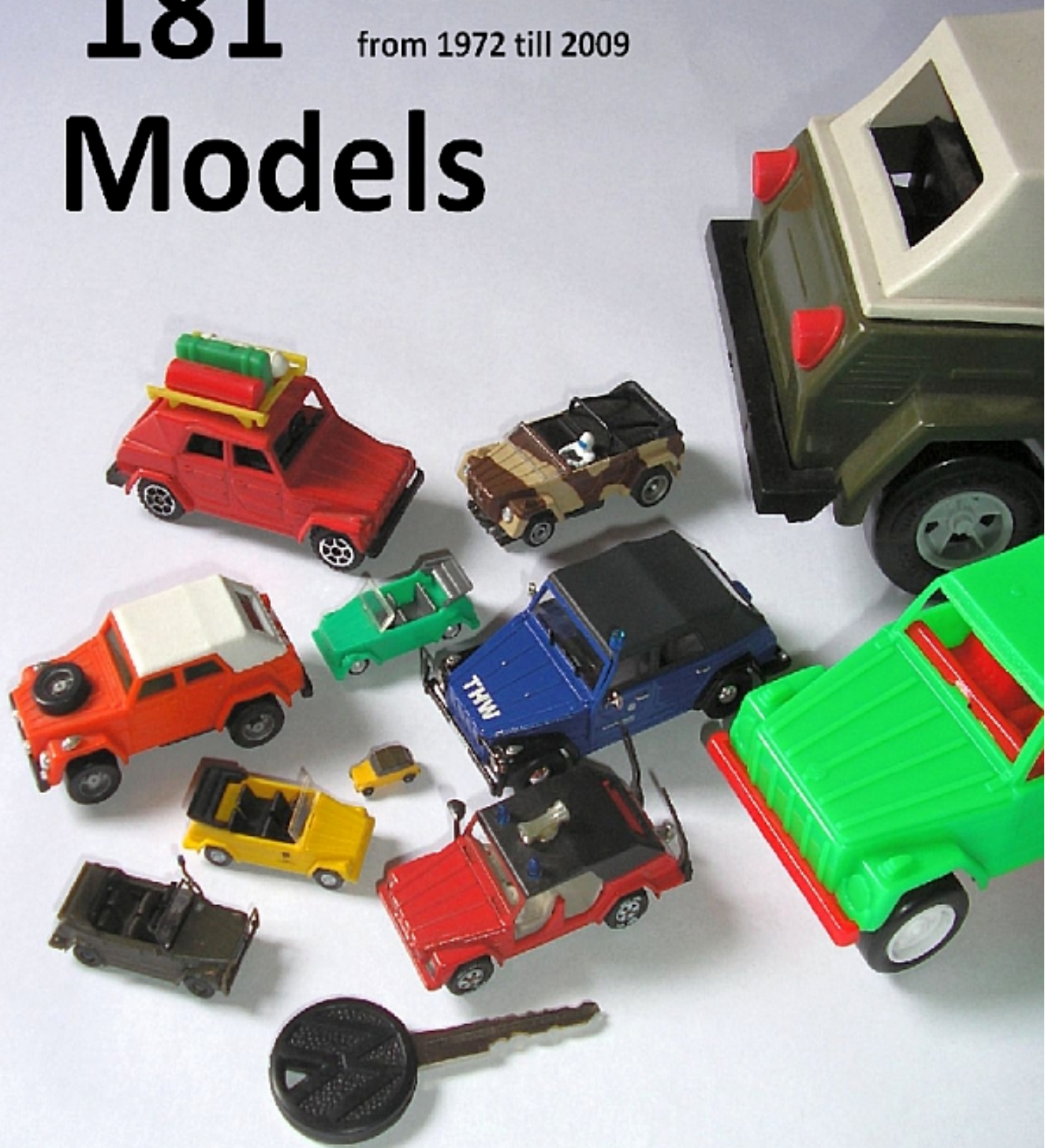


181

from 1972 till 2009

Models



PJ Vanhaesebrouck

Introduction

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the introduction of the Volkswagen Type 181. Created primarily as a rugged, reliable and economical post-war military vehicle, the Volkswagen Type 181 was first produced in Germany and Mexico. From 1969 through the early seventies the VW 181 proved itself and in 1973, Volkswagen made the decision to market their civilian variant called "The Thing" in the United States. The Thing was marketed as a fun off-road alternative to the Jeep, Land Rover and Land Cruiser. Unfortunately sales were slow and only lasted 2 years before the car was banned in 1975, after failing Federal safety tests. In Mexico and Germany, both military and civilian variants continued to be produced until 1980. Years later, after the German army began selling off their old military 181s to the public, they became an economical mode of transportation. The era of enthusiastic Type 181 lovers had begun.



Some toy manufacturers introduced a VW 181 model to their product lines early on. In 1972, Wiking began producing them, followed by Aurora in the USA a year later. Throughout the 1970's and 80's, a multitude of models came on the market with one goal - to offer a fun car model which children could play with. The variety extended from simple plastic models made in Mexico to detailed die-cast models made in German and Italy. In the late 1990's, some manufacturers started making slightly pricier models that featured a display base and clear plastic show case. Minichamps and Miniroute being the most popular of these. Although nice for collectors, the play factor had been lost. More recently, manufacturers such as Kyosho, Matchbox and Hotwheels are now offering cheaper toys that children from the ages of 4 to 84 can enjoy!

The purpose of this book is to catalogue all of the VW Type 181 models that have been produced, both past and present. Is the list of models complete? Probably not, but with the help of the internet, manufactures and fellow collectors I hope to have the most comprehensive listing of Type 181 models available. Hopefully, this will be a never ending story.

Scale 1:64

Production: from 1973

USA

AFX Aurora

Back in the late 50's the Aurora company's design group developed some "Little Buzz Cars" to work with H.O. scale track. In developing these cars they studied real racing cars, and duplicated them into highly detailed miniature models. These were called "Aurora Factory Experimentals", or "AFX" as they are now known. The Aurora company made 4 different models. The body was a plastic cast which could be placed on an electric slot car base. Great fun!



1931 Blue

1931 Yellow

1936 Green roadster

1936 Brown roadster

Scale 1:28
Production: -
Mexico

ALSI

This is a very simple toy made of smooth plastic. It consisted of a one-piece body and a baseplate with incorporated bumpers and interior. This same model was made by Strombecker.

The company ALSI industrias still exists today as a manufacturer of plastic toys.



This model is also available in other colors but more information about those models are unknown.



Scale 1:55
Production: 1980's
Brasil

Brinquedos Rei

In the 80's this Brazilian maker bought the old Siku molding material and produced models in various rather strange color combinations. A look at the baseplate clearly states that the models come from Brazil. It is interesting that Brinquedos Rei never made the Feuerwehr version as Siku did.

Although made in large numbers, these models are not that easy to find.



1032 topless car
1332 Military green
1333 Beach Buggy (with boat)

Scale 1:87
Production: -
Germany

C & D

The C&D Exclusiv series was issued by the Herpa chairmen Claus and Dieter Wagener, and were available from the late 1970s until the mid 1980s. They copied models from Herpa, Wiking and Eko. One of these models was a VW 181.

The body, chassis and interior were made in sterling silver and were of a very high quality. Upon request they could make a model in gold or with diamonds in the headlights.

no picture found

1280 VW 181

Scale 1:102
Production: 1977
Hong Kong

Crown Toys

A few years after the Ferrero company launched its “Chocolat Surprise Egg”, they offered a range of 29 different little cars within their eggs. Those were all copies of existing Wiking models. They were made smaller to fit inside the eggs (or to avoid a lawsuit?).

One of them was a VW 181 and is a hard to find item.



**Only available in green with
grey interior.**

Scale 1:12
Production: -
USA

Durant plastics

This model seems to be the same as those from Impala, and is the largest 181 toy available. The baseplate gives some details about the manufacturer, but no further information about this model.



Scale 1:70

Production: 1973-1979

Germany

Faller Hitcar

A product of the seventies, and a real toy for the kids. The Faller Hitcar system was only available for a very short period of time. Faller made them in orange and green.

These models suffered a lot while using them on the track. The axles are very weak and are often bent from use.

In Greece Kibi launched the orange Hitcar.

In Czechoslovakia the model was reproduced until the late eighties by a company named Sluzba. Other colors and wheels were used.

On all models "Faller Hitcar" was written on the base plate.



Faller:

3442 Green

3442 Orange

Kibi:

3442 Orange

Sluzba vdi:

Red

Lightgreen

Blue

(interior could be white or black)



Scale 1:16
Production: 1975
USA

Gay Toys inc.

This American model was made by Gay Toys. Gay in the meaning of "happy". Today such a company name would have another meaning.

These plastic models were made in the seventies, and are very good looking. A solid car which was meant to be played with. That's probably why these have become quite rare. The company still exists today under the name American Plastic Toys Inc.



Only 3 colors known:

White
Blue
Orange



Scale 1:15
Production: -
Hong Kong

H.C.

The only VW Type 181 toy with battery operated movement. As far as I know only two versions exist. A military vehicle with a gun mounted in the rear, and a red VW "Thing" with the convertible top up. The designers must have had quite an imagination, but they made a nice toy in the end.

The box looks like it comes straight from the seventies, but I suspect that these models are from a more recent production date. Hard to find!



No 978F military
Red

Scale 1:64
Production: 2009
USA

Hotwheels

Finally! A superb Hotwheels version. Although the beige color is a bit dull, the custom rims and raised convertible top give it a nice appearance.



N4020 Beige

N4020 Orange

Scale 1:35
Production: -
Austria

H.S.V.

This one is made for a modeler. The only VW Type 181 model in this scale. It comes in a vacuum kit, and some modeling skills are needed to transform it in a decent show case model.

HSV, which stands for 'Heeres Spezial Vacu', specialized in making models of Austrian army vehicles. These are still available.



Kit 1:35 in white molded plastic



Scale 1:55
Production: 1976
USA

Ideal

Made by Ideal (Hollis N.Y.) in Macao, this very attractive model has a motorized mechanism, and is not that easy to find.

Instructions on the blister pack state:
"To make vehicle go, place hand on Micro Mighty Mo. Press down and give a slow steady push forward. Now watch it go... not fast, but far...under its own power."

Personally, I love this 181 model the most.



No. 4262-2 Dune Digger

Scale 1:12
Production: -
Mexico

Impala SA

Impala SA Made exclusively for The Thing Shop in Chandler, Arizona these models are still available. They are quite large, and if you collect them all they will cover a table top! Constructed of smooth plastic they feature a one-piece body, a base plate (with incorporated bumpers and interior) and a removable top



5 different colors:

Orange
Green
Red
White
Yellow

with black or white roof



an Impala 1:28 ?

The same molds were used by Durant plastics (USA).

Scale 1:64 and 1:24
Production: 2007
USA

Jada Toys

These models must be every purists nightmare. The "V-Dub Collection" from Jada Toys appeals to younger collectors with a lowered body, custom rims and surfboards. The overall scale seems to be incorrect as well. The models are larger than the scale indicates.

The 1:24 scale models have moving parts: hoods, decklids and doors can be opened.



1:64
#12062 Yellow
#12062 Beige

1:24
#91040 Green
#91042 Yellow
#91042 Red
#91042 Orange
#91042 Green
#91042 Black
#91042 Grey



Scale 1:64

Production: 1996-2000

USA

Johnny Lightning

Playing Mantis re-introduced the Johnny Lightning brand in 1994. In 2004, RC2 Corporation purchased Playing Mantis, and continues to produce Johnny Lightning cars.

These models have a long front hood which gives them an awkward appearance. Nevertheless, they are a decent diecast model and are a truly colorful bunch!

Special edition orange
Special edition yellow
Surfin' supremes
Classic Gold acapulco
Luv Thing yellow
Luv Thing pink
Promo edition flames
Beaver automotive



Scale 1:87
Production: -
USA

Kaval

This model is cast in fine pewter. A modern method of production called "centrifugal casting" employs the use of rubber molds to produce the final product. A Wiking model was used to make the original rubber mold.



Model #6 top down
Model #? top up



Scale 1:64
Production: 2008
Japan

Kyosho

The Kyosho Volkswagen Series is a small, but very detailed model. The models have European style taillights, and come in a little cardboard box with plastic display base and cover. I consider these the best model made in this scale. Although new on the market, it is a rare model.



White
Green
Orange

Scale 1:80
Production: 1976
Japan

Little

The plastic cast of this toy is a crude copy of the Wiking model with lowered bumpers. The wheels and interior of the car were kept very simple.

Very rare!



No 13 Green

No 13 Blue



Scale 1:64

Production: 2008 -2009

USA

Matchbox

After quite some time Matchbox has finally released a VW 181 model. This is clearly a "Thing" with the large U.S. tail lights and large front turn indicators. The cast is not that bad, but Kyosho (which released its model around the same time) is more accurate to the actual vehicle.



Widely available in the yellow and blue color, the green version can be found in the ten-pack.



2008 Yellow

Green

2009 Light blue

Orange

Scale 1:200
Production: -
Germany

Mercator

Not much is known about this German manufacturer. They specialized in models of ships and military vehicles. This car is made entirely of metal. By agreement with Mercator, Skytrex (UK) now produces Mercator 1:200 armor and 1:1250 ships exclusively.

Suffice it say that these are extremely rare.

green



Scale 1:12
Production: -
Portugal

Mesquita & Pereira

This model seems to be the same as those made by Durant and Impala, but there are a few differences. Smaller turn indicators on the front fenders, thinner headlights, different wheels and a license plate sticker with "PM" on it.



Offered in a multitude of color combinations.

Blue
Yellow
Green
Orange
Pink
...



Scale 1:43
Production: 2002-2009
Germany

Minichamps

These are very detailed models. Unfortunately, Minichamps keeps using the military version for their models. The civilian version would be a welcome addition to their model line.

The DBP (Deutsche Bundes Post) was sold exclusively in German post offices, and is now the most sought after Minichamps 181 version.



430050030 Orange
4032 pcs.

430050031 Bundeswehr
4032 pcs.

430050090 Feuerwehr
1584 pcs.

Xxxxxxxxxx DBP
1584 pcs.

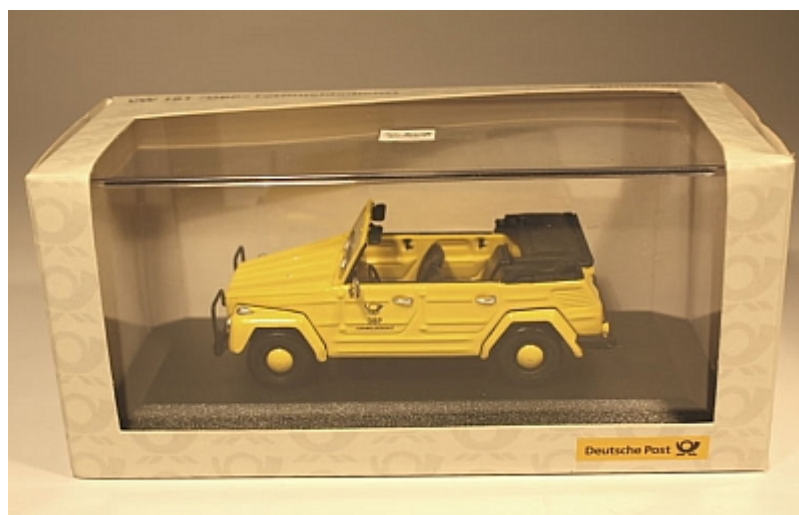
430050091 THW
1200 pcs.

430050092 Zivilschutz
1008 pcs.

430050034 Zebra
1008 pcs.

430050094 Bundeswehr
1008 pcs.

430050035 Beige





Scale 1:43
Production: -
France

Miniroute

This French manufacturer made some nice models of the VW 181. These were handpainted and are very rare. Because of its limited production, prices are quite high.



- No 34 Orange
- No 34 Green
- No 34 Beige
- No 34FD Bundeswehr
- No 34FF Pompiers Grimaud
- No 34MD Kakhi



Scale 1:43
Production: 1993
Germany

Monofe

Not much is known about this German manufacturer. The founder is a certain Mr. Lang, family of the owner of Minichamps.

The kit comes in two versions. The only difference between the two are the engine vents at the rear of the car louvres for the older version and large air intakes for the newer version. Both kits consist of 25 parts (excluding screws). The only parts that are not made of metal are the tires, light lenses and windshield.



The Monofe model looks to be a crude copy of the older Polistil model.

Version 1
Version 2

Scale 1:220

Production: 1984-1990

Germany

Noch

Perhaps the smallest 181 model ever made. This is a very nice model constructed of solid plastic. It features painted details on the convertible top, tires, lights and bumpers. The cars were made as accessories for Spur Z railway, and were available in different colors, with either a grey or brown top.

#4729

White

Yellow

Creme

Blue



Scale 1:43
Production: 1978
Italy

Polistil

Pescaccia (the Italian name for the type 181) was a very good diecast model.

In its first year this model had no glazing, and fixed doors. From 1979 on the front doors could be opened and glazing was added. Also, the first models did not have clear lenses for the front lights, but those were added to the later models. Some models had a roof rack with luggage while others had a spare wheel on their hoods. Production ended in the mid 1980s.



Various colors were available.

Red
Yellow
Beige
Blue
Blue metallic
Brown

The last models had black painted roofs.



Scale 1:87
Production: 2008
Germany

Schuco

Exclusively made for the 4MFOR military series from Märklin, these diecast models are detailed on a high level.

In earlier years Märklin used Wiking cars as model railway accessories. Apparently Märklin decided to relaunch the vw 181 model. Not a bad choice.

In 2009, Schuco start to sell some new models under the Schuco name.



4MFOR:
18705 Kurierwagen
18706 Feldjäger
18707 Feuerwehr
46957 on Transport

Schuco:
452561400 yellow
452561500 blue THW
452563400 set Ludolfs

Scale 1:55

Production: 1976-1982

Germany

Siku

The name SIKU originates from abbreviating the name of the founder of the company, Richard Sieper, and the German word for plastic, Kunststoffe. The first two digits of the model number designate the price range. Small cars traditionally have numbers that start with 10 or 13. The second two digits are the model numbers within each price range. The models came either in cardboard boxes or blister packs.

rare version:
Bundeswehr 'Der General'



Models came with different wheel types (R10 or R11). Newer models had plastic windshields instead of metal ones.



R10



R11

1032 Yellow

1332 Bundeswehr

1333 Beach Buggy (with boat)

1335 Feuerwehr



Scale 1:28
Production: -
USA

Strombecker

This was a very simple toy made of smooth plastic. It consisted of a one-piece body and a baseplate with incorporated bumpers and interior.



Blue with red interior
Red with blue interior

This model is also available in other colors but more information about these models are unknown.



Scale 1:87

Production: 1972-2004

Germany

Wiking

Wiking was the first company to produce a model of the VW 181.

The scale (HO) made these cars perfect as accessories for railway modeling. Over the years Wiking has built a nice catalogue of different 181s. Some of these models are currently very hard to find.

040 open version

12 colors, 1972-1984

040L Ladegut Roskopf

1972-1984

039 closed version

18 colors, 1978-1987

039A 10 Jahre automuseum

1994

040A Post (postmuseum)

1994

039A Post (automuseum°9)

1995

039A BSG (automuseum°9)

1995

691 THW

1990-1992

696 02 Fliegerhorst

1999-2000

039L Ladegut Märklin

2002

696 09 Camouflage

2000-2004

697 01 Militär Streife

2000-2001



In addition to the list above, there were a few other colors produced. These limited production models were only for color testing and never meant to be sold, but did find their way to the collectors

Scale

Production: -

Unknown

There are some models that I have no information on. A wide variety of Central and South American plastic toys do not indicate any manufacturer or production info. Many of these castings and molds look to be identical to other manufactures, but without any identification marks it is impossible to know the specifics.

plastic 1:28



The bronze key ring can be found in different variations, probably made by several different companies. All of these castings are clearly copied from the Wiking models.



The metal car was, without a doubt, made in limited numbers. Perhaps as a game piece for a strategy-based war game.



Bronze 1:87



Metal 1:200

Picture credits

Arthur Bidmon (Durant plastics, Gay toys, Ideal, Mercator, Miniroute, Noch, unknown)

Philippe Lanoire (Mesquita & Pereira)

Wyatt Davis (Johnny Lightning)

Thethingshop (Impala)

Kai Niedree (Siku - Der General)

Volker Vinzelberg (Brinquedos Rei)

Ulrich Eckstein (Impala)

Pieter-Jan Vanhaesebrouck (Alsi, HC, HSV, Ideal, Kyosho, Monofe, Polistil, cover, introduction, credits)



All other pictures were found on the internet.

Many thanks to:
Dr. Fabian Houchangnia, for his inspiration and support.

Mrs. and mr. Hatfield, for proof reading and correcting.