

Swiss-Made Sports and Luxury Cars in Full Size and in Miniature

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By [dbeck](#)

Daniel Beck lives in Marly in the Canton of Fribourg (Switzerland) and is a long time supporter of hobbyDB and the creator of the popular model car website modelcars.mbeck.ch where you can get information about the model car scene of 71 countries, illustrated by some examples from his collection.

Switzerland never had an important car industry. In the beginning of the 20th century, there were numerous small producers, but most of them went out of business during World War I or soon afterwards. Among the few exceptions, Martini continued production until 1934, while [Saurer](#), Berna and FBW specialized into trucks and buses. However, several Swiss companies in the second half of the 20th century made small series of exclusive cars, and some of these cars have also been modeled by contemporary or current model car manufacturers. Let's have a look at Monteverdi, Felber, Sbarro, and Enzmann cars in full size and in miniature.

Monteverdi

In the 1970s and 1980s, the most important Swiss car manufacturer was [Monteverdi](#). Peter Monteverdi had already constructed several racing cars called MBM and ran a dealership handling Ferrari, BMW and Lancia cars in Binningen near Basel when in 1967, he started production of high performance cars powered by Chrysler engines and bodied by renowned Italian coachbuilders, first [Frua](#), then Fissore. About 60 cars per year were made in the early 1970s. The first model was the [375S High Speed two-seater coupé](#), followed by the [375L four-seater coupé](#), the 375C and Palm Beach convertibles, and the 375/4 luxury sedan. Peter Monteverdi reportedly offered the 375/4 to the Swiss government as a state car, but the Federal Counsellors were not interested – they used Cadillacs in the 1970s. A super sports car called [Hai 450](#) debuted in 1970, but only two prototypes were built. By the mid-1970s, after the oil crisis, Monteverdi started producing “boutique cars”, technically unchanged serial cars with modified bodywork and tuned-up interior. His greatest success was a luxurious off-road car, the Safari, based on the International Scout, of which at least several hundred items were built between 1976 and 1982. The Sahara was another SUV with an only slightly altered body of the International Scout. Furthermore, Monteverdi used the boutique car system on two sedans, the Sierra (1977-1982) based on the Plymouth Volare, and the Tiara (1982-1983) based on the Mercedes-Benz S-Class. Serial production ceased in 1984, and the Monteverdi facilities in Binningen became a museum. In 1990, Peter Monteverdi shortly ran his own Formula 1 team after having bought the Onyx racing team. His last car was the Hai 650 F1 super sports car presented at the Geneva Motor Show in 1992, a single piece using remaining parts from the Formula 1 project.



Monteverdi 375S Frua by Matrix



Monteverdi 375L by Dinky Toys

The models: Contemporary diecast models of Monteverdi cars were made by various manufacturers in the early 1970s. [Dinky Toys](#) produced a 1:43 scale model of the 375L four-seater coupé from 1970 to 1974, painted in metallic red (no. 190). [Matchbox](#) released a 3-inch model of the Hai 450 in 1973 (no. MB-3d). This was issued in various non-realistic colors. In the USA, later models were sold under the “Rallye Royale” name. The Hai 450 was also modeled by [Pilen](#) from Spain in 1:43 scale, and [Juguinsa](#) from Venezuela released a model of the Hai from the same mold. Several highly detailed 1:43 scale resin models of Monteverdi cars have been introduced in recent years: 375L, Hai 450 and Safari have been made by [Neo](#), while [Matrix](#) has released a 375S with Frua body. As of June 2016, a model of the 375/4 sedan has been announced by [Kess](#).

Felber

Like Monteverdi, [Felber Automobiles](#), based in Morges on Lake Geneva, made exclusive cars in the 1970s and early 1980s, but even in lower quantities. Willy Felber ran a dealership for Ferrari and Rolls Royce cars called “Haute Performance Morges” before he introduced his first own car in 1974, [the Felber FF](#). It was a roadster with a body reminding of the 1947 Ferrari 166 Spyder, but based on the Ferrari 330 GTC from the late 1960s. About a dozen of these cars were built. Felber also made two shooting brakes, based on Ferrari 365 GTC/4 and 365 GT4 2+2, and a beach car based on a 365 GTB/4 Spyder for a customer in the Middle East, but these cars probably remained one-offs. Two more roadsters were built on Lancia chassis, and then Felber specialized into customized versions of production cars: Apart from a new front design and some details, the bodies remained unchanged, but the cars got luxurious interiors and could be equipped with more powerful engines. The first of these cars were the Excellence from 1977 based on a Pontiac Firebird, and a Felber Version of the Lancia Beta. They were followed by the small Rubis (Autobianchi A112), the Pacha (Buick Skylark) and a VW Golf Special. 12 items of the Excellence and 35 of the Pacha were built, but Willy Felber’s biggest success was the Oasis, a luxurious off-roader based on the International Scout and a direct competitor to Monteverdi’s Safari and Sahara SUVs. About 70 items were built and most of them sold to the Middle East. Production of Felber cars ceased in 1984.



Felber FF Ferrari by Tron

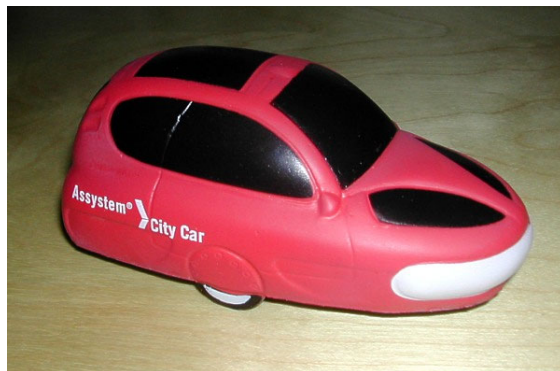
The models: Several manufacturers of 1:43 scale resin handbuilt models have produced models of Felber cars since the 1990s, but so far they were apparently only interested in the Ferrari-based items. [Tron](#) from Italy has released a nice model of the FF Ferrari in their “Glamour” range; another Italian manufacturer of highly detailed handbuilt models, [ABC/Brianza](#), has modelled the 365 GTB/4 Beach Car and the 365 GTC/4 shooting brake, while a model of the 365 GT4 2+2 shooting brake was made by [Swiss Mini 43](#) from Switzerland in the early 2000s. As of June 2016, no major manufacturer has ever released a model of an Oasis, Excellence, Pacha or another Felber car.

Sbarro

Franco Sbarro, a mechanic from Lecce in Southern Italy, settled in Switzerland in 1957. Ten years later, after having worked for Georges Filipinetti, owner of the Scuderia Filipinetti racing team, he founded his own small factory to produce sports and racing cars in Grandson on Lake Neuchâtel in 1967. The first [Sbarro](#) car was a replica of the Lola T70, then he released various sports coupés of his own design, such as the Tiger with a V8 mid-engine by Mercedes-Benz, or the Stash powered by a VW K70 engine, and like Monteverdi and Felber, he also offered luxurious SUVs in the late 1970s which were even more exclusive than their Swiss competitors, such as the six-wheeled Windhawk built for King Khaled of Saudi-Arabia in 1979. Most Sbarro designs were single pieces or made in very small numbers: about a dozen of the Lola coupés, five Stash, twelve items of the four-wheeled Windhound SUV. But Sbarro also produced small-series replicas of Bugatti Royale, Ford GT40, Mercedes-Benz 540K, and most notably a BMW 328 of which more than 100 items were built in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Later Franco Sbarro concentrated on concept cars and founded the Sbarro Espera school in Montbéliard, France, which offers training in car design and mechanics. Its creations are regularly exhibited at Geneva Motor Show.



Sbarro Isatis by Ministar



Assystem City Car promotional model

The models: So far, no manufacturer of diecast models has produced a Sbarro car in miniature, and there are no models of the early 1970s designs at all, but several small companies have released 1:43 scale resin models of later Sbarro concept cars. Ministar from France made the 1993 Isatis and the 1995 Alcador sports car concepts, while another French company, Ministyle, focused on Sbarro designs from the late 1990s based on less exclusive production cars: Citroën Xsara Picasso, Renault Clio and Scenic. The 1996 Sbarro Issima, Sbarro's interpretation of a big Alfa Romeo roadster, was modelled by Tecnomodel. But the widest range of Sbarro models has been made available by ABC/Brianza in their range of highly detailed handbuilt resin models: Besides other models of the Alcador, they modelled various Sbarro concepts based on Ferrari cars, including the 2002 Christelle, the 2004 and 2005 SB1 Tornado, the 2010 Autobau and the 2012 Memory 400i, a tribute to the famous Ferrari 250 GTO, but also the Mercedes-Benz-based GT12 from 2000. Another Sbarro design which has been reproduced in miniature was the 2007 [Assystem City Car](#), a prototype of a small city car with a diamond-shaped wheel-design allowing an extremely small turning cycle. A model of this concept car has been offered by Assystem as a promotional item. It is a simple reproduction made of foam plastic in about 1:30 scale.

Enzmann

Emil Enzmann, a doctor from Schüpfheim near Lucerne whose family owned a hotel and a garage, designed an affordable sports roadster based on a VW chassis in the 1950s. His prototype was shown at the Comptoir Suisse fair in Lausanne in 1956, and in the following year the car was presented at stand number 506 of the Frankfurt Motor Show. "[506](#)" then became the definite name of the car. In 1958 production started in a small series. The roadster had a glass fibre body and some very modern features for a 1950s road car, such as bucket seats, safety belts, an integrated roll-bar and a safety padding in front of the passenger. But the most striking characteristic was the absence of doors – driver and passenger had to climb over the side walls by means of the steps inserted in the niches on both sides of the car. The advantage of this unusual design was high stability and low weight: The complete car weighted only 550 kg. Most Enzmann customers didn't choose the standard VW engine, but preferred tuned engines by MAG and Okrasa, and sometimes even more powerful Porsche engines, which made the light car very competitive. A special version prepared for mountain races was equipped with the 130 bhp Porsche Carrera engine. The road car was sold either as a "Spider" with small windscreen or as a "Cabriolet" with larger windscreen and optional soft top. A retractable hardtop was also available. About 100 cars were built until the early 1960s, but since 2001, Karl Enzmann and Werner Schreiber, son and son-in-law of the company founder, have produced replicas of the original Enzmann car to order, now based on a modernized VW Beetle chassis.



Enzmann 506 by Renncenter.ch



Enzmann 506 by SwissMini43

The models: The Enzmann 506 has never been modeled by diecast manufacturers so far, but there are several hand built models, mostly made by Swiss companies. A 1:24 scale model was released by Renncenter.ch, a slot car racing centre in Uzwil in the Eastern part of Switzerland, in December 2006. The model has a body shell made of PET and was available either as a slot car or as a detailed static model. It was made to order for some years, but according to the Renncenter.ch website, production has now ceased. All other existing Enzmann models are 1:43 scale: Swiss-Mini-43 released a Cabriolet in 1996. This model is made of resin and is rather simple, without any photo-etched parts. The most common colors are orange and red. PE43, another Swiss manufacturer usually specialized in Borgward models, offered special versions of the Swiss-Mini-43 model in mint green or silver with white wall tyres. Finally a heavy 1:43 scale model of the Spider has been made by Emmy Models from Berne. It was originally released as a road car in 1996, later also as a race car in red or blue. After longer break, this model was reissued in 2013 and has been released in various colors since then. While the older models are fully made of white metal, the new models have a resin body. The parts are molded by Tin Wizard in Germany before the models are assembled and finished in Switzerland. The most recent 1:43 scale Enzmann model is the first one which has been made by a non-Swiss model manufacturer: Neo released a resin model in early 2015. For their first issue, they chose a version which had never been modeled by other manufacturers before: a white Cabriolet with red hardtop.

Conclusion

Like their prototypes, models of exclusive Swiss cars have usually only been made in small quantities. Several Sbarro and Felber designs have been modelled by Italian and French manufacturers of hand built models, but so far these companies have focused on designs based on Ferrari cars which are thus interesting for collectors of Ferrari models. Enzmann models could only be found in the small ranges of Swiss model car manufacturers until recently. Only the Monteverdi cars were modeled by big contemporary diecast toy and model car manufacturers. In the last years, the availability of detailed 1:43 scale models of exclusive Swiss cars has remarkably improved thanks to the efforts of Neo and other companies producing Chinese-made resin models. Due to the increasing interest of these companies in rare and uncommon cars, it is quite possible that we'll see more models of Swiss cars from the 1970s and 1980s in the future. Since Monteverdi, Felber and Sbarro were among the first companies to sell luxury SUVs, Monteverdi Sahara, Felber Oasis, or even Sbarro Windhawk could be particularly interesting projects for today's model manufacturers.

This article is certainly not a comprehensive overview. Furthermore, a much wider range of models of Swiss vehicles exists in other fields – racing cars, most notably sports prototypes and Formula One cars by the Sauber team, and commercial vehicles, i.e. trucks and buses by Saurer, Berna, FBW, NAW and Hess. The hope is that all of these are soon added to hobbyDB!