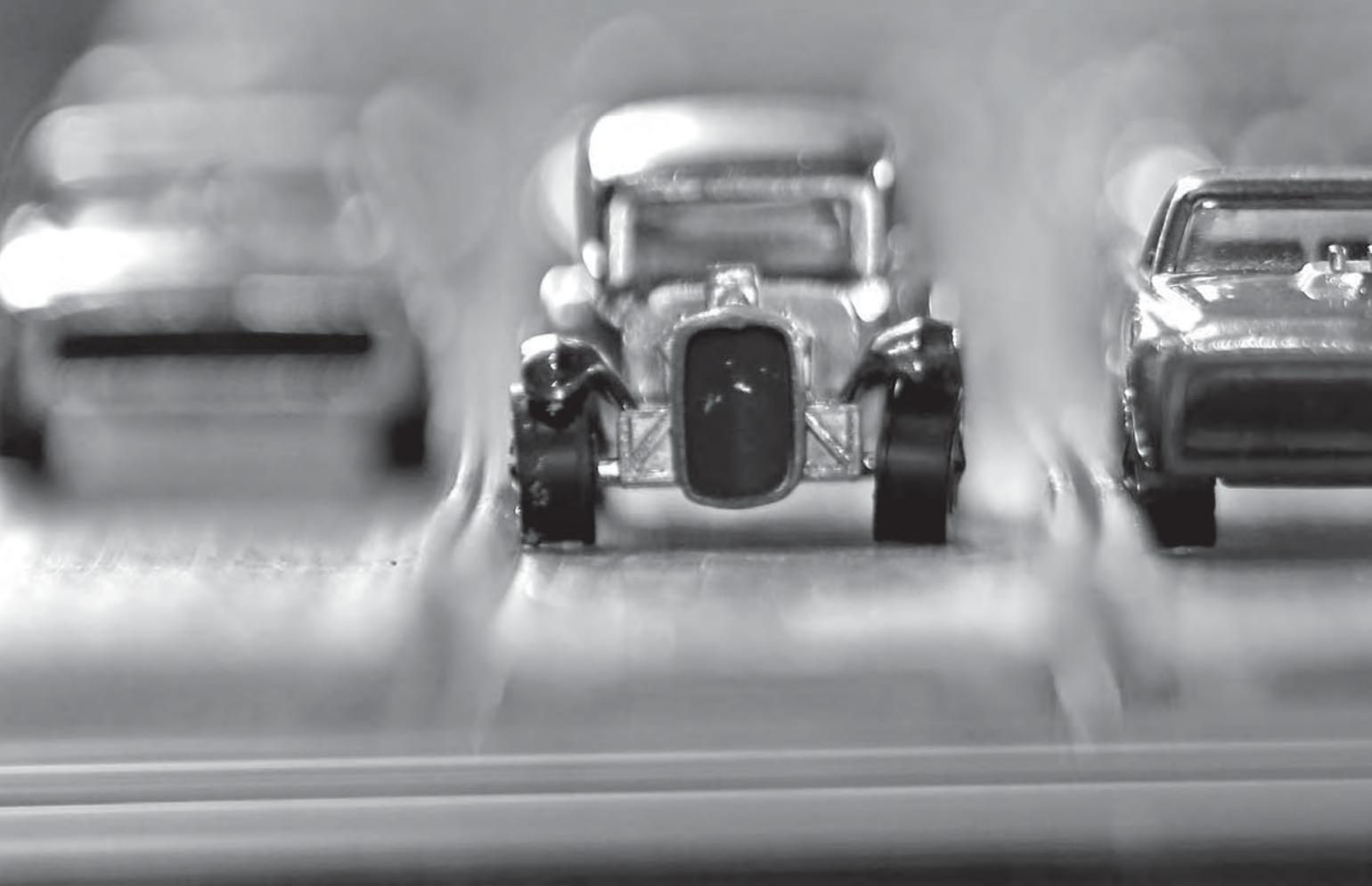




a liquidation of
LOVE

BY PATTI POLK



After a death in the family, our writer offers to sort through and sell a massive Hot Wheels collection. Only problem is she knows nothing about Hot Wheels. What had she gotten herself into?



Logan Werlinger/Barcroft Media via Getty Images



The 1968 Hot Wheels line-up of custom vehicles is called 'The Sweet Sixteen' by collectors.

In October of 2020 I lost my dear son-in-law Jeff to a heart attack. Jeff had been an avid Hot Wheels collector for almost 20 years and had accumulated quite a large collection of Hot Wheels and other die-cast cars.

His collection consisted of thousands of cars in boxes stacked to the ceiling, filling almost half of his garage and included vintage Lesney, Matchbox, Muscle Machines and many other types of die-cast cars, some I couldn't identify since they had no maker's marks.

There was also all kinds of other Hot Wheels collectibles such as McDonald's toys, collector posters, specialty commemorative sets, vintage stickers, collector car cases, a Hot Wheels watch, annual collector guidebooks, and even a couple of old packages of Hot Wheels candy!

My daughter works full time, and while trying to cope with the death of her husband, found the task of dealing with this huge collection overwhelming and beyond her capability at the time.

Since I am semi-retired and have more time to spare, I volunteered to drive the 420 miles from my home in Tucson to Las Vegas to pick up the collection, take it home with me, and try to organize and sell it for her. Now, you need to understand – I knew absolutely nothing about

die-cast cars when I agreed to take this on. And, although I am a collector myself, my expertise is in other things like coins, ephemera, old glass, pottery and the like.

I understood the basics of organizing and researching a collection, but in all honesty, I really had no idea of the enormity of the job I had taken on and what I was going to have to learn about all of the intricacies of Hot Wheels collecting. But I was soon to find out.

When I got to my daughter's house to pick up the collection I could not believe the amount of boxes that were there to deal with. I had driven a big Ford F250 truck with a large bed to pick up everything, but I could see right away that I probably wouldn't be able to fit all of the boxes in, even stacked high above the truck's side walls with a cargo net.

My daughter, my boyfriend, Kevin, and I loaded as many boxes in the truck as we could (probably about forty or so), leaving at least a dozen in the garage, before slowly and gingerly driving the long distance home so none would fall out. When I got home I filled three-quarters of my small garage with the precious load and then proceeded to stand and stare incoherently at the looming mountain of boxes before me wondering how on Earth

I was ever going to do this. What had I gotten into?

I realized that I had to make some kind of plan to organize all the cars, but how? Where do you start with a project like this that you have no knowledge of? Some of the cars were in boxes that were already organized by year, but others weren't and were simply mixed together randomly. I had no idea of what was valuable or common, or how they would be grouped as a collection. Were the cars collected by year, paint color, rarity, or model of car? I began to research online by looking for Hot Wheels collector websites to try to figure out how they were evaluated and priced. I found a few Hot Wheels identification books online and ordered them as well. As I began to study the cars I started to see that there were a variety of ways that they were collected. Some people collected certain models or colors of cars, while others collected vintage ones or specialty types like Treasure Hunts. One of the most popular types of the cars collected are the very first ones made in 1968 called "The Sweet 16" and feature wheels with a red stripe around them that came to be referred to as Redlines. The Redlines era continued until 1977 when they were replaced by the Blackwall era until 1989, then the Collector Number era

until 1999, and up until today where Hot Wheels continue to be sold in a variety of styles and makes.

Finally, after some deliberation, I decided to just dive in and go through all the boxes, one by one, and look at every single car in the collection since I had no clue which ones might have some value and I didn't want to miss any that might be worth something.

In my research I'd seen that there were some that were worth hundreds— even thousands — of dollars if they had a certain rarity or unusual characteristic that set them apart from the rest. I knew that this was going to take quite a while so I resigned myself to be ready for the weeks of work that I knew were ahead for me.

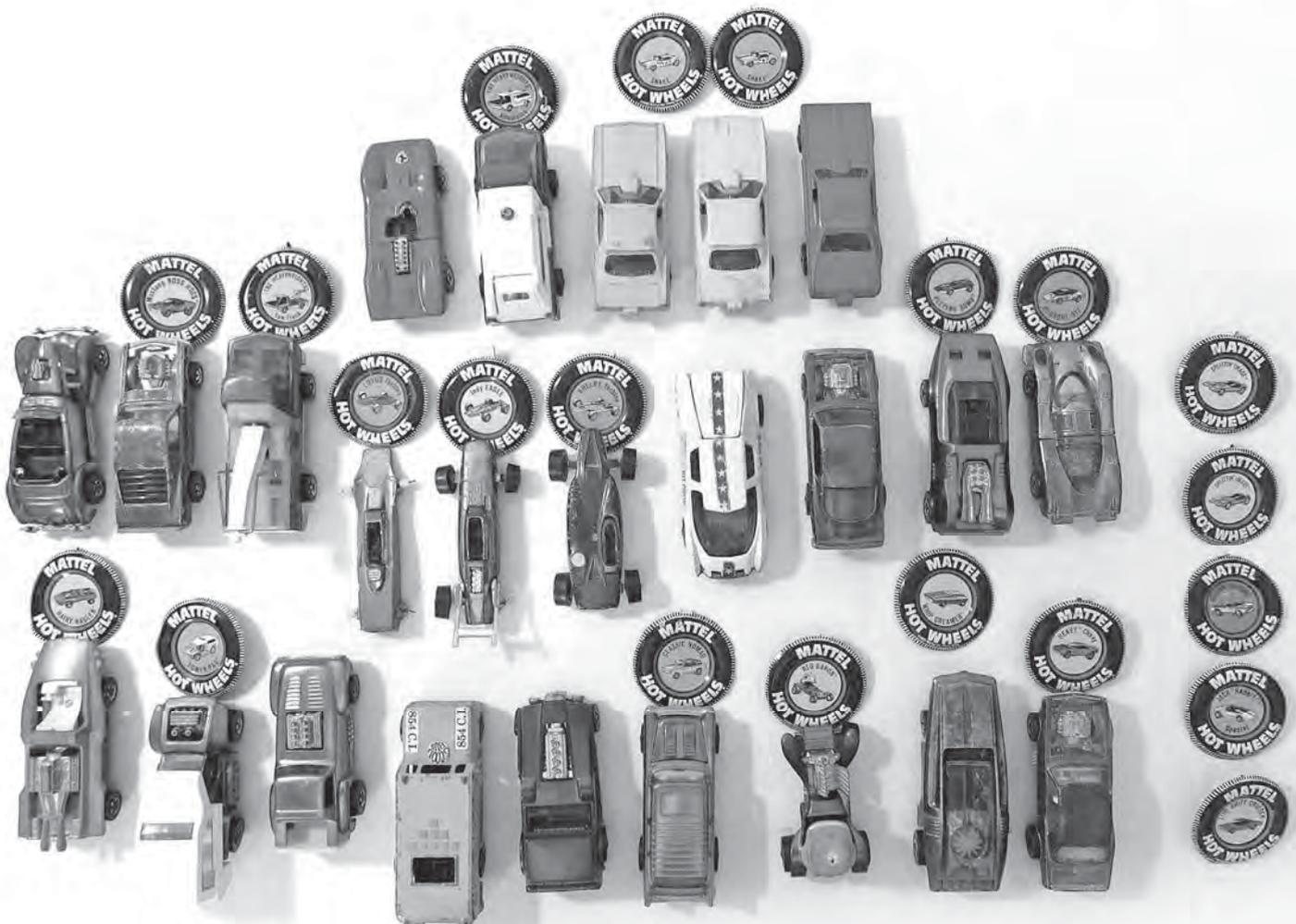
I started bringing the boxes into my small living room and stacking them everywhere with empty boxes that I could sort them into by year. As I began to sort them I used my research books to identify them visually by the name and date

printed on the base of the cars and then cross-referenced them with the collector websites on my smartphone. Once I knew what they were, I then searched for them on eBay to see what they were selling for. I soon realized that there were a whole lot of factors involved with identifying and pricing them — way more than I'd ever imagined. There were all kinds of wheel and color variations, tampos (graphics), different interiors, hidden specialty Treasure Hunt cars, accessories, packaging conditions, car condition if out of the box, and so on. Also, dating the cars can be tricky, the dates on the bottoms of the cars don't necessarily mean that it is the year it was produced — the date only refers to when that casting was copyrighted and the castings were sometimes reused over the years.

As I slowly worked my way through the cars I gradually began to understand what I was looking at. I pulled out anything that looked different or unusual and

set it aside to research separately. Once I'd gotten all of the more common cars reasonably sorted into year of manufacture, I put them back out in the garage to sell by the box with bulk pricing, and the more valuable ones I would then sell individually.

In my opinion, I had whittled down the best cars and accessories to about four large bins that I moved into my office to sell online piece by piece. I chose to sell them primarily through Facebook since I was familiar with that platform and already had another online business there. I created a new Facebook business page exclusively for the Hot Wheels sales and marketed them through my existing business page, collector groups, events, and Marketplace. I grouped them by the numbered bin with group photos and included lists of the items with descriptions and prices. I calculated the prices by looking at the high and low values online and averaged a price, taking into consid-



Once introduced in 1968, Hot Wheels were instantly popular, so much so that a second manufacturing plant was opened in Hong Kong. By 1972, U.S. manufacturing was halted and all Hot Wheels cars were made only in Hong Kong.



To simplify her liquidation efforts, the author created large USPS Flat Rate Mystery Boxes at an inexpensive price filled with common, random Hot Wheels cars in the hope of moving substantial inventory quickly. It worked.

Images courtesy Patti Polk

eration any condition issues. I also created large USPS Flat Rate Mystery Boxes at an inexpensive price filled with common, random cars to move them quickly since there were so many of them to deal with.

Very quickly I began to get responses from interested buyers, mostly for the Redlines first – the oldest and most desirable cars. Some of them I sold individually and some as small groups until they were all gone, which didn't take very long

at all. Some of the buyers were local, and some were from other places in the U.S.

If someone bought more than a few cars I would give them a small discount and the buyer paid for shipping. I have also been gradually selling off some of the Mystery Boxes, and just the other day, I luckily found a buyer who wants to buy out the rest of the collection in the garage.

I still have a few bins of the better Hot Wheels items left to sell but those I

can sell at my leisure now that the bulk of the collection is gone. I haven't made a fortune or found any of the thousand dollar cars, but I have been able to help my daughter out and put a few dollars in each of our pockets, and I am grateful for that.

All in all, I'd have to say that although it has been a long, labor intensive haul – almost 3 months from start to finish – I really did learn a lot about the exciting world of Hot Wheels collecting and I did



Hot Wheels posters through the years can be helpful in identifying what cars came out in what years. There are also a plethora of excellent Hot Wheels sites online that can be extremely helpful in not only identifying cars but also in determining values.

develop an appreciation for why people collect these cars. They are so fun and colorful, and beautifully detailed. I even kept a few for myself and have them prominently displayed around my house.

I'm sure I can say that my son-in-law is smiling above to see his beloved collection go on to good homes where the next generation of collectors can now appreciate and enjoy collecting them as much as he did.

PATTI POLK, one of the top agate collectors in the world, is the author of *Collecting Rocks, Gems and Minerals*.

