Diecast Trucks

Diecast is the term used for any toy or collectable manufactured using the die casting method, which is when highly pressurized molten metal is poured into a mould cavity. Diecast products are created using metal, though they may contain plastic, glass and/or rubber embellishments. The die casting method was introduced to the market in the early 20th century by manufactures such as Meccan and Dowst Brothers. Originally, the diecast metal was a lead alloy, which was eventually changed to Zamak: A zinc alloy with trace amounts of copper and aluminum. Over time, the lead alloy toys tended to deviate from the original shape and crack due to the numerous impurities within the metal. Finding a model toy made from the lead alloy (usually before World War II) in good condition is very rare.

Collecting diecast toys became popular during the 1950s. The most popular toys created using the die casting method were scale models of trains, trucks, automobiles, plains and construction equipment; however, by the 1970s, trucks became the prominent toy produced using the die casting method. With the launch of Matchbox’s Yesteryear range Y-12 Ford Model T van, companies saw the opportunity to increase their revenue by manufacturing diecast trucks as promotional material. Brand logos such as Coca-Cola, Colman’s Mustard and Cerebos Salt were painted on small, replicated toy trucks.

Diecast trucks are made using a specific ratio or scale. Trucks manufactured at a 1:12 scale are very large and elaborately detailed. These trucks measure 14 to 15 inches long and are typically made for adult collectors rather than children. They also tend to be more expensive due to their size and intricate detailing. The 1:18 scale is similar to the 1:12. The trucks produced at this scale are about seven to eight inches long and are also geared toward adult collectors. The 1:24 scale is well-liked and commonly used in America. Many construction kits and promotional truck are created in this size. Model tractors and agricultural vehicles are commonly used on a 1:32 scale. 1:34 scale is used by First Gear Models of USA for larger trucks, while the 1:50 ratio is typical for smaller trucks, buses and construction vehicles. The most traditional and classic scale for all diecast toys including trucks is 1:64.

Some of the most famous and sought-after trucks are the promotional ones such as the vintage Arnott’s Biscuit truck from Australia, Smith’s Crisps and Harrods from England and Sunlight Seife from Germany. The original trucks from these companies are extremely rare and are considered antiques. One of the rarest diecast trucks is from the Matchbox Quarry Truck, major-scale collection, and is attributed to the artist Ken Wetton. It is estimated at about $15,000.00. Another rare truck is the Du Pont truck and trailer set # 2424, which was recently auctioned off by Jeff Gordon’s stepfather. Additional noteworthy trucks are the 1959 ERF truck (Matchbox), 1960 Coca-Cola Lorry (Matchbox), 1968 Foden concrete truck (Matchbox), a rare PRR truck with an “N” gauge diesel “A” unit (Winross), and a 1963 Commer ice-cream truck (Matchbox).

There is wide appeal for collecting diecast toy trucks, with many reasons as to why people collect the toys. A multitude of collectors simply enjoy the hobby, while others get a thrill from the hunt. Others argue that collecting evokes sentimental childhood memories. For those who collect for monetary reasons build a collection in hopes of high returns if they choose to sell it in the future. When it comes to collecting, it is up to the discretion of the collector as to what they wish to purchase; however, the most valuable items are vintage trucks, which are highly sought after. Collectors tend to concentrate their efforts on finding a particular brand or manufacturer rather than type of truck.

Exhibiting and/or storing diecast trucks is simple. There are many options for display cases that protect the trucks from damage and dust. Acrylic is commonly used in making these cases, which have the option of having a mirrored or clear back panel. Single cases consist of a base with a clear, plastic box that sits over the top. Multi-truck cases consist of shelf-like compartments on top of one another that can be accessed by a hinged door. Both ready-made and custom-made cases are available to collectors.

Another aspect to consider, especially when purchasing new diecast trucks, is whether to leave the toy trucks in their original packaging. Typically, this is a personal preference; however, leaving the truck in its original case allows the toy to appreciate faster, increasing its value. It is estimated, that once a model is discontinued, the price rapidly increases, about ten times that of its original amount. This practice is acceptable for collectors who plan on selling their collection in the future. Because new diecast cars are somewhat inexpensive, collectors will buy duplicates: One truck is left in the original packaging and the other truck is opened.

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