

I WANTED to find out about the history and evolution of one of Argentina's most important diecast companies: Muky. My aim was to find information that could help us to reconstruct a piece of our culture, important to all Argentinians, collectors and historians. First we began discussions with fellow collectors, trying to make contact with those who managed this company until its closure in the early 1990s. So we began piece the story together from information on the packages of the diecast cars, and comments we got from our website or from fellow collectors. The task seemed enormous, however. The puzzle we were trying to complete had many essential pieces missing; we lacked important information and there were no government records on the subject. All this made the project a distant dream. Countless stories came up, though indistinct and without definite facts.

But after many months of hard work I finally got hold of a number. When the phone rang, Mrs Dell Arciprete, the wife of Muky's last owner, answered. Unfortunately he had passed away a few years earlier, but she was interested in and surprised by our project. During our conversation she told me that Bruno, her son, was the one who could help us the most, since he'd always been interested in this family business and knew all the details. She also told us that they were currently working in a different area, fertilising, but they had managed to keep all the old Muky machinery in working condition, although they didn't produce any diecast at the moment. We were astonished with their caring for the company and its legacy. That distant dream became a reality, as we began to fit pieces into the jigsaw puzzle. Muky's diecast history begins during the 1970s. It was then that two brothers, living in California at the time, bought several obsolete moulds from Hot Wheels, brought them to Argentina and began to produce the tiny marvels called Muky. The De Conti brothers rented a warehouse in Gualeguay, Entre Ríos, a small town located on the shore of the Uruguay River, five hours away from Buenos Aires, to set up their company. They continued production in Argentina until the late seventies, when due to the then very complex economic situation in our country, they moved production to Brazil. A few years later, Mr Dell Arciprete bought Muky. Unfortunately there is very little information on the first period of Muky, because so far we have been unable to contact the De Conti brothers. It is important to know that, though it continued the Muky name, the new company was not the same firm. The De Conti brothers owned Super Veloz, and Mr Dell Arciprete's Muky was Induguay. This can be seen on the underside of the cars, as well as on the packaging. During my interview with Bruno Dell Arciprete, I asked him about his family's history with Muky:

Bob: You bought the brand when it was already established. Do you know where that name came from, or if it has any particular significance?

Bruno: Actually I have no idea where it came from. What I know for sure is that we kept that existing trade mark, Muky.

I do remember that after a while we found out that there was a Brazilian cocoa brand named Muky, as well as many other Argentinian companies that had to change to other brand names when they went to register that brand, at least that was what our attorneys told us. But I really have no idea about the origin of the name. And it was Libio Conti who invented the brand and



created the company. He worked for many years in Gualeguay in the rented building where the factory was situated. I can't remember exactly if it was in 1984 or 1985 when my father bought the company. We kept on producing in there until we were able to buy a place of our own.

As to the moulds, we continued to operate the ones from the previous owner and then added some new ones as well.

Bob: So how did your Muky story begin?

Bruno: My father owned a fumigation company for many years before he even began to think about diecast toy cars. During the seventies he began to fly aircraft and then opened his own fumigation business in Entre Ríos, more specifically in Gualeguay. After many years of hard work, he managed to save enough money to buy an already-operating diecast factory, which was Muky. This company was previously owned by Libio Conti. It is then that our connection with Muky began. It wasn't our main source of income, it was just something we loved to do. As soon as we began production of the models they became a boom nationwide. We had a distribution network to reach far-flung regions. As we expanded and the market responded, increasing demand for our products, we began to improve the business. So we worked in both fields, diecast and fumigation, an odd combination. And although we are not currently producing diecast cars, we are still in the fumigation business, that has grown nicely in the last few years. I really don't know what went through my father's mind, though it wasn't factory production at first. Then it was just the factory he bought.

Bob: Were the Muky cars always this size?

Bruno: Yes, we tried to keep to the original design, not adding or taking away any detail, we also wanted to keep on working with the same basic material. What we did improve was the suspension system. At first they were completely made of zamac, but we altered the baseplate, and made it in plastic. This, combined with the zamac, resulted in a much better product. Plus, this way the item was a more robust toy for kids to play with. This alteration began originally following suggestions made by many of our clients and as we thought it was a very good idea, we put it into practice. In terms of the

production process this resulted in a quite interesting twist, since we had use two combined production lines, which in turn resulted in increased production output.

Bob: There is also a window colour variation you included at this stage isn't there?

Bruno: Yes, some were made in amber and some others in transparent blue.

Bob: Which were the models you designed?

Bruno: Well, there were some trucks we included, two of them Cargo Trucks, one YPF (Petrol) and another one that carried water and pipes. We also made a trailer caravan, which was very nice. Each and every model we made had its inspiration in everyday life, we wanted to reflect that.

Bob: There were also race tracks.

Bruno: Oh, yes, we had a basic model, and there were accessories such as loops, and turns. We also had collector albums. Each model had a dotted line printed on the upper part of the box, which could be cut off and the picture could then be stuck in the album. These albums were free; we handed them out during the summer in some of the most important Argentinian beach resorts and in some shops, and we had some very interesting prizes for completed albums.

Bob: It is said that one of the prizes was free flights in the company's plane. Is that true?

Bruno: Well, yes it is, and there were also scholarships for high school or college.

Bob: So, regarding the Muky models, do you remember how many were made?

Bruno: We had models numbered from 8 to 40. We added around seven new ones such as a 1940 Ford, a 1930s coupe, a Volkswagen Beetle and a Ferrari.

Bob: What about the models up to #8?

Bruno: I really don't know. You could say it's another of Muky's enigmas.

Bob: We'll have to do some research on that in the future.

Bruno: We made about seven new models, it was quite a job, because each mould was very expensive to make and we needed trained personnel whose main activity all year long was to design and perfect that model. So in the seven years that the company was successful we managed to launch a new model each year.

Bob: When looking at Muky models I see that they are very similar to the American Hot Wheels models. Is there any relationship with them, or maybe only inspiration?

Bruno: To my knowledge there is no connection, at least for the ones we made.

Regarding the earlier ones, I personally doubt it. There is a lot of protection in regard to that kind of thing, nationally and internationally. There are patents, copyrights and legal protection against imitation.

I seem to recall a situation that happened with a Buby model, if I recall correctly it was a Ford Sierra that someone tried to copy, but couldn't go through with it because of this.

Bob: Once again maybe we should ask Mr Conti about it.

Bruno: Yes, most definitely. But the thing is that since all of us made diecast models based on real cars the key to success was not the subject, but the way it was carried out. The differences are more obvious between those mould makers who had access to orig-

inal blueprints and those who didn't.

Bob: Blueprints are the secret weapon!

Bruno: Yes, and it wasn't very easy to get hold of them. So you had to be talented and a good craftsman.

Bob: Did you have specialist tool makers, or were they self-taught artisans?

Bruno: We had two tool makers working in Buenos Aires that my father knew, and in Gualaguay we had an automatic plant which didn't require special qualifications, were we had 45 people employed. There were also around 100 families that worked at home painting some parts, fixing stickers, and adding finishing touches to each car by hand. Plus there were all of our people involved in distribution.

Bob: Speaking of distribution, did you sell your production to other countries?

Bruno: We sold for a while to Uruguay as well as to Spain through the *Camara Argentina del Juguete*.

But we also sent many individual packages to collectors all around the world.

Bob: How did they contact you?

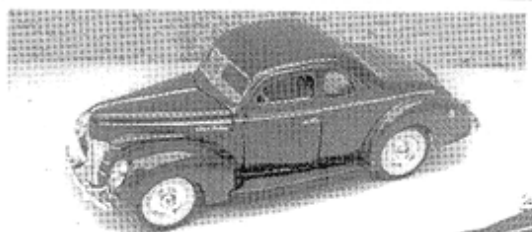
Bruno: By letters mainly. They wrote to us asking specifically for the model they needed, and we gladly sent them the item. Afterwards we would get *thank you* notes. It was really nice, but this was a really small part of our production. Almost 99% of production was sold in Argentina.

Bob: The other day when I talked to your mother on the phone she told me that you have taken care of the diecasting machines, that they are still in working order, ready to restart production, but that for the moment you are not thinking seriously about doing so in our country's economic situation.

Bruno: That is correct. I'd love to carry on with my dad's diecast company. And although the technology we have available at Muky is quite obsolete in relation to new diecast companies, I believe that it would only be a matter of getting started. The thing is, as my mother pointed out, there would be no problem restarting production, but if we put together a group of experts and hard working staff, then shortly after that great effort we may be obliged to close down again because of an unexpected change in economic laws or some other cause of instability in our country. Nonetheless we'll keep on taking care of our equipment, awaiting a better time.

Judging by this interview with Muky's current owner, it is not the end of the story, because the Dell Arciprete family has taken care of the plant and of all legal matters 'awaiting a better time'. It has just stopped for a while to catch its breath. And will start again one day.

Roberto Dario Frassinetti thanks the team that has formed around the Toy Museum: Florencia Rodriguez, Leonardo Candiano and Julian Rodriguez, without whose collaboration this work would not have been possible. They also have a book in preparation on diecast firms in Argentina, with the help of David Weber and Kimmo Sahakangas. Hopefully it will be published in early 2005.



LEFT: the Sunnyside 1:34 diecast model, and below, the National Motor Museum Mini Series 1940 Ford Coupe, 1:32 scale.

Photographs by Benno Knorr

TWO 1940 FORD COUPES

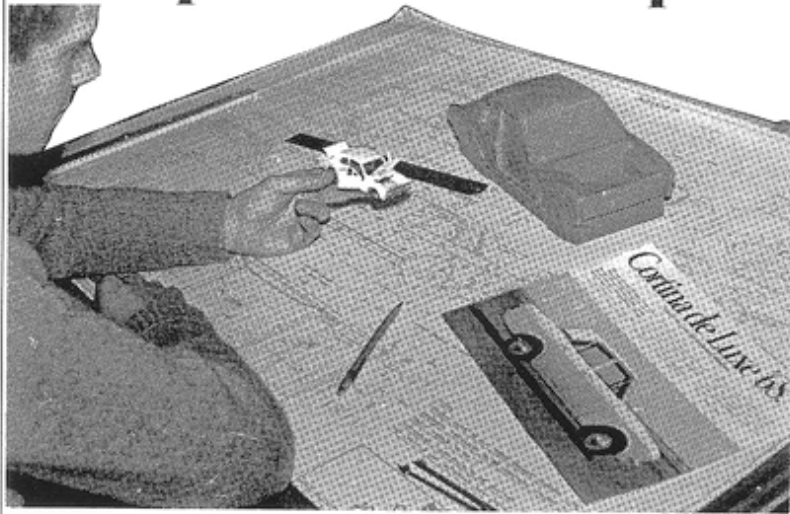
By Phil Campbell

NOT to intrude too much on Dave Turner's territory, but I have two very similar models of a Ford icon, the 1940 Special Deluxe Five window coupe. Here is a brief comparison, showing many similarities and differences, but both are nice collectible toys. One of these models is 1:32 scale, part of the National Motor Museum Mini 2003 series of models on the history of Ford (the 1940 Ford was sold in a two-pack carton with a 1913 Ford Model T Speedster. This series spans Fords from 1903 to 1940, this set numbered by NMMM as GDF012, SS 76730A). The other 1940 Ford is made by and labelled as Sunnyside (SS 5740). On the other hand, given the numbering on the NMMM model, that may also have been produced originally by Sunnyside. The scale differs, however, in that the Sunnyside model is 1:34. The NMMM model is maroon and has wheels the same colour, with white wall tyres, opening door, trunk and hood. Trim parts, such as tail lights, gas cap, trunk and license plate, twin mirrors, headlights and front license plate are chrome plated plastic pieces glued on to the car. Door handles, wipers, hood and body molding are moulded into the body and then painted silver. (On my model the hood does not open though it is supposed to, so I can't say what the engine bay looks like without risking breakage). The Sunnyside model is blue with a beige interior. The doors and hood open easily, but the trunk deck does not. If it is supposed to, I am not certain. Both models were obtained at about the same time, the Sunnyside found in a shop in Rotorua, New Zealand). I don't know how long the Sunnyside model has been on the market, but the NMMM model is a new release. The interior is detailed on both cars, the NMMM

marked as a *Deluxe Business Coupe* without a back seat. The Sunnyside model is called a *Five Window Coupe* which should be a regular coupe model, but it also has no back seat. Both cars have some of the emblems as decals, such as the back trunk emblems and script emblems on the hood. However, another dissimilarity is in the window trim. For the NMMM model the window surrounds are not highlighted, and the wipers are moulded into the body and painted. Door glazing is not fitted to either model though the rear side windows are glazed. On the SS model the windshield (with wipers moulded and painted on the screen) and rear windows have chrome trimmed mouldings around them that are separate from the body casting. Furthermore, interior details differ, as the NMMM model has more detail in the dash and door panels than the Sunnyside model and the seats seem more colour coordinated. The side mirrors on the NMMM model are a distraction, swooping out from the door area and curving backward, looking quite unnatural. Conversely the SS model does not have any mirrors, which is also a distraction, but in my view not as much as the overstated mirrors on the NMMM model. The overall proportions of both models appear to be quite good, notable in view of the fact that not every model by either firm is as well made and accurate. To my eye the rear body side profile is not true to the original shape. An additional distraction on the Sunnyside model is the chrome wheel discs which are fully chromed and do not have the small hubcaps and wheels in body colour, as seen on the NMMM model.

These two inexpensive Chinese-made models help make collecting affordable.

Blueprint secret weapons



In the piece on Muky toys at left, blueprints are described as the 'secret weapon' which means success or failure for a toy company. To underline that fact, here is a picture of a Meccano designer with his drawings, a sales brochure, large scale prototype and finished diecast Ford Cortina Mk II model.