102

The F102 was the last car to bear the DKW badge. After 1965 DKW passed into Volkswagen ownership and the car re-emerged under the Audi name. The bonnet opens on this Gama version.  
Price guide: £60

**Gama 950 Volkswagen Van 'Shell'**  
The Volkswagen T1 delivery has been much modelled in different European countries. The Gama also comes as a minibus with windows, and as a pick-up, crane truck, and Coca-Cola delivery truck.  
Price guide: £100



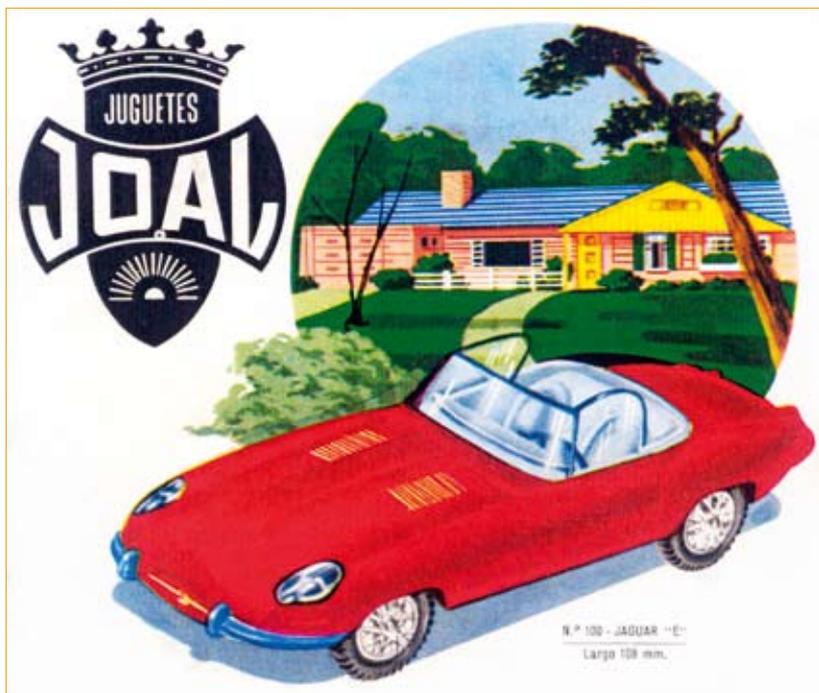
## Gama 911 Breakdown Truck

Gama used the same chassis as the basis for numerous commercial vehicles, though these do not seem to be as popular with collectors as the cars.  
Price guide: £40



## Gama 9518 Volkswagen Vans

In 1967 Volkswagen updated its van and Gama followed suit. The 'Esso' livery is a standard issue, but the other model is a much rarer promotional vehicle in the livery of a service van used by Lansing fork lift trucks.  
Price guide: £30 ('Esso'); £70 ('Lansing')



The first item in the Joal range was a Jaguar E Type, based on a Danish Tekno model.

guns, Joal branched into 1/43 scale diecast cars around 1968, using moulds from various companies, especially Tekno of Denmark. The Mercedes 300SL and 230SL sports, Chevrolet Monza and Jaguar E Type had all first appeared in the Tekno catalogue. However, the fit of the opening parts was not quite as good on the Spanish issues, and the paint finish tended to be rather thick.

A couple of long-running British Dinkies found their way to Spain as well: the Albion Cement Mixer and the Blaw Knox Bulldozer, though there is some debate about whether these are copies or made from the original moulds. The tooling for some Italian Fiat models also provided an easy way for Joal to add some Seats to its lineup.

Among Joal's original designs were various Pegaso trucks. While other manufacturers often combined metal and plastic construction, the Joal trucks are all metal, giving them a heavy feel. A catalogue from 1979 shows the original models of ten years earlier still in production, having been joined by some more recent cars like the Citroën SM, CX and Ford Fiesta, while the selection of Caterpillar construction equipment is an indication of the direction in which Joal was to move in future.

## Pilen

Joal quickly found competition from another Spanish diecast range produced in Ibi: Auto Pilen, later known simply as Pilen.

Pilen's first venture into diecast was a range of formula one racing cars in 1/41 scale, but from 1969 onwards Joal and Pilen competed head-on with similar 1/43 scale cars, again using old tooling: the Chevrolet Corvette, for example, came from Corgi, and the Mercedes 250 from Mebetoys of Italy.

The most significant thing about Pilen, though, is the Dinky

connection. By the early 1970s French Dinky was in grave difficulties and production ceased at the factory in Bobigny on the outskirts of Paris. The Dinky name was a valuable asset, though, and in 1974 moulds for several French Dinky cars were transferred to Pilen which marketed them as Dinky Toys made in Spain. There were various minor casting changes and different colour schemes, and details of these can be found in Jean-Michel Roulet's *Histoire des Dinky Toys Français*. Finally, another group of original Pilen models was issued under the Dinky name. Ironically, this Spanish toy maker that had at first depended on moulds from other European companies ended up supporting French Dinky, if only for a few years.

Compared to French Dinkies, the Spanish issues were undervalued by collectors during the eighties and nineties, and prices were low. Now, though, they are considerably more expensive. The most desirable issue is undoubtedly the Citroën DS 23, a reworking of the earlier French Dinky Citroën DS 19 (Ref. 530) with the later style of headlights.

## Nacoral Intercars

Unlike most other Spanish toy companies, this range was not made in Ibi but in a factory at Zaragoza. Dating from 1967, the first series, known as 'Chiqui Cars,' was in plastic, but some were also made in metal, paving the way for the 'Intercars' range which appeared around 1973. Some of these used tooling from the Belgian Sablon range, but Nacoral soon started to produce its own diecast models, among them several Volvos – the 144 and 244 DL, the 145 estate – and a Saab 99 Combi.

## Mira

A later arrival on the Spanish diecast scene was Mira who, in the mid-seventies, launched a series of 1/64 Pegaso trucks, later joined by eight 1/43 cars: Ford Fiesta, VW Scirocco, Mercedes 450 SE, Chrysler 150 (Alpine), Citroën CX 2400, Seat 128 Coupé, Seat 1200 Coupé, and Seat 131. Mira managed to make eight models go further by



This early Auto Pilen leaflet reveals a preference for exotic sports coupés and Formula 1 racing cars.



## Ralstoy Removals Truck

One of the most attractive liveries to be found on the Ralstoy Ford box van. Total model length is 8.5 inches.  
Price guide: £60

## Ralstoy Oldsmobile

This six-inch, chrome-plated toy is not typical of Ralstoy products, most of which were trucks. The car is based on a 1948 Oldsmobile.  
Price guide: £15



## Hot Wheels 6404 Classic Nomad

Hot Wheels cars were radically different from earlier diecast toys. Early issues had 'redline' wheels, as on this item, which was produced in 1970-71.

Price guide: £90  
(Courtesy Douglas R Kelly)

## Hot Wheels 6421 Jack Rabbit Special

Until 1972, Hot Wheels cars came with a tinplate 'collector's button.' Models in unopened packaging are worth significantly more than loose items.

Price Guide: £35  
(Courtesy Douglas R Kelly)

