COMPETITION GIVES DINKY ANOTHER FIRST

by Chris Jelley

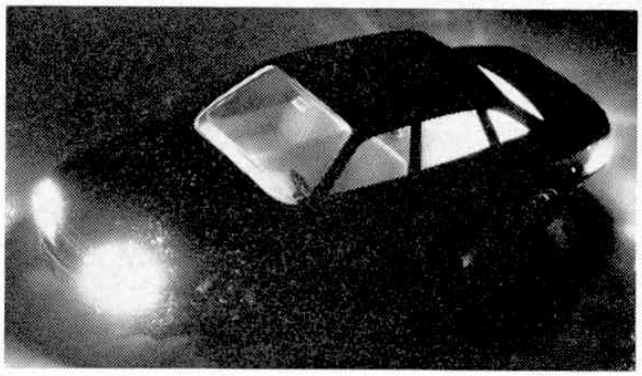
WHAT SINGLE factor would you say has been responsible for the highest number of improvements, advancements and inventions in the manufacturing side of industry, at least in the free world? If you can't guess, I can tell you—Competition.

It stands to reason, doesn't it? Without competition, a manufacturer has an easy time of it. Provided he markets a reasonable product that sells reasonably well, he can go on turning out the same old thing year after year with nothing to trouble him. Introduce competition, however, and the whole position changes overnight. If you have several different companies producing the same type of product, then each one of those companies will do its utmost to make the best possible version of the product and it will go on trying to improve the product even further, to enable it to stay ahead of its competitors. From the manufacturer's point of view this can involve a great deal of work and expense, but it certainly means that the customer is on the winning side, no matter which company is on top.

A prime example of the way competition has improved a product beyond all recognition lies in the die-cast model business. Dinky Toys, for example, were the first mass-produced die-casts in this country. From 1934 until the last war and for years after the war they had a monopoly. There was no competition, and in the whole of that time Dinkys hardly progressed at all, remaining little more than body castings with baseplates, axles and wheels. Nowadays, however, there are several companies throughout the world making similar-type die-casts and all of them competing with each other for a share of the market with the result that the models produced have improved beyond all recognition. After a couple of decades of those rough-and-ready models, for example, Dinky have taken only a fraction of the time to introduce to their models such things as windows, suspension, interior fittings, steering, opening bonnets, boots and doors, tipping seats, jewelled head and tail lamps—even working trafficators and brake lights—and many of these things before any other competing manufacturer!

Undoubtedly, the list of Dinky Toy successes is long and impressive, so much so, in fact, that you might well think that they had reached the limit of what it is possible to do with a model so small as a Dinky Toy. If you believe this, though, you've a surprise coming because Meccano have just released another superb creation with not one, but two features entirely new to Dinky Toys and one of which has never before appeared on any similar die-cast model—head and tail lamps that really light and luminous seats!

Model No. 176, based on the German N.S.U. Ro 80, will go down in history as being the first Dinky Toy to be equipped with both these features, and a really splendid model it is, too. Even before I tested the lighting, though, I was impressed by the clear-cut casting which seems to include much more than ordinary detail, and this despite the fact that the model does not sport any "opening" features such as bonnet and boot lids, etc. I was also immediately struck by the beautifully-rich colour-scheme of deep burgundy which, thanks to the special spraying process used in the manufacture of the model, reflects the light so well that you would think it had actually been polished!



This is not a case of trick photography but is a genuine photograph, taken in the dark, and showing the Dinky N.S.U. Ro 80 with its head and tail lamps on. Note the luminous glow from the seats which gives the impression that an interior courtesy light is fitted to the model.

However, the things which really set the model apart are, of course, the new features, yet, strangely enough, these are not even evident at first glance. The head and tail lamps, for example, are so well designed that they look no more than the almost-normal "glass" lamps with which many Dinky Toys have been fitted in the past two or three years. It is not until you press the model down on its well-sprung suspension that the lights flash into life, powered by a Vidor V16 or equivalent battery that slots into a cavity built into the base. Incidentally, the Dinky has a strong advantage over other models fitted with working lights in that the lights are so bright that they can be readily seen in daylight. It also has the advantage over real cars of having separate switches for the head and tail lamps, the headlamps being brought into operation by pressing down the front of the model, and the tail lamps by presing down on the back. This system allows the headlamps to be flashed on and off just like a real car, while the rear lamps can be used as brake lights when stopping. For night driving, both the head and tail lamps can be illuminated simultaneously by pressing the front and the back down together. The battery by the way is not sold with the model because of storage difficulties.

Although rare, working head and tail lamps on models are not unique, but, to the best of my knowledge, the luminous seats incorporated in the Dinky are entirely new. When viewed in darkness or even semi-darkness their effect is startling, glowing as they do with an eerie greenish-white light which illuminates the whole of the car interior to give the impression that the model is fitted with an interior courtesy light. In fact, it is amazing how much light they do give off —enough to make it almost impossible for the Dinky to be lost in the dark. In broad daylight, the seats appear a normal off-white colour, set off by a black steering wheel and all enclosed by the usual window moulding, incorporating rear-view mirror and windscreen wiper representations. German-style number plates are present at front and rear to add to the already impressive authenticity of the model.