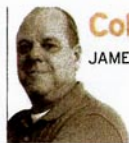


ENJOY IT



## Collect

JAMES COCKINGTON

# Small cars, big price tags

It's safe to assume a lot of grown men will be receiving small cars for Christmas. This niche market, aimed predominantly at men in their 40s and 50s, has grown spectacularly in the past decade. These are not toys but scale models with a degree of detail that is mind-boggling.

Biante and Classic Carlectables are perhaps the best-known Australian manufacturers, largely because they sponsor most of the V8 Supercars racing these days. Their models tend to focus on the Ford v Holden rivalry.

The other manufacturer of note is Trax, which covers a wider range of makes and models, including vintage buses and commercial vehicles. Trax began production in 1986 and most of its models are already starting to appreciate significantly in value.

The jury is still out on whether the more recent output of other manufacturers will follow this trend.

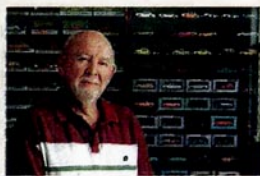
To cater to collectors, Trax publishes a book that details every model sold from 1986, with production numbers and current market values. Most models are now worth about \$100 (in mint and boxed condition) but there are some spectacular exceptions, such as the limited edition FJ Holden van produced in 1989 bearing the logo of Stanbridge Hobbies. Only 288 were made – now valued about \$950 each.

A series of Holden FC sedans in the colours of taxi companies has also increased dramatically since being released in 1994. The original retail price was \$27.95. A few are now worth more than \$200 on the secondary market, with Sydney's De Luxe version the most valuable at \$270 (mint and boxed).

Why this has happened is a mystery even to Trax boss Robert Hill, who says he can't explain why some models sell like hotcakes while others go untouched. "Some models we think will go gangbusters don't," he says.

## MY COLLECTION

Model enthusiast Robert Morris trained as a graphic artist, then worked as national advertising manager for several major corporations. Now his passion is for classic cars, full-size and small scale.



As he puts it, this is the hobby that was handed down from son to father, not vice versa. When his son was a typically untidy teenager, Morris noticed four Matchbox toys gathering dust in the boy's bedroom. His son said: "Dad, I don't want to play with them any more, you take them."

He did and it started him on collecting the Matchbox "Models of Yesteryear"

series, which evolved into his interest in Trax models, some new, some picked up at swap meets.

He now has 700 to 800 displayed in cabinets and, like all serious collectors, stores the boxes very carefully.

"If I can't get them in boxes I won't buy them," he says.

He has a broad range of cars, trucks, fire engines and taxis plus one that is very special. Because he also restores full-size classic cars, his 1965 Valiant AP6 V8 was chosen as the guide for the Trax model of this car, which was released this year. It is his most prized model.



Released earlier this year by Trax was this signature edition of the Repco Brabham racing car Jack Brabham drove to victory in the 1966 formula one world championship. Valued at \$298, each one has been signed by Brabham.

prototype. When it was released in 2005, the model sold 6200 units in 30 days. The 2006 release of the Holden "Seawitch" Sandman also sold out quickly. "The fastest sellers have all been Holdens," Hill says.

Still, one of the most valuable Trax models is a Super Scale version (1:24 scale) of the Ford Falcon Phase III in the popular Vermillion Fire colour. It's valued at about \$380 if you can find one.

There are countless model car collectors, including a High Court judge who relaxes with his collection of miniature Sydney buses. One of the more fanatical collectors has 8000 models in his climate-controlled two-car garage, plus a slot car track in the shape of the Mount Panorama circuit.

Owning a model of every Bathurst-winning car is a popular theme, as is every car driven by motorsport legends Peter Brock and Allan Moffat. One of Brock's most celebrated cars was the Holden-powered Austin A30 he raced in the late 1960s. A model of this machine was produced some time ago by Dinkum Classics. If one comes up for sale, you can expect a feeding frenzy.

"Like the original P76 sedans – collectors begged us to do them for years – which failed dismally. But after we discounted them and they couldn't be bought new, they have now become quite collectable." Part of the Trax philosophy is to release models in strictly limited numbers and not repeat production. This adds to their collectability.

Released earlier this year was the Repco Brabham BT19 racing car that Jack Brabham drove to victory in the 1966 formula one world championship.

The signature edition, personally signed by Brabham, was limited to 1000 units valued at \$298 each. Time will tell but it should be a good investment.

A similar concept is the Trax Select series of resin models featuring rare Australian cars such as the 1974 Leyland P76 Force 7 Coupe.

This design had just gone into production when Leyland announced the closure of its Australian division. Only 10 were saved and auctioned off to private buyers.

Orders for the Trax model closed on August 30, 2010, with 1620 units booked. Another Select model of the HK Holden Brougham generated 1540 orders. These models have already started to appear on eBay and one supposedly fetched close to \$400, about three times its original price.

This is a common scenario. There are model car "scalpers" (as they are called by other collectors) who will buy a few spares of a new release, which they try to sell online at a profit with varying degrees of success.

Other fast movers from the Trax catalog include the cream Holden FJ station wagon based on a one-off Holden

\$95



This Holden EJ Panel Van was released by Trax in 2003 to mark the centenary of the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria. These models have already more than doubled in value.

\$270



The Holden FC Sedan in the colours of the De Luxe company of Sydney is one of a popular 1994 taxi series by Trax. Melbourne's Silvertop equivalent is almost as valuable. Both originally sold for \$28.

\$380



The Trax Super Scale model of Ford's classic Falcon GTHO Phase III is one of the most valuable.

All prices quoted are for "mint and boxed" models.