

The Doll's House Museum Basel presents:

Pedal away!

**A special exhibition on historic pedal cars,
from 19 April to 5 October 2008**

This delightful little special exhibition presents historic pedal cars for children from the period from 1920 to the 1950s. Original films from the early days of motor racing will be shown to accompany it. An exhibition to evoke memories of a childhood deeply moved by pedal and other cars; for one-time children and today's big kids.

From a tin toy to an exclusive carriage

A pedal car is a specially designed, small-scale car for children, moved by turning the pedals with muscle power, as with a bicycle. Today, toys of this type are mostly made of plastic. In earlier times they were made of tinsplate, for which reason the old models belong to the “tin toy” category. Because of the high prices and the amount of space they occupy, pedal cars were only affordable for wealthy families. One vehicle of this type cost 72 German Mark, which was around the average monthly wage at that time.

The first pedal cars were produced in Germany around 1900. At first, rather than being based upon any particular vehicle, these first children's pedal cars represented ideals of the motor car. The bodywork was generally made of wood with deeply cut-out sides that made it easy to get into and saved the need to incorporate opening doors. The chassis was usually made of metal and the spoke wheels were based on bicycle wheels.

In the 1920s, the toy industry became an increasingly important economic factor. New production processes and materials enabled mass production. Whereas pedal cars were originally made by hand or in very small numbers by craftsmen or bicycle makers, a mass-

production industry specialising in children's cars now developed. Soon after the full-size originals took to the streets, children's cars became a permanent feature in big department stores in Europe and the USA. They were made largely by hand and were extremely expensive. In this respect, too, they were no different to real cars. Often they were replicas of real cars. They had handbrakes, a horn, indicators and upholstered seats. Bugatti and Citroën were car manufacturers who produced models especially for children.

In the 1930s, the models became ever more elaborate and sophisticated. The companies endeavoured to outdo one another especially when it came to attention to detail in comparison to the real car. Some cars were even equipped with electric lighting. The new models were now made mostly of metal. Dating them accurately is very difficult, since many models were often sold unchanged over several decades. The weight of the cars is quite considerable.

Pedal cars made from the 1950s up to the present day consist mostly of plastic. In the course of time, they became lighter and cheaper. Battery-powered motors are increasingly being incorporated, replacing the pedal mechanism. Even in the computer age, the good old pedal car remains a popular toy with our children. Even today some automobile marques still offer the appropriate vehicle for their customers' children. Audi offers an exclusive carriage in aluminium for children up to 1.35 metres in height. The "Type C" from 2007 is limited to 999 examples and has a price of 9700 Euro. It is a reincarnation of the "Auto Union Type C" racing car from the 1930s.

The pedal cars in the exhibition

Among the models on show there are some that can truly be described as exceptional. One example is the "MG" pedal car by the Englishman H.J. Mulliner dating from 1939. The 140-cm-long car has an aluminium body with opening bonnet, boot and doors.

Another highlight is the "Hispano Suiza" pedal car; a Swiss one-off production dating from the early 1930s. It is 158 cm in length, has opening doors and the rear seat can be folded up. Many visitors to this exhibition will probably also be fascinated by another one-off production: the "Rolls Royce Silver Ghost", a pedal car from the 1950s. This car has a tinplate body, true to detail instruments, handbrake and opening bonnet as well as an accurate replica of the engine block with spark plugs and cables. All three vehicles originate from the once-renowned "Pedal Car Museum Munich" belonging to the late founder and collector Manfred Klauda which was liquidated in 2005. In addition to his museum activities, he was also the world record holder in solo pedal car driving over a distance of 458.8 km from Munich to Dresden.

There are also a number of vehicles by the renowned French pedal car maker Euréka to admire: from the rare "Bugatti Biplace Tandem" from the 1920s to the "Modèle Super Junior

35" (ca. 1935) or the "Bébé 25" built around 1925. Connoisseurs will also be impressed by the famous "Pathfinder special" (1949) from the Austin Junior Car Factory, England; a pedal car based on the "Austin 750 01-IC" racing car. Not to mention the little "Blue Tourer Vauxhall" (ca. 1932) by Lines Bros. from England, or the unique "Bugatti" with petrol engine. The setting for this exhibition is also rather special: A number of the cars are displayed in a section from a multi-floor underground car park from the 1920/1930 period.

Old original motor racing films

To enable visitors to travel back in time better to the era of these pedal cars, the museum is showing old original films of motor racing covering the time from 1903 to 1964 in the special exhibition. What a contrast to today! Often these races took place on ordinary roads, as with the "Gordon Bennett Races 1903" for example or the "Targa & Coppa Florio 1924", whereas in 1920, the "Indianapolis 500" already took place on an oval course. In those days, changing tires and refuelling the cars was an extremely jeopardous experience. Fuel was poured directly into the tank from a canister using a giant funnel. The drivers took part in open cars wearing racing overalls but without a helmet; all they wore for protection were goggles. At the end of the race, they looked like chimney sweeps: dirty faces with large clean rings around the eyes when they removed their goggles. It was only from the mid 1950s that enclosed cars were used. The films show races from that time which are still held today, such as the "Grand Prix de Monaco", as well those that are no longer possible such as the "Grand Prix of Italy in Livorno" or the "Grand Prix of Tripoli". What is quite conspicuous is that the fascination of motor racing has always attracted many spectators since the very early days. The moving pictures clearly show how the appearances of drivers and spectators have changed over the years. And the final picture from the 1964 Argentinean Touring Car Championship shows that women can also be enthusiastic racing car drivers.

Famous manufacturers

One of the best-known manufacturers of children's pedal cars is the **French company Euréka**. Starting in 1922 and in the following five decades, the company had an extensive range of pedal cars with a tremendous variety of colours, equipment etc. in its programme. The company was renowned for the outstanding quality of its pedal cars and attention to detail of its accessories. In 1933 alone, Euréka produced 53,000 pedal cars. Starting in 1906, the **American "Reo Motor Company"** produced children's cars that were accurate replicas of their own vehicles. An ingenious move, to bind children to the car marques concerned from an early age.

Lines Bros. Tri-ang Toys from London was a toy making company whose product range included pedal cars. They, too, had an incredibly large range of different models. There were racing cars, fire engines, tractors; even jeeps were included in the product range.

The German company **Margarete Steiff in Giengen** also produced pedal cars in the period between 1927 and 1942. The “Tretmobil” model was built from 1927 until 1937: a four-wheeled car for children from 4–10 years of age, with an all-metal body and pedal drive. Or the “Tripmobil”, with the same body and drive, but three wheels only. There were other models such as the “Sportmobil” or the “Tempomobil”.

Pedal cars were also made in Italy, by the **Bologna-based company Giordani**. They were renowned for the production of bicycles and the most popular toy of that time, the three-wheeler. Shortly after the end of the First World War, Giordani also started with the production of pedal cars.

Rare and sought-after collectors' items

The one-time children's toys are today sought-after collectors' items by big kids, in other words grown men. Most collectors of old pedal cars are also fans of historic cars who frequently complement their collection of vintage cars with the miniature versions (pedal cars). Historic pedal cars also have to be looked after; their maintenance and professional restoration calls for great dedication. Unfortunately not many pedal cars from the 1920s and 30s have survived; they were either driven to destruction, messed around with or unthinkingly thrown away. Today, however, some of them change hands for a small fortune at auctions. Pedal cars from the post-war era are considerably cheaper. Pedal cars are to be found in various museums all around the world.

Modern pedal cars for young museum visitors

And so that our younger visitors also have a good time, they can ride around the exhibition with three original cars. They can choose between a red “Citroën 2CV” or – a little more sporting – a flaming red “Ferrari F430” and a “BMW 24”.

Opening hours

Museum, shop and café: daily from 10.00 – 18.00

Admission

CHF 7.00/ 5.00

Children up to 16 years of age are admitted free and only if accompanied by an adult.

No additional charge for the special exhibition.

The entire building is wheelchair accessible.

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