

Little cars take up lots of patience

By SUZIE MARKS

A Troy man bought a 1934 Mercedes Benz for only \$200. But when he got the car home, it was in 3,000 pieces.

It's all together now, but Ken Tompor, 30, still can't drive it. Of course, he never expected to because the sleek black sportster is really a 1/4-scale replica of the original.

But unlike models found in hobby shops, the Mercedes is part of a discontinued European sports car line, Pocher, available only abroad. The foreign collection includes the Mercedes, two Alfa Romeos, a Rolls Royce and a 1907 Grand Prix Fiat.

"When I first opened it (the model) I thought I'd never do it," said Tompor. "It was in 3,000 pieces and the directions were written in Italian. But it became a challenge, like being your own Henry Ford."

Tompor said he spent thousands of hours, sometimes 10 hours at a time, putting the miniature pieces together.

The model is constructed without glue, with each piece screwed into place. The components are made from genuine brass, leather and machine steel. Every part of the real car is reproduced in the model.

"They're tooled from an original automobile," said Tompor. "They dismantle the cars and blueprint them on a 1/4-scale."

When completed, the car's lights work, the steering wheel moves the tires, the windows roll up and down, the doors open, the ashtray and glove box open, the gear shift and brakes operate and springs stuffed into the seats compress when weight is applied.

"What makes these European cars so unique is all of the intricate detail," said Tompor.

He added to the auto's authenticity by using real car paint, applying first primer, then paint. The use of sand and polish results in a final glowing luster.

"I took the car to the best stripper in the United States. He works on \$40,000 real cars," said Tompor.

The stripper enhanced the beige

canvas rollback convertible with a red stripe.

A FRIEND introduced Tompor to the detailed hobby.

"A few visits to his house gave me the wants," said Tompor.

When frustration threatened Tompor's patience, he put the model away for a few months until the emotion passed.

"There was some minor thing I couldn't do, so I put it away for two months," he said. "When I came back to it I forgot what the stumbling block was and finished it in four hours."

Tompor is now working on his second car, an Alfa Romeo. When finished, it will join the Mercedes, which is displayed in the Tompor's new home. The two cars, along with the others Tompor is yet to begin, will stay in the case until their 6-year-old son is mature enough to take ownership.

Tompor hopes to have the collection complete within 5-10 years.

In addition to the cars, Tompor also busies himself with constructing dioramas—three-dimensional models of wartime scenes.

Most are actual scenes from World War II. After studying a picture, the model builder attempts to construct each piece as it was in the original picture.

"You start with a piece of wood and a picture that you will transform into a scene," Tompor said. "You have to do all the painting and putting together of the many men."

Tompor's diorama is an American Army scene that includes a plane, a jeep and lots of men. The plastic soldiers are three inches high with beards, faces and cigarettes painted on. The scene is surrounded by a barbed wire fence which Tompor made by twisting screen.

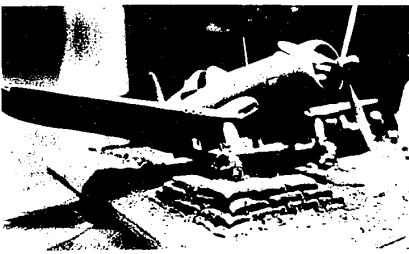
The correct colors and insignia are very important to the dioramas because that is how their authenticity is judged.

"People know if they are done wrong," said Tompor. "They will tell you if certain colors, helmets or jeeps

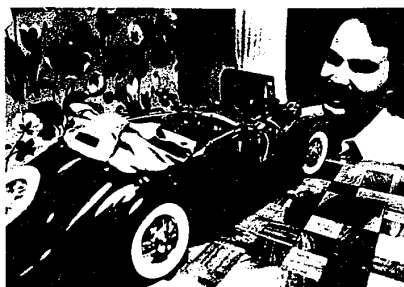
weren't used in the scene you made."

It takes about 40 hours to finish one figure, said Tompor. The scene's airplane is coated with a type of paint called mud because of its look. It is sprayed onto the plane with an air brush to create a camouflage.

Tompor said he enjoys both hobbies and is always working on something because he "can't sit still." While he spends his time making models, his wife Cathy, points. She is accredited with the colorful animals that cover the walls of their daughter's nursery.



When he's not working on his car models, Tompor spends his time piecing together a diorama, a miniature detail of a war scene.



The Mercedes Benz, which took Tompor three years to assemble, is an exact replica of the 1934 original.

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