

## **AIRFIX 1/32 SCALE MODERN MOTOR CAR PLASTIC KITS - BAGGED SERIES.**

These plastic model construction kits gave me great pleasure as a child and teenager. They were both affordable and of an ideal size, being larger than the typical diecast 1/43 and smaller than the somewhat cumbersome 1/24 scale plastic kits which were also available. Building the Airfix kits has given me a preference for 1/32 scale models, even today.

With my pocket money, I eventually acquired the whole series, and built most of them. Some of them were built and rebuilt many times. Others were discarded when they were beyond salvation. At the time, new kits could be had for approximately 60cents (Australian). This was still a substantial cost as my pocket money was no more than 20cents on a good week!

Over the past seven years, I have attempted to put together another complete collection of unbuilt Airfix bagged modern car kits. This was not an easy task! The average price these days is around 25 pounds (UK), but availability is the main problem. The following is some information I have put together on these models during my quest:

This series of plastic model car construction kits was first issued in 1961 and was a welcome addition to the Veteran Car series introduced by the British firm, Airfix Plastic Products in 1955. By the early sixties Airfix was world famous for its plastic model aeroplane kits. The model car kits, like the model boats, were a relatively small but significant part of the Airfix range.

Today, Airfix still exists as an important plastic model kit maker, despite a major slump in the early eighties. Airfix is now owned by Humrol, the paint manufacturer.

The modern car kits competed to some extent, with diecast model cars from Dinky, Corgi and others. Although the finished models were larger than the 1/43 scale diecasts and very attractive, the plastic material was fragile and quite a lot of skill and effort was required to get the right effect.

Unlike Dinkys and Corgis, the kits had very little "play" value once completed, but great pleasure could be had by those with the patience and interest to build them.

Most scale plastic car kits came in boxes which usually had a painting of the model on the lid of the box. Part of the pleasure came from imagining the finished model looking like the picture on the box.

In fact, today, this "box art" interest is an important part of the rather rare hobby of collecting old plastic kits.

Rather than being sold in the usual boxes, the early Airfix modern car kits were issued in plastic bags topped by a folded set of instructions stapled to the bag with coloured artwork on the face sheet. I guess the bags were a less expensive way of marketing the models.

The artwork initially consisted of simple line drawings with a colour wash depicting the model in the bag. Later, after 1964, this was changed into superb action paintings of the vehicles, by renowned artist Roy Cross. Many of the 1/72 scale Airfix aeroplane kits were also sold in these bags, with similar artwork.

The back of the instruction folder contained a potted history of each car.

A total of thirteen "modern car" models were issued in plastic bags. All except one were initially issued as "Series One" models by Airfix. The Series One models were the simplest models made by the company. The more detailed and comprehensive (or in some cases, just larger) Series Two and upwards models were normally sold in boxes. Just to confuse matters, many of the early Series One models were later issued as Series Two, in the seventies.

The first model issued was M-1-C, the **Sunbeam Rapier**, followed by M-2-C, the **Austin Healey Sprite Mk 1**. Both were issued in 1961.

The following year two additional kits were issued, M-3-C, the **Renault Dauphine** and M-4-C, the **Morris Mini Minor** (with Austin Seven and Austin Cooper grille options).

1963 saw the appearance of M-5-C, the **Jaguar E Type** roadster, and the only Series 2 model in this series to appear in a plastic bag, M-201-C, the **Ford Zodiac Mk3**.

These were followed by only one model in 1964, M-6-C, the **Volkswagen 1200**.

A total of three models were issued in 1965, M-7-C, the **MG 1100**, M-8-C the **Ford Lotus Cortina** and M-9-C, the **Vauxhall Viva**.

In 1966 M-10-C, the **Aston Martin DB5** was issued together with M-12-C, the **Porsche Carrera 6**. Curiously, there seems to have been no M-11-C issued and even more strangely the following year M-10-C was re-issued as the **Bond Bug!** The Bond was the final model to be issued in the bagged 1/32 scale modern car series.

All of the models had one piece bodies and clear plastic glazing, both advanced features for the early sixties. The one piece bodies were especially suitable for slot racing cars. Rival kits from companies like Revell, Aurora and Monogram usually featured older type multi piece bodies due to the simpler moulding processes required.

Most of this series were moulded in coloured plastic and the builder had the option of painting the bodies or simply detailing the bare plastic. There is something quite charming about a detailed, well built but unpainted Airfix model.

Today, all of the original Airfix bagged series modern cars are fairly rare, although not particularly valuable, as few model car collectors actually like "plastic". To the dedicated few, however, these models are a cherished and enjoyable link with their childhood, as well as being excellent representations of the real vehicles.

The survival rate for such fragile models sold in flimsy plastic bags, understandably, is not high. The most sought after items are unbuilt in the correct bag with the original Airfix instructions and packing slip intact, preferably unopened. One problem with survival in countries like Australia is exposure to the sun, which could quickly melt or warp the models.

Model car shops dealing in obsolete items rarely stock these old kits as they suffer from the "plastic" stigma. However, they do sometimes turn up at garage sales and swap meets. Naturally, the UK is the best place to look for these models.

Some of the kits are less common than others and a rarity rating has been applied to the series, as described below. One star means relatively easy to get, five stars suggests that the model would be very difficult to find.

The rarity rating is based on a six year monitoring of the regular stock lists from one of the world's few plastic car kit dealers, Carkits International of Southend-on-Sea in the UK. Discussions have also been held with Bob Dobbinson, the proprietor of Carkits and others regarding the availability of the models. Kits given five stars have been seen a maximum of once on the lists over the past six years.

Contact has also been made with the Surrey firm Collectakit. This supplier of obsolete plastic kits has also published an excellent book entitled "The Enthusiasts Guide to Airfix Models". The book was released in 1989 and gives interesting historical information on the models.

A more detailed description of each model in this series follows:

### ***M-1-C Sunbeam Rapier***

The Rapier is a simple, delightful model, typical of the series. The kit was moulded in grey plastic and could be built either as a coupe or convertible. Scaling was very accurate with the only criticism being the slightly knobbly tyres moulded with the wheels. A full set of windows was supplied for the closed version.

The model was issued with two different sets of instructions, (known amongst collectors as "first issue" and "second issue") the first type issued in 1961 and current until 1964. The second type from 1964 until the kit was discontinued in 1971.

The centre section of the instruction folder for both types contained excerpts from the Sunbeam sales brochure showing the engine, disc brakes and the operation of the rear quarter windows. Paper number plates were printed with the instructions and could be cut out and glued to the model.

Interestingly, the second issue of the model was simply entitled Rapier Series III, rather than Sunbeam Rapier. The kit was also available in a special version moulded in the USA. This was boxed and had some chrome parts.

Rarity rating UK version \*\*\* US version \*\*\*\*.

### ***M-2-C Austin Healey Sprite Mk1***

This kit was also a very accurate representation and was moulded in light blue plastic. A "soft top" was supplied in clear plastic, cleverly avoiding the necessity of supplying separate windows. As with the previous model, the Sprite could be built as either an open or closed version.

Although accurately scaled, the wheels once again featured the curious knobbly tyres similar to those seen on the Sunbeam Rapier. The Sprite was also fitted with moveable seat backs and the bumpers supplied were an optional fitting, just like the real car.

The small Austin Healey was also supplied with two different sets of instructions, both featuring very attractive artwork. As with the Sunbeam, the first set lasted until 1964 and the second set until the model was withdrawn in 1971.

Amazingly, the moulds still survive, as the model was reissued in its original form in 1997! Even the Roy Cross box art is identical to the second series instruction sheet issued in 1965.

The Sprite was not available in a U.S. version.

Rarity rating \*\*\*

### ***M-3-C Renault Dauphine***

The first and only French car to be modelled in this series, the kit depicts a right hand drive, British built Dauphine. At that time Renault had an assembly plant at Acton in the UK. The pretty Dauphine was a very popular car, especially after Renault had presented a blue one as a gift to the Queen.

The model, although charming, suffered several minor scaling errors, including the size of the front and rear windows (too small) and some aspects of the overall body shape, especially the roof.

In Airfix's defence, however, the rounded Dauphine shape is notoriously difficult to model accurately. Other examples from HUBLEY, Dinky, Norev, Lion and CIJ (to name but a few) all suffered from scaling errors. For the first time in this series, however, the tyres were very well done.

The Dauphine, which was modelled in red plastic, represented the first fully closed modern car body moulded by Airfix. This may have explained some of the accuracy problems. The model was deleted in 1971.

Again, this kit had a first and second issue with different artwork on the instruction sheet for each. In this case, the first issue drawing was by far the more accurate of the two. The artist, normally delightfully precise, did not depict the car at all well in the second issue illustration!

The Renault kit was also available in a boxed version moulded in the USA. This version included chrome bumpers, hubcaps and headlamps.

Both issues of the bagged Renault kit are very rare today.

Rarity rating UK version \*\*\*\*\* US version \*\*\*\*

### ***M-4-C Morris Mini Minor***

A superb model of a little car that had taken the world by storm. Moulded in the same red plastic as the Renault, the Mini could also be built as an Austin Seven or an Austin Cooper. Three different grills were provided as well as two different badges for the bonnet.

The bumpers provided were the deluxe type, correct for the Cooper and correct after trimming for the other two.

As usual two different instruction sets are known. Both contain photographs and information from the factory sales brochure. Four different sets of number plates were printed with the instructions.

The first issue Mini kits had separate front and rear lower body pans, under the bumpers, whereas the second issue had a one piece body.

The Mini was also available in a boxed US version with chrome parts.

From all accounts the Mini was a very popular model, especially as the body was ideal for slot car use, in later one piece form.

The popularity prompted the re-release of the Airfix Mini by the Channel Islands company Model Road Racing Cars (MRRC) and the kit was still available from Carkits in 1999. The MRRC kits are available in red or green and have one piece plastic glazing and chrome parts.

Rarity rating \*\*\* US version \*\*\*\* MRRC \*

### ***M-5-C Jaguar E Type***

Once again, a beautifully scaled model, moulded in a similar fashion to the Austin Healey Sprite. The plastic was coloured red like the Dauphine and the hardtop was again done in clear plastic. Naturally, the car could be built as an open or closed version.

The original first issue kit had the many tiny parts moulded very well indeed, but a distinct deterioration could be found in the moulding fidelity as time went by. It was as though new, inferior moulds were made for some parts of this model in about 1966.

The first issue Airfix E Types featured a curious omission. The headlamps appear to have been forgotten! These parts simply never appeared on the sprue. Neither were they discussed in the assembly instructions!! The headlamps were meant to be glued behind the clear plastic covers, and the locating holes were provided, but for some reason they were omitted on the early issues.

A boxed version with chrome parts was issued in the USA.

Although production appears to have ceased in 1974, the E Type must have been a very popular model because it was re-introduced in 1989 and is still available in 1999!

The re-introduced model is boxed and the grey plastic is actually moulded in France. The excess flashing on the parts would indicate that the moulds are getting pretty tired!

Rarity rating \*\*\* US version \*\*\* current version \*.

### ***M-201-C Ford Zodiac Mk3***

Introduced in 1963, and deleted in 1971, this was the largest and most elaborate model of the series, the only Series Two modern car kit issued in a plastic bag. The bag was slightly larger than the others and the instruction sheet was a little bigger as well.

The full size Zodiac was an exciting and imposing vehicle, Ford UK's flagship of the time. The model was no less so.

The big Ford was the first of this series to be moulded in dark green plastic and was very accurately scaled. Two sets of instructions are known and both included printed number plates.

By this time Airfix had almost perfected the scaling of the models with the result that the Zodiac and later kits were generally very accurate representations of the real vehicles.

An unbuilt Zodiac kit in good condition is quite hard to find today. Being slightly more expensive when new may help account for this rarity.

A US version of this kit with chrome parts was also available.

Rarity rating \*\*\*\* US version \*\*\*\*

### ***M-6-C Volkswagen 1200***

The ubiquitous Beetle was modelled very nicely by Airfix in a similar dark green plastic to the Zodiac. The model was released in 1964 and deleted ten years later.

The rounded VW body shape is quite difficult to scale properly, but Airfix got it right. The finished model is a delight to behold.

As usual, two different instruction sheets are known, the first referring to the model as a Volkswagen de lux (yes, misspelt) sedan, and the second simply as a Volkswagen 1200.

The actual model is of a 1962 Beetle, but the artwork on the second issue instructions clearly depicts a later "big window" car.

Unusual for this series, the second issue instructions carry a potted history of the car in three languages - English, French and German.

Not surprisingly, the VW was also issued in the US as a boxed version with chrome parts.

The bagged version is rare whereas the US version seems to be far more common.

Rarity rating \*\*\*\* US version \*\*.

### ***M-7-C MG 1100***

The third BMC model of the series was also one of the best. The MG 1100 was an attractive Pininfarina design and the kit is very accurate. The plastic was cream in colour, the only model of the series to be so coloured.

This is the first model in the series where the builder is instructed to paint half the body in a different colour, in this case dark green. The resulting cream and green two tone finish was typical of MG 1100s of the period.

This kit was introduced in 1965 and deleted in 1974.

Only a single issue is known, as the "first issue" kits finished in 1964. In the case of the small MG, the artwork on the instructions was simply superb, thanks to Roy Cross, showing the car, complete with family, cruising down the newly built M1 motorway.

A somewhat rarer boxed US version was also available, complete with chrome parts.

Rarity rating \*\*\* US version \*\*\*\*.

### ***M-8-C FORD LOTUS CORTINA***

This excellent model of a highly respected motor car was the first of this series to be moulded in matt white plastic. This material was to become common later and was apparently done to encourage painting of the models.

Painting was easily the most difficult part of model building, especially as suitable spray packs were reasonably hard to find at the time.

The model itself was very well scaled with perhaps small diameter wheels being the only real criticism. The tiny axles were also extremely weak, sometime failing with the weight of the model itself.

Once again, the artwork on the instructions was superb, showing the car, complete with racing numbers in mid corner action on the race track.

The bagged Lotus Cortina kit was introduced in 1965 and renumbered and boxed in 1975. The kit was deleted in 1976.

No US version of this kit was made.

Rarity rating \*\*\*.

### ***M-9-C VAUXHALL VIVA***

This model of the baby Vauxhall saw a return to red plastic similar to the Dauphine, E type and the Mini.

The Viva, which was a very popular car in its day, was again superbly scaled by Airfix. There are no known scaling errors and the fine detail, including features like separate door handles, is exceptional.

The artwork again shows a Viva speeding down a motorway, although not quite as well done as the MG 1100.

Three sets of printed number plates were included on the instruction sheet.

This model had a relatively short life, being introduced late in 1965 and deleted in 1971. Unlike most of the later bagged kits it was never available as a boxed model. Despite its short life, the model is one of the more easily obtainable of the series.

No US version is known.

Rarity rating \*\*

### ***M-10-C(1) ASTON MARTIN DB5.***

Another superb model of an exciting vehicle, issued late in 1966, just when interest in the James Bond car was gathering momentum.

The Aston was also moulded in matt white plastic, a material that was to become commonplace in the later boxed modern car series. Scaling was also excellent with slightly small diameter wheels and fragile axles being the only minor flaws.

The instruction sheet shows a blue right hand drive car being driven with verve on the right hand side of a mountain road, obviously depicting continental use. The instructions also recommend the painting of the body blue (Airfix colour G6). Printed number plates were also included

The bagged version of the kit is quite rare, only being available between late 1966 and late 1967 when the kit was renumbered as M206C (series 2) and boxed.

The model was deleted in 1978, only to reappear along with the E Type Jaguar in 1989. It was still available in 1999.

Rarity rating \*\*\*\*\*

### ***M-12-C PORSCHE CARRERA 6.***

Curiously, as stated previously, no evidence can be found of a kit numbered M-11-C.

The Porsche kit is the only full competition car offered in the bagged modern car series. The only such kit moulded in silver plastic, the Carrera 6 is an outstanding model.

By now Airfix had its methods perfected and there is very little scale wise to criticise on the Porsche.

The superb painting on the instruction sheet shows a blue car with silver lower body sides leading a Ferrari 250LM on a race track. Although most works racing Porsches at the time were painted white or silver, the first Carrera 6 to appear from the factory was actually painted blue with the lower body in bare aluminium.

The model builder is encouraged by Airfix to paint the car green as it depicts the first Carrera 6 to be raced in the UK by Porsche Cars (Great Britain Ltd.). That car was painted British Racing Green.

Rather than supply printed number plates as previously, Airfix supplied three printed racing numbers "7" for the Porsche.

This kit was introduced in 1966 and deleted in 1978. It was renumbered and boxed in 1967, however, making the bagged model very hard to find.

Rarity rating \*\*\*\*\*

### ***M-10-C(2) BOND BUG.***

Even the Airfix book by Collectakit is unable to give the bagged Bond Bug a number! I can confirm that my bagged Bond is definitely numbered M-10-C, as is my bagged Aston Martin.

So, until more information is at hand the mystery remains unsolved.

The model itself, entitled Bond Bug 700E on the back of the instruction sheet, is the last of the bagged modern car series. Scaling of this tiny vehicle is excellent.

The real Bug was a very curious vehicle full of unusual features, not the least of which was that the top half of the car had to be lifted up to enter! Airfix have faithfully provided this feature along with several other firsts for the series.

These include:

- A scaled plastic driver.
- Detailed scale engine, even though the engine cover does not open!
- Decal sheet, including two different sets of number plates and the correct Bond factory striping (showing the car to be the 700ES version).
- Building instructions in English, French and German.

The model is moulded in white plastic and the builder is encouraged to paint it in yellow (Airfix G2). Many real Bond Bugs seemed to be available in orange, and the excellent Roy Cross painting portrays the car in this colour.

The “doors” which on the real car are just vinyl coverings are moulded by Airfix in clear plastic.

This kit is extremely hard to find especially in bagged form. It was released in 1971, but was changed to a boxed model in 1973, before being deleted in 1976. The model was not seen at all on Carkits' lists during the six year period. I purchased my model new in Australia in the early seventies.

Rarity rating \*\*\*\*\*