



AT THE PINNACLE OF EXCLUSIVITY in the model car world are the bespoke miniatures, delectable one-offs that display the ultimate in craftsmanship. Owning one of these rarities, whether through acquisition of an existing model or commissioning, is the dream of almost every collector. Often, they are created for an individual who already has the “real thing” in his or her garage, and they are complete down to the finest details of the original.

In most cases, bespoke miniatures are as rare—sometimes rarer—than the cars they represent. The number of those gifted enough to build worthy examples is small; the legendary figures in this field have either left the scene, like Michele Conti and Manuel Olivé Sans, or are nearing the end of their careers, like Gerald Wingrove. And few are following in their footsteps.

One modeler who is keeping the craft alive is Marshall Buck, a New Yorker who has spent years refining his skills. His work, generally produced in one-twelfth scale, represents a mixture of old and new techniques. The master form for his cars’ bodies, for example, is still carved by hand, but the finished product is a cast shell in a modern, high-strength resin. Tires, correct in appearance and detail, are cast in brass molds, but tread patterns are laser-cut and sidewall detail is photo-etched.

Buck emulates the craftsmanship of Carlo Brianza,

whose work he admires. Buck reproduces some of his creations in small series of 10 to 25 examples. That is logical enough, as the forms, molds, and jigs needed to create one car can be used to build copies. Quality is the factor that determines the number built; he feels that he can make only a limited number while maintaining his high standards. Of course, clients who want one-offs are catered to as well.

Because the process is complex, Buck will not quote general prices. Price is determined by the extent of the detail required, such as: which panels should open, which controls (steering, for example) are to function, and other custom features. Buck says that sometimes the final figure can rival the cost of a real car. The same factors affect delivery time. In general, Buck can complete a model within 12 to 18 months of order.

A somewhat less expensive alternative, says Buck, is to base a model on an existing kit. The best of these may require no more than upgrading the finish and using higher-quality parts for some details. Others may become virtual reconstructions, involving wholesale replacement of factory-made pieces. Again, the cost can vary considerably, based on the work necessary. Buck also acts as a broker for other builders’ work. ☐

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Could a racecar be any more beautiful? Juan Manuel Fangio won the 1954 French Grand Prix in a Mercedes-Benz W196 streamliner. Marshall Buck created 25 one-tenth-scale replicas, each signed by the five-time World Champion.