

1951 Mercury "Hirohata" Custom Coupe by George Barris

The '49 through '51 Mercs were some of the most beloved cars for customizers and hot rodders. Just think for a moment of the various movies in which customized Mercs were featured. If memory serves, one was *Rebel without a Cause*, along with a bunch of "drag strip" b-movies of the same ilk. Even Sly Stallone featured one in his movie, *Cobra*.



Perhaps it was the timeless lines of the cars. Similar to the Ford Customs, the Mercs seemed to have that extra little something. I suppose it was inevitable that the "King of the Customizers," George Barris, would work his magic on one. He chose not the '49 but the '51 on which to display his art. I've said before that I don't collect die casts of hot rods per se, but I make an exception when it comes to Mr. Barris's creations. He usually dials back on excess and ends up with a cleanly styled vehicle, as functional as it is beautiful. The Hirohata Merc is no exception. With its chopped roof and lowered suspension, this baby personifies *SLEEK*. Absolutely nothing seems to stick out too much, with a close-coupled, wind-cheating look that seems timeless. It has just the right amount of chrome, a "floating" grille, double searchlights, fender skirts, beautifully understated vertical taillights, chrome sweep spears on the sides, accentuating the low-slung stance, and sharp looking little "toothed" coves in front of the rear wheel wells. Even the two-toned pale green-over-dark green is tastefully understated. In fact, each of the styling features is so well integrated, not one seems to stand out on its own, each lending its small part to the whole.

As is to be expected, DM has done this classic beauty proud. They provide the usual working front and rear suspensions, scissors-style hood hinges (a DM trademark), exquisitely detailed, chromed-to-the-max, Cadillac OHV V-8, and removable spare tire, gas and oil cans. Three notable features are the tilt-out vent windows, what I suspect are faithfully replicated custom door hinges by Barris, and tilt-and-swivel searchlights that operate like the 1:1 items. DM also didn't stint on the interior details, faithfully detailing Barris's custom colors and styling touches. The undercarriage detailing is also above average. All window "glass" is crystal clear. This beauty is yet another reason to believe that DM is making a move to be the premier die cast mint in its price range. This kind of image can really get a collector's mouth to watering. If you have a place in your collection for tastefully done customs, this one's definitely a-ticket material. Heck, I'm signing up for the next in the George Barris Collection—the '60 Chevy "Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby."

Barris's Hirohata Merc is one of those images that makes you want to drive the 1:1 item to the local burger joint, pop the hood, and listen to the "oohs and aahs" of onlookers. If so, then the Hirohata Merc image by DM has worked its magic on you—and that's what this "little car" collecting thing's about.

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