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REINVENTING THE WHEEL *The latest car technology*

Model Cars Ride Again

■ **What It Is:** Customizable model cars that can entertain a child as well as spruce up a cubicle might be this season's all-ages holiday hit. These toys could bring back the old-fashioned enjoyment of model building, an activity that is increasingly scarce in these videogame times.

■ **How to Get It:** RideMakerz scales down car customizing for Mini Cooper, Ford, Dodge and Scion models. Car fans (age 6 and up) begin with a basic frame, then proceed to sort through choices like remote radio control, "wheelz" (in the company's lingo), "soundz" (revving, sirens, music) and "treadz" (tires). Playful custom options include street glow kits (under-carriage lights; \$10), hood scoops (air vents that add performance; \$2.50) and a hot rod kit (including chrome muffler and black spoiler; \$12.50). Automoblox offers souped-up versions of old-fashioned wood cars for collectors age 3 and up. Several models include sedan, sport utility or sports car with snap-on interchangeable wooden and plastic parts. Automoblox markets its pieces as "heirloom toys";

similar to real-life cars for adults, the models are tested for durability, crash impact and scratch resistance. XMODS's radio-controlled models include Transformers from the 2007 movie, such as Autobot Bumblebee (as a Chevy Camaro) and Decepticon Barricade (as a Ford Mustang police car). Accessories include a weapons kit (\$10 for missile



Customized toy **Mini Cooper**

launchers) and drifting kits that allow cars to move sideways (\$0.97). Revell's RPHMZ radio-controlled racing car comes with options for multiple surface conditions, like waxed floors or cement. Models include the Nascar racing Chevy Monte Carlo and Nascar Ford Taurus and have adjustable pinion gears and suspension for control and acceleration, two motors and two sets of tires.

■ **Upside:** Whether they skitter about the floor or sit on a bookshelf, toy cars have enduring mass appeal. Through Dec. 31, consumers can donate a customizable RideMakerz Mini Cooper to the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. See ridemakerz.com/mini for details.

■ **Downside:** As with most toys, parents with small children should watch for moving and removable parts. And adults who grew up with iconic Hot Wheels might be disappointed with car doors and hoods that don't open.

■ **Cost:** The base RideMakerz frames range from \$12 to \$25, without any add-ons. Gift cards and ready-made models (\$20 to \$50) are available at the company's online shop, <http://www.ridemakerz.com/shop/>. Automoblox (\$34.99, mini-cars are \$7.99) are sold at FAO Schwartz and at the company's online store, <http://www.automobloxstore.com/>. XMODS radio-controlled Transformers editions are on sale for \$30 at RadioShack.com. Revell's RPHMZ run \$80 on their site (<http://www.revell.com/>); they also are sold at Wal-Mart.

—Elva Ramirez