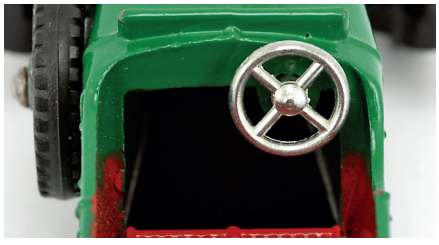
Steering Wheels

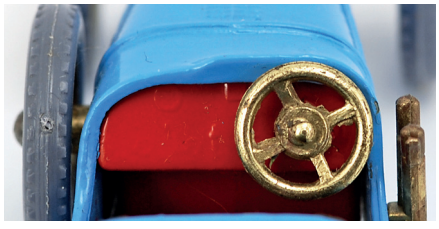
Yesteryear steering wheels in particular offer a variety of versions. Due to their various details and dimensions it is necessary to describe and to catalogue them.

For the sake of clarity, we have divided steering wheels into three basic types: MS – 'Metal Short'; ML – 'Metal Long' and P – 'Plastic'. Individual steering wheel types are numbered, e.g. MS1 for the Y-5A Bentley or ML2 for the first steering wheel made for the Y-15A Rolls-Royce.

THE FIRST SEPARATE STEERING WHEEL created for a Matchbox model was the MS1, designed for the Y-5A Bentley.



THE FIRST STANDARDISED STEERING WHEEL used for more models was the MS2-type. The variation MS2a was mounted as a brass plated part on the Y-6B Bugatti.



THE MS2b STEERING WHEEL VARIATION for the Y-5B 4½ Bentley was given a shiny silver metal finish.

THE SUBTLE MS3-TYPE STEERING wheel was originally designed for the Y-10B Mercedes-Benz 36/220, but was later used on other models.

Metal short steering wheels

The oldest steering wheels were primitive castings with no spokes. The main body of the Y-1A Allchin and the common parts of the steering wheel with a driver for the Y-2A London Bus and the Y-6A Lorry were cast in moulds that sprang from the side of the steering wheel. Since these steering wheels did not constitute separate parts, we have not used a special designation for them.

The first separate steering wheels were created individually for each Yesteryear model. This applies to all the short metallic steering wheels, which enjoyed the shortest production period. They were produced between 1957 and 1968 and mounted on four models in the following order: Y-5A Bentley, Y-6B Bugatti, Y-5B 4½ Litre Bentley and Y-10B Mercedes-Benz 36/220. To speed up production, steering wheels of a single type were cast in several mould inserts simultaneously, leading to minor differences between the castings. However, these are not considered as variants.

MS1-type

Production of the oldest separate steering wheel in the Yesteryear range began in 1957 for the Y-5A Bentley. Its diameter is only 7.5 mm, making it the smallest separate steering wheel in the series. The short steering column is attached directly to the dashboard. The MS1-type was mounted only on the Y-5A Le Mans Bentley; it was silver-plated in the standard version and on very rare variants it was painted in the same green colour as the body.

MS2-type

This steering wheel features an 'ignition control knob' jutting out clearly from the centre, similar to that which had graced the Y-15A Rolls-Royce a year previously. The MS2 type was first mounted on the Y-6B Bugatti and later on the Y-5B 4½ litre Bentley.

Like the type that followed it, the MS3, it has a diameter of 8.5 mm. For the Y-6B Bugatti, the surface of the MS2a variation was brass-plated, while for the Y-5B 4½ L Bentley, the MSb was silver-plated. There are minor differences in MS2 steering wheel castings, which suggest that the individual inserts of the moulds were created separately.

MS3-type

The last type of short metal steering wheel with a diameter of 8.5 mm is characterized by its long spokes that extend as far as the small knob which looks like the cover of a nut holding the wheel secure. The smaller column steering wheel ML5 for the Y-2B Renault is similar in appearance.

The MS3 was originally manufactured for the Y-10B Mercedes 36/220. MS3s were later fitted to the last Y-5B Bentley issues, after the dies for the MS2 steering wheel had worn down.

Metal steering wheels on a column

Long metal steering wheels were produced by Lesney between 1958 and 1971. Development on them stopped, however, in 1966.

Long steering wheels were assembled from two parts. The steering wheel itself was cast from zinc alloy. After that, it was plated and pressed onto a steel spindle, which had a rivet-shaped head at the base. The spindle was threaded through a hole in the floor and held firm by the baseplate. Painted long steering wheels were mostly sprayed with the model body in a paint shop.

Long metal steering wheels were gradually fitted to nine Yesteryears: the Y-1B Ford T, Y-2B Renault, Y-3B Benz, Y-7B Mercer, Y-10A GP Mercedes, Y-11B Packard Landaulet, Y-14B Maxwell, Y-15A Rolls -Royce and the Y-16A Spyker. The GP Mercedes, the early Mercer and Packard Landaulet steering wheels were brass-plated, while the rest were painted along with the body. The painted steering wheels appear thicker than the brass-plated ones because of the layer of paint.

TRULY THE GREATEST PARADISE FOR COLLECTORS OF RARE 'MISPRINTS' IS NOT STAMP-COLLECTING, BUT YESTERYEAR MODELS. This Y-2B Renault somehow received a Y-15A Rolls-Royce steering wheel during assembly in the Lesney workshops, and so the rare Y-2B/4 variation was created.

ML1-type

The first two-part steering wheel was created by Lesney's designers in 1958 for the Y-10A GP Mercedes. Its 9.6 mm diameter makes it the largest ever metal steering wheel in the Yesteryear series.

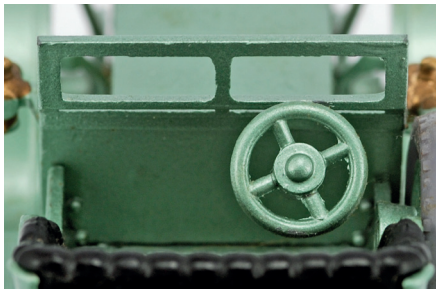
The ML1-type consists of a zinc alloy steering wheel and a long steel column. The hub of this wheel is slightly wider than the domed centre on its top. The Mercedes GP steering wheel was not used for any other model.

THE ML1 STEERING WHEEL with its long column was fitted only to the Y-10A GP Mercedes.

ML2-type

This long metal steering wheel has a diameter of 8.5 mm. A novelty of the ML2 type was a knob in the centre reminiscent of a Rolls-Royce ignition control. In fact, on real Silver Ghosts from this period, there was merely a nut to hold the wheel securely in the middle.

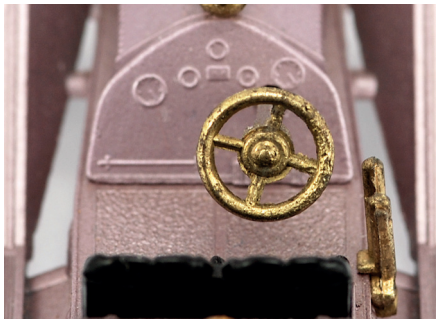
The ML2 steering wheel was originally meant for the Y-15A Rolls-Royce, but due to supply errors it ended up on several other models as well. When the ML2 was withdrawn, newer standardised steering wheel types were fitted to the newer versions of the Y-15A Rolls-Royce and other models.



THE FIRST Y-15A ROLLS-ROYCE STEERING WHEEL was the unique ML2-type. The knob in its centre does not represent a 'horn' button but a Rolls-Royce ignition control. However, such a control was indeed mounted on later versions of the real Rolls-Royce cars.

ML3-type

Unique steering wheels with two concentric projections were mounted on the first variants of the Y-7B Mercer. Some collectors mistakenly believe they are identical to the ML4 of the Y-16A Spyker. However, the Mercer's ML3 steering wheel is only 8.5 mm wide and its hub is different. The ML3 type occasionally appears on the oldest version of the Y-11B Packard Landaulet as well.

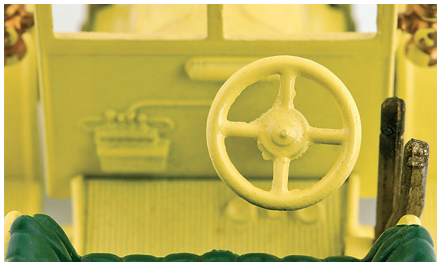


THE OLDEST CASTINGS OF THE ML3 steering wheel mounted mostly on the Y-7B Mercer were often defective.

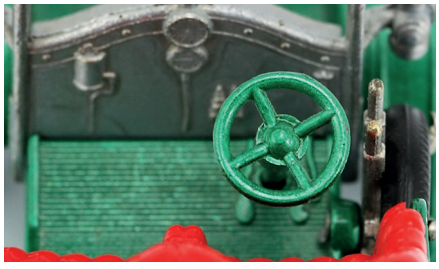
THE ML4a STEERING WHEELS of the first Spykers were a different shape from the others, and also had a larger diameter.

SOME ML4a STEERING WHEELS WERE ALSO PRODUCED NOT PAINTED BUT BARE METAL OR BRASS PLATED. This scarce M4b variation was on rare occasions mounted on the Y-11B Packard.

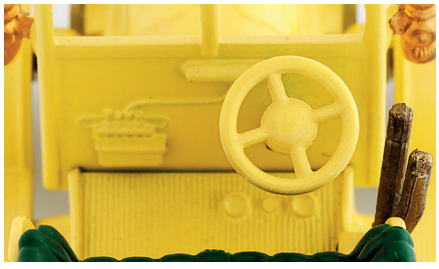
THE ML4c VARIATION SPORTS A TINY 'HORN' LIKE BUTTON on the raised disc in the centre of the steering wheel. It may represent the nut for securing the steering wheel to the column. We have found the ML4c steering wheel variations only on the Y-16A Spyker.



THE FIRST Y-2B RENAULT STEERING WHEEL was the ML5-type with long spokes protruding from the small sharply curved domed centre, leading up away from the hub, and finishing on the upper side of the wheel.



ON THE EARLY CASTINGS OF ML6 STEERING WHEEL, the domed centre was smaller. This particular wheel was mounted on the Y-16A Spyker and was also used in large quantities on other Yesteryears.



THE SCARCER BROAD DOMED CENTRE OF THE ML6 STEERING WHEEL. At the end of the ML6-type production run, its domed centre became larger and slightly exceeded the steering wheel hub.

ML4-type

The first versions of the Y-16A Spyker featured a new 9.4-mm wide (with paint layer) steering wheel mounted onto a column. The older version of the ML4 has a similar centre as the ML2, but its raised rounded centre disc protrudes slightly less.

The brass-plated variation of this steering wheel type – the ML4b – appears on some of the oldest, rare variants of the Y-11B Packard. Without paint, its diameter is 9.2 mm.

The newer, rarer version – the ML4c – features a miniature ‘button’ on this raised disc. It might in fact represent a bolt nut that fastened the steering wheel to the column rather than the ignition control or even a 'horn' button. In old cars such as this one, a driver would blow the horn by squeezing the bulb.

ML5-type

This first type of the steering wheel for the Y-2B Renault is sometimes mistaken for early Y-15A Rolls-Royce or Y-16A Spyker steering wheels. Its diameter is 8.5 mm, however, its spokes are longer, extending from the top of the wheel all the way to the hub. There is a small sharply curved dome in the middle which might represent the cover on a nut holding the steering wheel secure.

The ML5 steering wheel – originally produced for the Y-2B Renault – is relatively scarcer and is very rarely found on other Yesteryears as well.

ML6-type

The first truly standardised steering wheel was the long metal wheel with a diameter of 8.5 mm. Its hub is anchored in a semi-circular hole in the baseplate, which can be of various sizes. From 1965 onwards, the ML6-type gradually replaced all previous Yesteryear steering wheels.

The varying width of the domed centre of the ML6 steering wheel was caused by the repeated replacement of worn-down moulds. It is difficult to discern any pattern. In the mid-1960s, there were more ML6 steering wheels with smaller centres, and by the end of the decade, more of the larger ones which are slightly larger than the hubs. The mould used to make them seems to have first been used on the light green versions of the Y-3B Benz.

From 1965, all the previous steering wheel types were gradually replaced by the ML6-type. Metal steering wheels with steel columns lasted longest on the Y-15A Rolls-Royce, Y-16A Spyker and Y-14B Maxwell; they were never replaced with plastic ones.

Plastic Steering Wheels

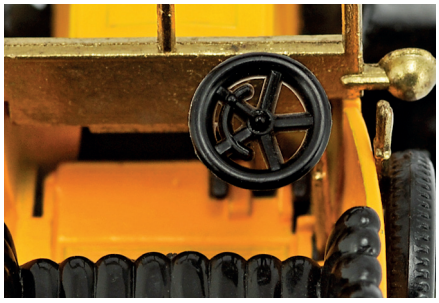
Advances in the development of plastics coupled with austerity measures introduced by Lesney led to a fundamental change in the technology of steering wheels that hardcore diecast fans did not appreciate. Beginning in 1966, black plastic steering wheels were mounted on all new models. Draughtsmen even reconfigured four older Yesteryear models so they could take the new standardised plastic steering wheels. They created special square holes for them in the floors of the newer variants of the Y-1B Ford, Y-2B Renault, Y-3B Benz and Y-11B Packard.

Standardised plastic steering wheels were finished at the bottom with a square-shaped end that slid into a hole in the bodywork. The plastic steering wheels in particular are not easy to remove, because the end is held tight by the sharp edges of the floor. However, with a little skill and effort, they can be removed and exchanged mostly without leaving any trace of damage.

P1-type

The first type of plastic steering wheel brought with it the promise of greater model fidelity for the Yesteryear range. In 1966, the oldest variants of the Y-13B Daimler were given a unique five-spoked steering wheel which depicted a quarter segment housing the car's ignition control. In addition, the steering wheel was cast in conjunction with the foot pedals, which had never previously appeared in such detail. Unlike the later plastic steering wheel, this complex part cannot be removed, because the link between the pedals and the steering wheel covers the riveted components of the Daimler's body.

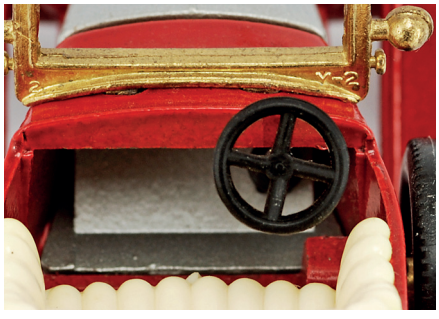
Less than a year later, however, the Type P1 fell victim to a further wave of standardisation. Lesney withdrew the P1 from production, and such a beautifully sophisticated piece of modelling never appeared on later models.



THE P1 STEERING WHEEL LOOKS VERY AUTHENTIC. However, the fact that it was connected to the pedals complicated model assembly.

P2-type

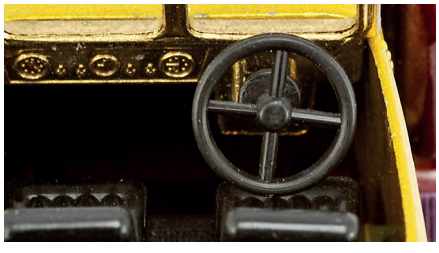
From 1967 onwards, newer versions of the Y-13B Daimler and most of the existing as well as new Yesteryears were fitted with the first standardised plastic steering wheel. Its shape is extremely straightforward. It has four spokes, a diameter of 8.3 mm and forms a single part together with its column and mounting square. This type of plastic steering wheel survived on a few Yesteryears after 1972 and was still being fitted to models even after the demise of the Lesney company.



THE P2 PLASTIC STEERING WHEEL was the most commonly used type in the late '60s and the early '70s. This particular example is mounted on the Y-2C Vauxhall.

P3-type

The final type from the metal wheels period was a black plastic steering wheel with a short column. Its 10-mm diameter corresponded to the size of the new upcoming generation of Yesteryear models. It was first mounted in 1969 on the Y-15B Packard Victoria and later on the Y-16B Mercedes-Benz SS and Y-11C Lagonda. The P3-type steering wheel too also survived well after 1972.



THE P3-TYPE IS THE LARGEST STEERING WHEEL fitted to a Matchbox model made before 1972. It was cast in two slightly different variations.