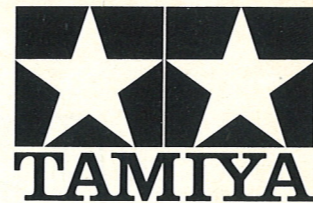


FACTORY VISIT



I wonder if in years to come their will be collectors of 1/10th and 1/12th cars as there are today collectors of *Dinky* toys and *Wedgewood* ceramics?

I have already heard of enthusiasts looking for new *Tamiya* 'Rough Rider's and 'Cheetah's' on only the 11th anniversary of *Tamiya* entering the mass R/C market. If obsolete kits are already being collected what will be the going rate in 10 or 20 years time? Last year was the 10th anniversary of *Tamiya*'s entry to the R/C car world, so it seemed appropriate that the occasion should not pass without some comment.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the success of 1/10th R/C cars in the UK owes a lot to the *Tamiya* company and their UK distributor *RIKO*. Without the prodigious output of the *Tamiya* factory and the energetic efforts of *RIKO* in marketing the kits in the UK I suspect that the 1/10th scene in this country would be a lot less dynamic and competitive.

You only need look at countries such as France, where on a recent visit I found it difficult to find any *Tamiya* kits even in dedicated model shops to realise that the success of this sort of business does not come without some considerable effort.

Not that *RIKO* or the other importers are philanthropic organisations, this is big business and the UK represents probably the largest market for 1/10th cars after Japan and the USA. Having said that, it is good to see *RIKO* investing resources to support 1/10th racing around the country.

In the beginning

The man who started it all, Yoshio Tamiya was born 82 years ago in Shinzuoka City, where to this day the *Tamiya* factories still produce kits for world-wide distribution. The company is today run by Shunsaka Tamiya son of Yoshio.

Tamiya have not always been in the model business. Before the last war the company had a thriving transport and bus company, but the war years destroyed all of that and at the end of hostilities the company was rebuilt, concentrating on

The Tamiya Co. Ltd can rightly claim to be the most prolific producers of R/C car kits in the world. Geoff Driver takes a closer look

timber products for the building industry. The demand was high and the company prospered. During this time another member of the *Tamiya* family, Fumiwaka Tamiya had a go at producing some wooden models which were the foundations of everything we see today.

After a disastrous fire the company once again had to start from scratch, although this time the wooden model activities were beginning to represent a significant part of the business, the first kit being a Sherman Tank.

It was from the success of this model that the decision was taken to go to model kit manufacture. Soon after Shunsaka Tamiya joined the factory in 1958 the first moves were made towards plastic model production.

The reputation of *Tamiya* products are in the main built on the accuracy and quality of the scale model kit business. This attention to detail is carried through into every product that the company makes. As the years go by it seems that it would be impossible for *Tamiya* to improve further. However, with the release of each new model, be it for R/C or scale modelling, the attention to detail and quality of production goes from strength to strength.

Tamiya are also renowned for another aspect of their kits and that is the presentation. Instructions and box art, in this area *Tamiya* are second to none, and now set the standard that other manufacturers try to emulate. The responsibility of the artwork is down to another *Tamiya* brother. He is in charge of the art department where

they usually take about one month just to do the original box artwork for a new 1/10th kit.

Although most readers of this article are likely to be 1/10th enthusiasts Shunsaka Tamiya admits to having a weak spot for things military and to this day probably the greatest output of the factory are the scale military models be they aircraft, vehicles or ships.

During the last ten years we have seen vehicles ranging from the beautifully detailed 'Cheetah', more of an R/C controlled scale model, to the start of competitive 1/10th Off-Roaders with the 'Rough Rider' and its derivatives. Also the budget priced 'Holiday Buggy', the sophisticated 'Toyota Hi-Lux' with a mechanical gearshift and 2/4 wheel drive options and most recent a new range of 1/12th on/off road-racers starting with the 'Porsche 956.'

Although *Tamiya* cannot take the credit for all the developments in this hobby they can say, quite justifiably that they continuously try to improve their models as they move from kit to kit. They maintain extremely high standards of production quality which is even more surprising

when you realise that they have something like 600 sub-contractors doing moulding and engineering work for them.

A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to visit the *Tamiya* factory and meet Shunsaku Tamiya (how about that for name-dropping). The headquarters building in Shinzuoka City houses the design and drawing office, prototype engineering and development departments, together with some production facilities.

The building is an impressive one with a very large entrance hall in which can be found some of the full-size versions of the kits. Sometimes of course it is not possible to buy the real thing to use as reference for model-making. So apart from manufacturers drawings and photographs the company engineers travel all over the world to take their own measurements and photographs. Of course it is not just a matter of producing the engineering drawings of a model, the plastic parts are produced on sprues and the metal parts may need to be die-cast or machined and as such engineering drawings and specifications must be produced.

The decision to produce a new car is not taken lightly. The tooling costs are enormous and many people are involved, ranging from the engineers and designers to the marketing experts. There is little point in producing even the finest

engineered kits if no one wants to buy your product. The final go-ahead to produce a model is given by Shunsaka Tamiya, but ideas come from all over the world, in fact one of the most successful R/C kits was suggested by the UK importers, *RIKO*.

Like most manufacturing companies *Tamiya* keep a wary eye on the competition. I noticed whilst walking around the factory, R/C kits made by all the leading Japanese producers. These are used to find out what is happening in the factories of the opposition, in much the same way as full-size manufacturers buy in vehicles from other makers.

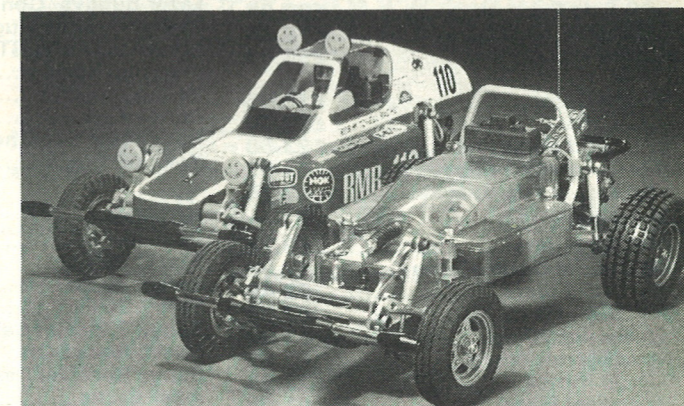
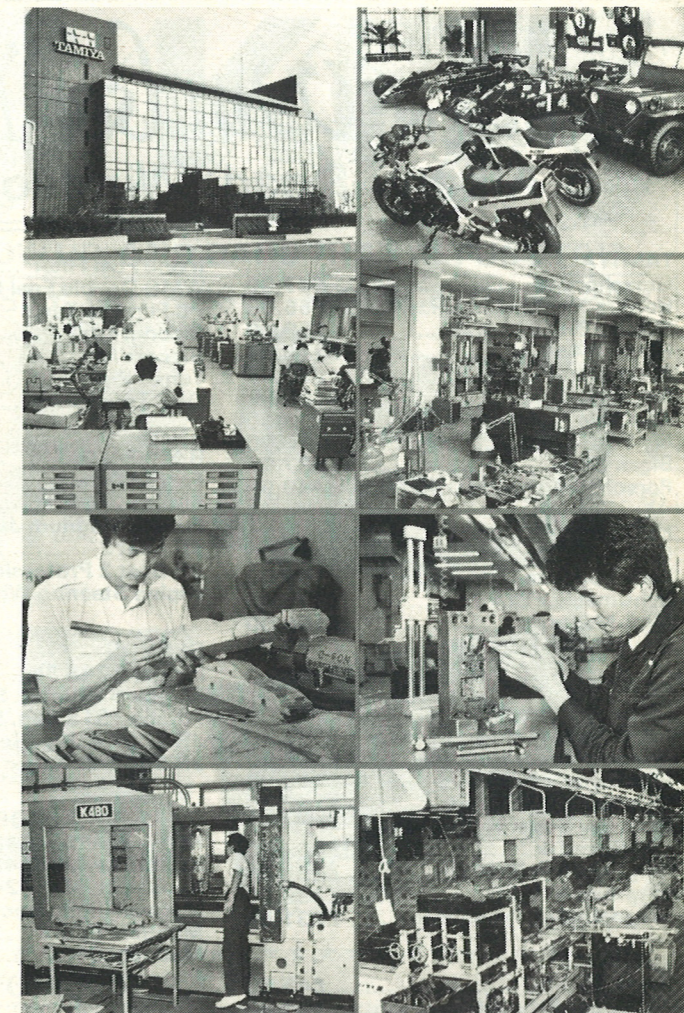
However pride of place in the Cathedral-like entrance hall of the headquarters building is a display of the companies own products, both R/C and static.

All of the component parts of the kits come together in the packaging plant where the boxes are filled and checked automatically. From here the kits are dispatched to sixty-five countries around the world. With this sort of market it is easy to forget that the Japanese home market is still the largest consumer of *Tamiya* products.

To promote home sales *Tamiya* sponsor a 30-minute TV programme each week showing R/C racing and displaying the latest products.

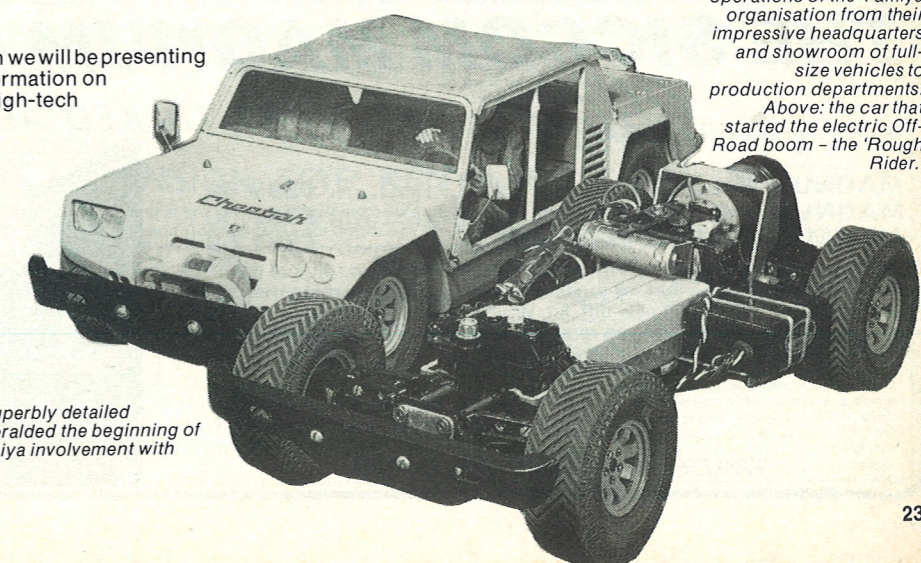
Another facility provided by *Tamiya* to further 1/10th and 1/12th R/C racing is a permanent track a few hundred metres from the headquarters building. Apart from organising weekend competitions and allowing local R/C enthusiasts free use, it is also used as a test facility for all new products.

In producing even a short article on a single company, it is very easy to write what must appear to be a lengthy advertisement. It was not my intention to eulogise over *Tamiya*, but there is no doubt that the company is incredibly successful. In my opinion the success is due to the uncompromising quality of the product, the enthusiasm of the staff and the careful choice of models.



Top panel: various operations of the *Tamiya* organisation from their impressive headquarters and showroom of full-size vehicles to production departments. Above: the car that started the electric Off-Road boom - the 'Rough Rider.'

Next month we will be presenting further information on *Tamiya*'s high-tech operation.



Right: the superbly detailed 'Cheetah' heralded the beginning of serious *Tamiya* involvement with R/C cars.

PORSCHE

turbo RSR TYPE 934

1/12th SCALE RACING CAR SUITABLE FOR RADIO CONTROL

READY TO ASSEMBLE MODEL KIT 1/12th PRECISE SCALE TWO FORWARD AND ONE REVERSE SPEED CONTROL COIL SPRING REAR SUSPENSION SYSTEM POWER TRAIN INCLUDES A MOTOR & GEAR BOX WITH DIFFERENTIAL GEAR

ラジオコントロールカー 電動
ポルシェターボRSR

使用ラジオコントロールカーキット
2/4駆動、ターボエンジン搭載、フロントディスクブレーキ、
コイルバネリアールサスペンションシステム、電動モーター
駆動の動力系、両方向の前進と逆進が可能、2速のギアボックス、
ラジオコントロールカーキットには含まれません。

- ・フロントディスクブレーキシステム
- ・コイルバネリアールサスペンションシステム
- ・両方向の前進と逆進が可能
- ・2速のギアボックス

Right: *Tamiya*'s first venture into radio control car kit production was the 1/12th scale 'Porsche turbo RSR Type 934.'