

CMC 1:43-scale 1954 Mercedes-Benz Transporter—Part No. M-036K

You have to hand it to Mercedes-Benz. When they produced their W 196 and 300 SLR racecars, they also created a hand-built transporter to haul them to their racing venues. This isn't just any old truck either. With swoopy, art deco inspired bodywork—and painted in deep, Daimler-Benz blue—this carrier is as much of a standout as the cars it carries. The entire cab sits



forward of the *front* wheels, looking like it would tip forward onto its front bumper every time the brakes were applied. Its twin bucket seats are upholstered in Daimler-Benz plaid and the cab floor is fully carpeted. The 300 SLR, 192-bhp, six-cylinder engine sits aft of the cab and is accessed via a hatch cover on top. Printed on each rear fender is the message, “Max. Speed 105 m.p.h.” Imagine, a car-*hauler* that can do 105—just the thing for the Autobahn, heading to Nuerburgring for a fast weekend of racing. It wasn't long before this unique utility vehicle earned the nickname “blaus Wunder” (“Blue Wonder”). Though the original was retired at the end of the 1955 racing season—and was scrapped in 1967—Daimler-Benz resurrected it under the direction of the Mercedes-Benz Classic-Center. It required a great deal of painstaking handwork to re-fabricate its curved panels. The “Blue Wonder” was again presented to the public in 2001, during the 100-year company jubilee, at the Festival of Speed in Goodwood, South England.

CMC has made two versions of this carrier—one in 1:18 scale and one in 1:43 scale. I expect good detail in the larger scale but, for a 1:43 scale image, the level of detail is nothing short of amazing. As nice as Brooklin images are, this little beauty by CMC is gorgeous and—at \$79.95—it's \$10 less than most Brooklin images. It approaches the level of detail we find in 1:24 precision die casts. Here's the list: 1. 201 separate parts (73 of metal, 30 chromed, 27 photo-etched). 2. Steerable front wheels. 3. Motor hatch can be opened to show nicely detailed engine. 4. Good cockpit detail, with fabric covered seats and inner doors and “carpeted” floor. 5. Opening doors. 6. Suspension on right front wheel, with helical springs. 7. Suspensions on both rear wheels. 8. Polished stainless steel tracks with original hole pattern and eyes for lashing. 9. Mobile and mountable polished stainless steel loading ramps (4) with original hole pattern. 10. Spring-loaded binding hooks with metal buckles to secure loading ramps. 11. Dismountable support jacks for loading ramps that double as hold-down clamps for both spare tires. 12. All windows have “glass” in them. Now, that's an impressive list for so small an image. I have a couple of quibbles, however. As far as I can determine, the front wheels can't be steered, or positioned. The *steering wheel* can be turned but it has no effect on the front wheels whatsoever. Though the ramps are supposed to be removable (they can be) and mounted on those dismountable jacks. Now, I'm usually pretty good at assembling things and can usually follow a set of directions, but I found the instructions to be indecipherable, and couldn't work out any way to set them up. A couple of simple drawings would have helped immensely. CMC provides a pair of tweezers (called a pincette) and a silk polishing cloth in the packaging. It also comes with a hangtag, like FM models come with. The image is well packed in a molded Styrofoam box insert that's about the size you'd find for a 1:24 image. The outer box is nicely printed and includes

some graphics. An instruction sheet and an information folder are also included. All in all, there's a lot to like in this tiny image.

Among the things that appeal to me about European vehicles is that they're not constrained by American notions of form and style. European manufacturers have produced a lot of unusual cars and trucks, Mercedes-Benz being no exception. Back in the '30s, American manufacturers produced unusual cars and trucks based on art deco and streamlining principles but Europe continued the trend into the '40s, '50s, and '60s. The M-B "Blue Wonder" is one of those vehicles that flout convention yet makes you smile when you consider its charming "oddness."

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