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Online hot wheels price guide

From the March 2010 issue of Car and DriverMark Fletcher cranes the two small, chipped toy cars on the velvet cloth in front of him: a gold '68 Mustang and an orange-metallic '68 Cougar. These are my childhood cars, he says. Fletcher, an unemployed Arizona computer salesman, is now 50. But back in 1968, when he was eight and visiting relatives in Southern California, his father took him and his brothers shopping for Hot Wheels, only to discover that the local toy store was closed. Desperate to avoid a mutiny, his dad found an old Hot Wheels package in his car, located the manufacturer's address on the back, and started driving in that direction. It was late in the day when he arrived at Mattel's headquarters, and hardly anyone was around, but a secretary responded to his pleas. She rummaged through someone's desk and grabbed these two cars: handmade, chrome-plated demonstration models used by vendors to drum up department store orders. I was the youngest, Fletcher says, rolling one of the cars back and forth, tenderly, so I got the last pick. I cried because there was a crack in the windshield for me. We're at the 23rd Annual Hot Wheels Collectors Convention. More specifically, we're in a small banquet room in the Los Angeles Airport Marriott, at an invitation party where VIP members of the toy car world show off their rare treasures. Small vehicles, lovingly displayed in custom mirrored cases, line the walls. All around us, middle-aged men talk animatedly about their toys. Fletcher's going to let us get one of his cars. It is familiar-warm and worn and with a satisfying heft-and a stream of nostalgia encoma. Many Americans who grew up loving cars had cases filled with these like boys. But it's one of the only times we're going to keep one here. This hands-off policy makes sense. These toys have become a serious business. When we ask Fletcher about the value of his childhood relics, he estimates about \$10,000 for the couple. Let's assume he's not crying over split windshields now. Or is he? They would be worth four times as much, he says later, if they weren't playing worn out. How did we get to the five-figure, museum-piece Hot Wheels? After conquering contemporary girlhood with the Barbie doll in 1959, the folks of Southern California-based Mattel trained their sights on boys. Hoping to improve what he thought were bland toy cars produced by Matchbox and Corgi, intrepid company founder Elliot Handler asked his designers to develop a superior line of stylized, little metal vehicles that would drive fast on smooth surfaces and capitalize on the burgeoning local muscle-car and hot-rod culture. (Company lore, it has that brand came from a comment from Handler about one of his designer rides, a chopped El Camino: It's some hot wheels!) The toys were an instant smash when the first 16 models were In 1968, elicit millions of orders from national retail chains and handily outselling all rivals. Their success was equally attributed to the tweaked realism of their designs, their garish candy-metallic color, their sub-\$1 price, and their advanced technology: The cars all had lightweight, aluminum-zinc alloy construction; integrated suspensions, and low friction wheels that allowed scale speeds of up to 200 mph on the brand's customizable orange plastic tracks. (Sold separately!) Show Pictures TED SOQUI But like the classic muscle cars on which they were often based, the first generation of Hot Wheels—now known as redlines for the thin red band that runs around their tires—was made only through the early 1970s. Their deaths were caused by some of the same factors as their roadside counterparts: inflation and the rise in oil prices. (The small cars didn't run on gas, but the big industry that built and transported them really did.) The cars were also victims of their own groundbreaking uniqueness. Their complex stampings, buffed metal bodies, and flashy paint made them increasingly difficult to produce and sell profitably for less than a dollar. Manufacturing was moved overseas to save on labor costs, designs were simplified to save on production costs, and the paint formula was moved from its expensive (and lead-rich) metallic to cheaper enamel. Hot Wheels kept the line on pricing, but sales still fell. Handler tried to diversify his way out of the slump, expanding the Hot Wheels line to include cast motorcycles, trains, airplanes and bizarre human-machine hybrids. These items were generally met with a lukewarm reception from consumers. However, the company's licensing department found a way to succeed without the risk of finding new toys: Simply place the corporate seal on existing products. Hot Wheels has since stamped its logo on almost everything that will take a mark: lunchboxes, headbands, sheets, coffee cups, yo-yos, toothbrushes, watches, cake decorations, laptops, even hair gel. Still, Mattel has continued to make small 99-cent cars. And 41 years later, it's the No. 1 toy-car brand in the United States, which has produced over 4 billion vehicles. Until last year, the lovable hot rudder Larry Wood was the company's chief designer. In the first 15 years, I just did my job, and nobody cared, said Wood, now 67, as we visit his Long Beach garage, where he walks us through his huge collection of small car memorabilia (and his larger collection of life-size vehicular retirement projects). Sales went up. Sales went down. Then, about 20 years in, the kids who had bought the original cars started to become dads, and these dads started buying the cars for their kids, and things just went through the roof. The same nostalgia has fuelled the remarkable escalation of the toy's of adult fans now attend local and national collector conventions. Hot Wheels is consistently the most populous eBay category, with an average of 25,000 vehicles at auction at any time. And sites like diecastspace.com, redlinesonline.com, and Mattel's own hotwheelscollectors.com allow legions of collectors to exchange information and millions of dollars worth of small cars. But as the hobby has become more commodified, it has grown away from toys' humble \$1 roots. Rare, original redlines—those that look new, were produced in limited numbers, or feature bloopers such as mismatched wheels—now routinely trade for thousands of times their original price. There have been fakes, where unscrupulous dealers create fake rarities by repainting vehicles in unusual colors or carefully installing desirable errors. It has created a layer of pickers, which scour flea markets and grandma's wind for hidden gems to sell. And it has caused division in the collectorworld where, as postal worker Rafael Cerillo says, it's not a matter of what you want to collect anymore. It's a matter of what you can afford to collect. View Photos TED SOQUI What you can afford certainly figures prominent in rooms, the commercial hub of collector conventions. Built on different floors of the host hotel, the rooms are advertised by hand-drawn signs and open doors, and are a serial bazaar for Hot Wheels hamsters. Inside each one, cars for sale shimmer on each surface: in blister or loose (in their original packaging or out); on chests of drawers and chairs, in velvet cases and under shop lights, and, everywhere, covering the beds. There are toy cars here for \$5, \$50, \$500. There's a Classic '31 Ford Woody for \$9,000, a VW Beach Bomb for \$12,000, and a pink Superfine Turbine whose owner only laughs when we ask what he asks. Sid Belzberg, a Canadian software CEO, is here, looking to fill holes in his collection, a million dollar hoard containing the first Hot Wheels ever produced. We're category killers, Belzberg says of himself and his wife Alicia, describing how they have dominated markets in tin toys, old coins and pocket watch. We'll collect until we get everything there is. And there's puckish, 48-year-old real estate agent Bruce Pascal from Washington, D.C., who, in addition to being a walking toy-car wiki and a member of the Diecast Hall of Fame, is known for owning the most expensive Hot Wheels ever bought: a pink 1969 VW Bus that he is said to have paid about \$70,000 in 2000. While he suspects that things have come down from the top of the market, he feels confident that the high end remains strong. There is still money in the hobby, he assures. As an example, he tells the story of a picker who paid \$56,000 in cash for set of cars the day before. The guy he bought them for will part them out on eBay a few pieces at a time and will probably gross around \$80,000. But even in this acquisitive environment we reveal another feeling, one based less on picking, parting, or killing and more on affection. When I'm looking for a car, long-haired, longtime L.A. collector Mark Randall says, I'm attracted first to what's beautiful. It's like a girl. You see her across a room and you know you like her, but the person next to you might have a completely different opinion. He opens a small padded case. Inside is evidence of his passionate obsession: a rainbow of pristine, loose Heavy Chevys—a rodde-out, first-generation Camaro. Which one catches your eye? he asks. We point to a spotless, olive-green F-body, a color that we think few others would find cute. But Randall smiles, generously. You have excellent taste, he says, nodding like a sensei. It is the most desirable color for this casting. This obsession goes even deeper among customizers, the fastest growing part of the hobby. These folks spend days chopping, welding and painting these little cars, just for fun and show. Generosity is another characteristic of this sub-subculture. When customizers meet at conventions, their signature act is to give away a car they have decorated, an object and action that they call a random act of kindness. We leave here with 100 cars, Chicago adaptor Brian Thorby says, introducing his wife and two young sons. Guys in the rooms will see the kids and just let them pick out a car for free. Why this outpouring of benevolence? Biological imperative. They have to keep the kids in it, Thorby says. It perpetuates the hobby. Intrigued by this statement, we follow Thorby's sons briefly as they explore the convention floor. They lead us to one of their favorite features: a glass-fronted machine near the goods room, about the size and shape of an average household aquarium. We watch as they feed a Hot Wheels car into a hole in their side. The car rolls down a ramp and stops on a platform. Then the boys press a button, and a heavy steel press sinks, crushing the toy into a flattened disc of plastic and metal. The hobby's young perseverers scream with delight. We finally locate the collectors collective heart at a meeting with the Blister Pack Liberation Army. This group was formed about 10 years ago and is coAordiAnated by childhood car hoarder Fletcher. The gathering is ad hoc and surreptitiously occurs outside the convention's agenda, at 11 p.m., outside the hotel's shuttered ballrooms—but is open to anyone who provides a classic red line, still in its original 40-year package. (Such a seal multiplies a car's value three to ten times.) Fletcher tells the approximately 20 people gathered there: yourself by answering two questions: Which cars did you give away as children, and why? The liberators take turns presenting. While almost all of them have a heartwarming story about receiving a car—from a beloved grandmother, from an exasperated sibling, from a friend at a convention—are innate collectors—

few have stories of giving one away, even as a child. Their anecdotes also reveal âpoignantly liberator distance from the toys elementary nature. The last time I opened a blister pack, Belzberg admits, was in 1969. View Photos TED SOQUI Finally, each one holds up his or her little package. Spectators crawl and scream offering to buy them, intact. But each member frees every little car from their brittle prison—even if they all do it with care, like a bride opening wedding presents. And when they linger and chat afterwards, they share a vital, if hermetic, camaraderie, as if they have also been freed to revel in the innocent joys of the cars. Everyone thinks we're stupid, takes a valuable package and rips it up. Fletcher says, standing behind a table filled with cardboard and yellowed plastic. But we spend five days here trading cars for money, looking for the perfect piece. This event is about reminding us that these cars were not perfect, even right out of the package. It's about having a beautiful thing that you can touch and hold on rather than just value. He rolls a car in his hand and studies it beatifically. It changes your relationship with a car. It'll be yours. This content is created and maintained by a third party, and imported into this page to help users enter their email addresses. You may be able to find more information about this and similar content piano.io piano.io

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