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SLOT CAR

ISSUE 52

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Sascha Distilled

Beautiful retro models from Vélasor

by Ric Woods

In the time I have spent working on this magazine, I have learned far more about racing cars than I could have thought possible. That particularly applies to pre-World War Two cars. Yes, I knew about Auto Unions and the big Mercedes racers, I could identify a Bugatti and a Bentley, but as for the myriad other makes, I was in a blissful state of ignorance. Thus, I have to confess, until Barcelona's Vélasor brought it to our attention, I hadn't heard of the Austro-Daimler "Sascha". This has therefore been a voyage of discovery, firstly regarding the full-size vehicles and secondly as to how much incredible detail can be packed into a working

slot car. If your knowledge also has a "Sascha"-sized gap, we'd better start with a little background...

Until the 1969 917 introduced a certain amount of brute force to its racing philosophy, Porsche racing car design had always been known for smaller capacity engines twinned with very light weight. The nimbleness that resulted from this approach would see those early cars in contention for overall victories on tighter circuits, whereas they frequently had to be content with class victories where tracks demanded more power. This way of thinking lasted well into the 1960s, actually into the early 1970s, when the extremely light and nimble 908/3s were used by the factory instead of the more brutal 917s on the twisty Nürburgring and Targa Florio

tracks. This DNA can be traced all the way back to a small sports car designed by Ferdinand Porsche in 1921: the Austro-Daimler ADS-R "Sascha". Until the First World War, Ferdinand Porsche had been working on projects for the Lohner and Austro-Daimler manufacturers. These companies were responding to the demands of their wealthy customers by building ever larger, more powerful and expensive vehicles. Ferdinand Porsche had always believed that it was possible to make a good car that was small, light and not too expensive, as long as the development



VÉLASOR
LEGENDARY MODELS



was handled properly. The War changed everything, both socially and economically. Cars were no longer the exclusive toys for the wealthy and the car industry entered a boom period – for those on the winning side. Unfortunately for Ferdinand Porsche, Austro-Daimler was on the losing side. Austria was an impoverished country, with industries in administration, including Austro-Daimler. The administrators rejected the idea of a small car, thinking that there was not enough wealth in the country to buy sufficient numbers to make it profitable. Porsche was still determined to make it happen and eventually found a backer in the form of one of his best friends, an aristocratic film industry tycoon from that country, Count Alexander "Sascha" Kolowrat, who, very handily, was also passionate about racing. Kolowrat would put up the necessary funds for both the racing and road versions of the design and would himself be one of the drivers responsible for winning with his friend's cars. The car was named the ADS (AustroDaimler Sascha), with its racing variant

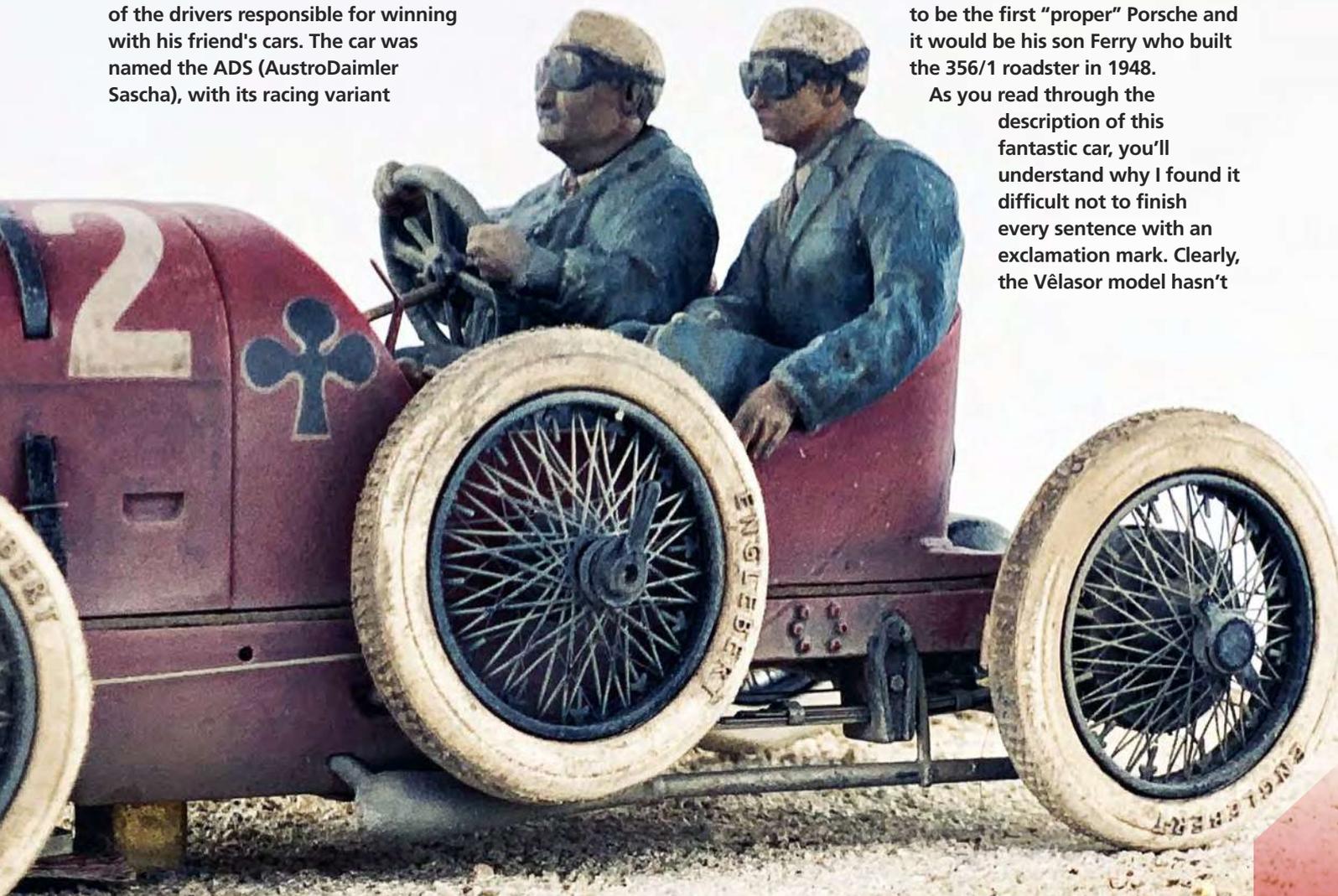
becoming the ADS-R. From the beginning, Ferdinand was sure that the features of his ADS-R were ideal for one of the great races at the time: the Targa Florio. The car was extraordinarily light and balanced – 50/50 with its occupants –, with a newly-designed 1100 cc engine. Any unnecessary weight that would compromise braking and manoeuvrability was removed. The philosophy of those racing Porsches of the 1950s and '60s was born.

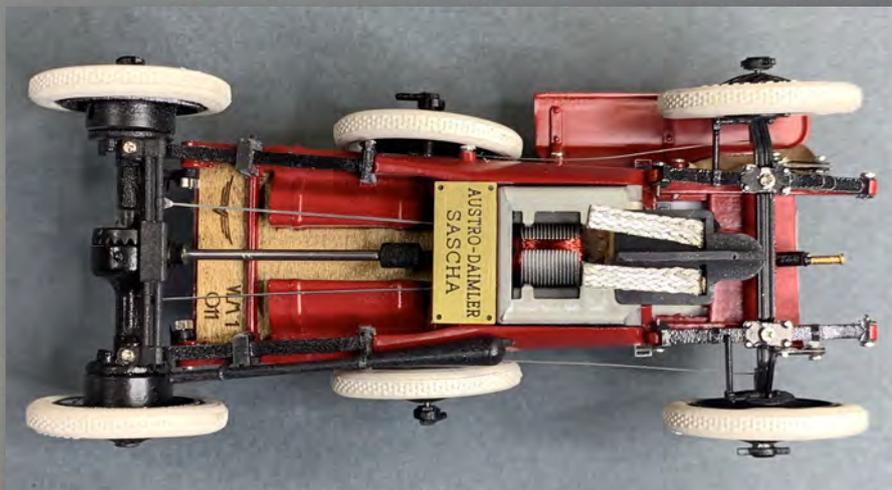
Four cars were entered in the 1922 Targa Florio and three finished – ironically, only Kolowrat dropped out. The ADS-Rs of Kuhn – winner with the number 3 – and Pocher, second with the number 2, easily dominated the small category of production cars. Neubauer's car (number 46) was entered in the "Corsa" category, so as to measure it against the larger capacity Mercedes, Fiats and Alfas. Neubauer finished fifth in his class, but

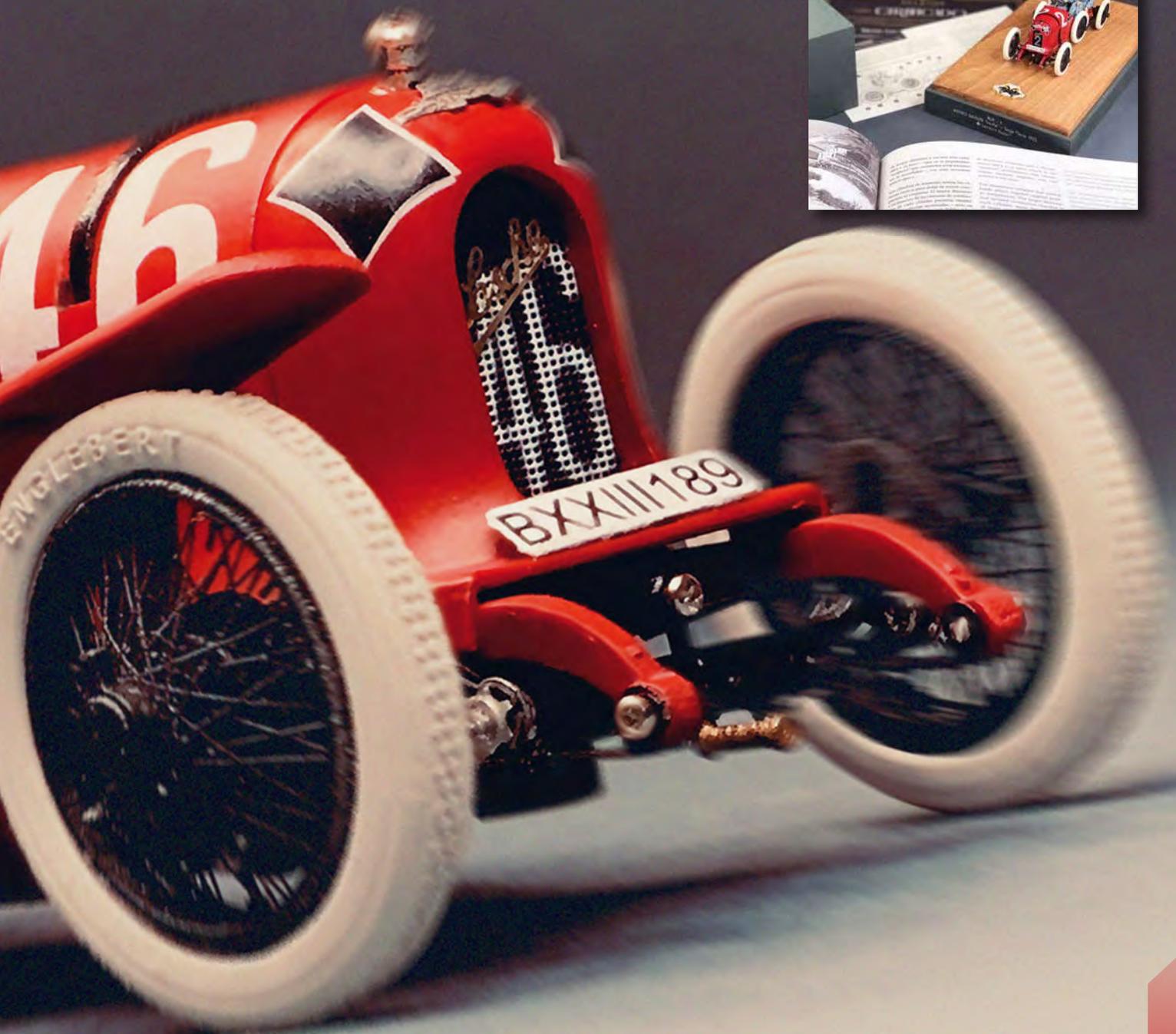
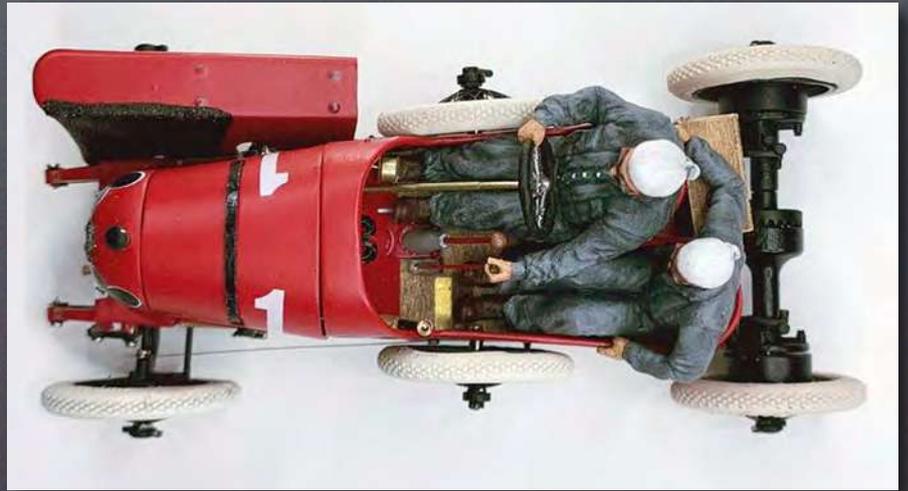


amazingly he managed to average only 8 km/h less than the winning 4.5 litre Mercedes. The international press highlighted the sensational showing of the nimble Saschas, and in Austria huge crowds turned out to meet the team. However, despite this and other results, the Austro-Daimler administrators would not put the car into production and so Ferdinand ended up leaving for Mercedes in 1923. It would take him seventeen more years to put a vehicle with similar characteristics on the track – 1939's 64K10, considered by many to be the first "proper" Porsche and it would be his son Ferry who built the 356/1 roadster in 1948.

As you read through the description of this fantastic car, you'll understand why I found it difficult not to finish every sentence with an exclamation mark. Clearly, the Vélasor model hasn't







been made to withstand the rough-and-tumble of normal slot racing and, at only 111mm long, 53mm wide and 58 grams at the weigh-in, it's a very small model. Apparently, an amazing 232 parts go to make up the finished model, so what we have here is something more akin to a Swiss watch than your average model car. An obtrusive slot guide can often spoil the appearance of cars from this era, so with careful use rather than competition in mind, the guide has been positioned as far back as practical, so that maximum front end detail can be incorporated. This is where that parts count starts to rise. Each front wheel is made up of ten parts. Each working front suspension spring accounts for another seven. Vélasor says that if you press down on the front – carefully, mind – you can see the suspension working with the correct action.

Actually, if you opt for Neubauer's or Kolowrat's car, you get an additional two parts, bringing the total to 234: there's the mudguard attached the right side of the car and, though only in the "dirty" version of the Kolowrat's two-seater, there's the leather cover that he had installed on the day of the race to protect against

stones and splashes. The engine cover is fastened to the base of the chassis by a long belt with four metal buckles. To quote Vélasor, 'With patience, fine precision tweezers, and good eyesight, we undo the left clasp - which passes through two of the clips - to release the cover, and discover a beautiful replica of the real ADS-R engine.' Sadly I don't possess any of those three crucial items, but hopefully those of us with little or no patience, wonky tweezers and diminishing eyesight will still be able to make our way in eventually. As well as the engine you can look out for the ignition coils, wiring, fuel filter, oil filler cap and I wouldn't be surprised if there's a working dipstick as well... Inside the cockpit, the dashboard is a combination of nine more pieces, with the dials having proper glasses. To fully appreciate the cockpit detail, you will need to carefully remove the two figures (step forward those with the patience, tweezers and good eyesight again?) The metal pedals are all present and correct, of course, with the accelerator in the middle – not so uncommon back then, so with fewer of the "hilarious consequences" than we might imagine today. The co-

driver's footrest and the (moving) parking brake are metal parts as well. Once both figures are out, the texturing of the wooden interior floor can be seen and don't forget the two fuel tank covers and the tiny battery handily placed between the two occupants. The crude spare wheel brackets are located on both sides of the cockpit and by now you won't be surprised to learn that both wheels can be easily removed, as can the road wheels, using a supplied key. Next there's the toolbox, which actually opens and naturally contains a full set of tools.

Underneath, the detail continues, despite the constraints of it being a functioning slot car. The metal rods that operate the front brake drums are there, the twin fuel tanks that Porsche placed as low as possible in order to get a better performance out of the race car are there, as well a fully detailed and working rear suspension, made up of twenty-five parts.

The feature that really blew us away when we first came across these cars was the fact that all the figures are different. In fact, they are modelled as accurately as possible on the real drivers. After you see the



pictures, you will probably be as impressed as we were. Vêlasor has modelled eight completely different figures, not only differently posed – that would be too easy – but also with different clothes and the features of the actual drivers. There's no driver's head stuck to a sheet of plastic here, or, thankfully, nice shiny overalls! Far from being the afterthought that driver figures often are, for me it's these figures that immediately set the Vêlasor range apart. The quality of the paintwork applied to the body, the toolbox, the different metals of the original engine parts and the very detailed spoked wheels warrants the same praise. Incidentally, the playing card suits – the diamonds, clubs, hearts and spades – were suggested by Kolowrat himself and would of course be used again on the Gulf John Wyer 908/3s for the 1970 and 1971 Targas, to honour the memory and achievements of Ferdinand Porsche and his Sascha. In using a satin varnish to protect the paintwork and decoration, it is evident that a great deal of care has been taken to avoid the over-glossy finish that spoils many a model of this type. As Vêlasor puts it "Hopefully this Sascha

will serve as an example to many of these so that, in the future, there will be fewer models on our tracks and in our cabinets that shine like lollipops." You have been warned.

When the detail and size of the Sascha are taken into account, you would be forgiven for thinking that it might be a slot car in principle, but not necessarily in practice. The manufacturer recommends a setting of 15-16 volts to get the car going 'with some verve', as they put it. I haven't driven one, and to be honest I doubt whether I could muster the courage to have a go, but apparently the car performed much better than Vêlasor expected it would. But don't get carried away; mistakes may well prove to be costly, but as with any full-size expensive classic, part of the fun of ownership must surely be to take it for an occasional run. Vêlasor deserve some praise for paying attention to the way the Sascha functions as a slot car. There have been too many occasions when manufacturers have claimed to make the most beautiful or most detailed slot car ever, but when it comes down to it, the poor thing can hardly get out of its own way on the track. Vêlasor has noticed this too and

while nobody expects dazzling performance, a car this detailed that is also enjoyable to drive round a track is a big plus.

Now you know that you need one (or all four), we'd better talk about production and prices. All those parts, all that precision – these aren't going to be cheap, but there again, given everything that goes into a Vêlasor car, I thought it might cost more. Firstly, it's a limited edition of 250 units. Now take a deep breath... for the first 100 units, it will 400 Euros per car or 1550 Euros for the set of four. Each model comes on a wooden display plinth, or there's a much larger plinth to display the full set of four cars together. You'll get a few other goodies, such as a book about the history of the Sascha, a certificate of authenticity, the all-important VC1 key so you can remove the wheels and a specification card relating to the model. There! That wasn't too bad, was it? There's always the throwaway line about a company 'raising the bar', but in terms of sheer detail and application, I have to say that Vêlasor have done just that. There's more information at www.velasor.com.



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