

Wanted: Soviet cars

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Vadim has lots of toy cars on what looks like the living room wall. They are in two wooden boxes filled with shelves and have the look of a museum exhibit dedicated to “this is what I played with when I was a lad.”

But that bit is not true.

“No, nobody plays with them,” Vadim said, sounding flabbergasted at the idea. “It’s a collection.”

The collection is up for sale on the classified web site Izrukvruki and the Russian eBay, Molotok.ru, but nobody seems to be buying quite yet. He was trying to sell an old police car for 5,000 rubles (\$180), but it is still up for sale.

“It’s rare because it still has a migalka [flashing blue light] on it,” Vadim said. “That usually comes off.”

Toy — or rather model — cars are one of those collections that inspires that certain degree of

fetishism that a good collector always has.

There are lots of different models — not just your ordinary Ladas, Pobedas and other Soviet cars, but a whole spectrum of fire engines, ambulances, trolleybuses and even hearses. And they often come in hundreds of different models that all need to be collected.

One of the more interesting models is the VAZ factory Lada that was issued — hopefully only in toy form — with a large image of the 1980 Olympic mascot Misha the bear on the hood of the car.

There were also Soviet limousines, scrupulously copied at a 1-43 ratio, which have fake wedding rings on top of the roof.

One American collector/seller has pages and pages of Soviet cars for sale complete with photos of every different model and loving descriptions.

“First passenger car of the U.S.S.R. This model is one of the hardest to find of factory models. Only 500 or so were produced in the 1970-80s. All feature two opening doors. Some have different tires,” he writes about one.

The models go back to the NAMI, one of the first passenger cars produced by the new Bolshevik state in the late 1920s.

Some of the cars are pictured with their original boxes. On one, you can see that the company is based on Ulitsa Lenina in the city of Marx. Just as you can still see the boxy Soviet cars around town today, you can also still visit the city of Marx, too. It’s in the Saratov region and has not changed its name.

Vadim’s collection began with his dad who was based in Germany, and Vadim continued it for awhile until he decided to sell.

“It doesn’t fit in with the room anymore,” he said, embarrassed to be discussing interior decoration with a stranger he had only picked up the phone to a few minutes before. “It did before, but not anymore.”

So you’re redecorated then?

“Times have changed,” he said, somewhat exasperated.

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