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Diecast Report

Mercedes-Benz 500K Roadster

The 1934 500K Roadster was the sensuous car of a young boy's dreams.

There are classic cars, and then there are classic cars. But few are as desirable and as sleek as the brutally powerful 500K—and later 540K—built by Mercedes-Benz in the 1930s. Endowed with head-turning and superbly proportioned styling, impeccable engineering and breathtaking speed, the 500K was the stuff of young boys' dreams—and of many older boys and girls, too, especially the sensuous Special Roadster version, of which only 29 were built between 1934 and 1936.

Known officially as the Type W29, the 500K was a logical development of the 380 (3.8-liter/232ci) and 390 (3.9-liter/238ci) models of 1933 and 1935, respectively. The 500K had an engine displacing 5.018-liters or 306ci (cubic inches). The water-cooled, eight-cylinder, in-line motor had overhead valves operated by a gear-driven camshaft that was set in the side of the enormous block. And what about the suffix “K” in the 500K type designation? That stands for kompressor in German. It's the Roots-type double-lobe blower, or supercharger.

It was that piece of equipment that gave the car such awe-inspiring performance. The Roots supercharger cut in with the kick of a mule to boost power output from 100 to 160hp, rocketing the 500K to a maximum speed of 100mph. This was in an era when the magical figure of 60mph was regarded as the “sound barrier” for most cars. But even more exciting, while doing its thing, the blower emitted what's been described as a demonic shriek that was both exhilarating to the 500K's occupants and alarming to mere mortals watching and listening to the car's swift passage.

The engine was mated to a four-speed, overdrive gearbox with hydraulic brakes on all four wheels, an independ-



ent suspension with coil springs all round, double-wishbone front axle and a double-joint swing axle at the rear. The exotic suspension added exemplary handling and greater passenger comfort to what was already a very impressive handling package.

Over the past couple of years, diecast aficionados worldwide were gob-smacked when the Bauer Group of Nuremberg released magnificent replicas of two different examples of the mighty Bugatti Type 41 Royale in eye-popping 1/18. Now Bauer has raised its craftsmanship to another level with a superb replica of the 1934 Mercedes-Benz 500K Special Roadster in 1/12 #S018H.

Bauer Group has brought a wide range of materials together with the precision of a Swiss chronograph to create a unique masterpiece. Everywhere you look, this model oozes quality and class. From the artistically styled front bumpers ahead of an imposing radiator grille set back from the front axle centerline, huge headlamps, an elongated hood stretching into the next zip code, a meticulously equipped and detailed driving compartment with literally everything that opens and shuts and a dickey seat with fold-out lid all the way back to twin spare wheels, this vehicle was an amalgam of more than 1959 metal, glass, plastic, rubber and even leather components that produced a treat for the visual and tactile senses.

While the body color may appear black, it is actually a dark brown specially mixed for Bauer by Mercedes-Benz. Depending on lighting, the intensity of the color can vary between different shades of dark brown.



The fabric covered convertible top folds, but it requires gentle handling.

As you would expect, the centrally hinged hood, divided into two panels (one on each side), opens to reveal a credible replica of Mercedes-Benz pre-WWII engineering in a variety of materials, colors, shapes, thicknesses and sizes—the straight-eight motor, itself a work of art.



Left: Lifting the hood reveals the detail that is contained in the engine bay. Right: The door trim includes operating door latches and an opening map pocket.

The rear-hinged doors swing open upon deft manipulation of the dainty handles—both inside and out. Let your fingers luxuriate as you caress the grained leather on the door trim panels—with fold-out map pockets—as well as the opulent leather upholstery of the seats. Just ahead of the doors' leading edges and below the scuttle-mounted spot lamps are semaphore trafficators (turn indicators) that actually flip out.

The faithfully replicated cockpit is complete with full instrumentation—including opening glove-box lid, cranked-back gear shifter, pedals, windshield wiper motors, four-spoke steering wheel with horn ring and a realistically carpeted floor with tailored floor mats. The ventilation flaps just above the windshield can also be opened and shut using a nifty little cockpit lever.

Another standout feature is the folding top. Made from



a realistic fabric material, the roof should be opened and shut with great care, given the delicate and complex linkage of hinged bows to which it is attached. When in the folded-back position, the convertible top can be neatly encased in a multi-studded leather bag of a color matching the upholstery and door trim.

While all six wheels are removable, it must be noted that unlike Bauer's two Bugatti Royale 1/18 models, the body of the 500K Special Roadster cannot be separated from the chassis. But this is not much of an impediment to examining the details of the chassis, where you can clearly see the gearbox, front suspension wishbones, working coil springs, what appears to be a relatively slender tail shaft with flexible couplings at each end and the massive, agricultural-looking differential housing.

Undoubtedly, Bauer is carving a niche as a manufacturer of quality high-end, large-scale miniature motoring masterpieces—and deservedly so. This latest addition to the range, of which only 2,000 pieces have been released, will go a long way to enhancing that reputation. Bauer Group models are distributed by Minichamps North America. **HM**

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