

The Last of the V8 Interceptors



AUTOart made the model's engine more realistic than the original. This blower is actually hooked up—atop a tunnel ram for proper height.



The road from a low-budget Australian film back lot to movie car immortality is a long one, filled with plenty of twists, bumps and wrecks, not to mention several bands of marauding motorcycle maniacs. Such is the tale of the Pursuit Special—often referred to as the Interceptor—driven by one Max Rockatanski, Main Force Patrolman turned antihero of the post-apocalyptic Australian wasteland and better known as “Mad Max.” The 1979 film of the same name made a star out of Mel Gibson, but the car made a cult classic out of the film. Gibson and the car both returned in 1981’s sequel, “The Road Warrior,” which ramped up the automotive mayhem and intensity to levels unmatched before or since. Movie critic grandmaster Roger Ebert called it “a film of pure action” and put it on a shortlist with “Bullitt” and “The French Connection” as “... among the great chase films of modern years.” If you haven’t seen it, put in your Netflix queue. Better yet—buy it. No self-respecting car guy should be without this film.

The Pursuit Special started life as a 1973 Ford Falcon XB GT. The film crew had just one car, which they festooned with a wild array of body mods and faux speed gear: eight fluted ‘zoomie’ exhaust pipes, “Sunraysia” wheels and a nosepiece from an Arcadipane Concorde body kit. There was that monster Weiand 6-71 blower topped by a vintage Scott mechanical fuel injector. In the film, Max switches the blower on and off via a switch on the gearshift, and much speculation circulated about how that setup worked. The answer is simple: the whole thing was faked. The blower was hollow; the pulley spun via an electric motor, while the car ran on its original intake and carb beneath.

For the sequel, years and miles spent blasting across the arid post-nuclear outback had hardened and weathered both Max and the Pursuit Special. Huge tanks for storing scavenged gasoline had replaced the rear deck and window. The lower front valence had been discarded and a few improvised gadgets installed by its “quick” owner. The filmmakers

now had a budget for a second car, so the original was used for close-ups and interior shots, while the newer one performed the driving stunts. This second car was sacrificed for a cringe-worthy crash sequence, so today exists but a single surviving Pursuit Special. It now lives, fully restored with a mix of parts from each film, at The Cars of the Stars Museum in Keswick, England.

AUTOart just released a 1:18 diecast of Max’s mean machine as it appears in the opening moments of the second film, sporting the jumbo fuel tanks but sans the front air dam. It matches the movie car exceptionally well except for one thing: the black-on-black finish is too nice, more reminiscent of the pristine car in the first film than the sandblasted and fallout-stained patina seen in “The Road Warrior.” It looks great, though, with nice touches such as the mesh in the hood air ducts. The Scott injector scoop has the correct contour, and the blower uses a rubber belt on a rolling pulley. The differing wheel patterns front to rear are also dead-on to the second movie.

AUTOart took a few liberties in the engine bay, but most of them actually make the model more authentic (to the spirit of the Pursuit Special, at least) than the real movie car. The engine is the proper 351 Cleveland, but it sports a fully plumbed supercharger perched atop a tall tunnel-ram manifold. This is an odd arrangement, but it would work, and it provides the film-correct blower height. The interior is properly sparse,

with the blower switch on the shifter and a door-mounted seat for Max’s included sidekick, “Dog.” There’s also a spare BFGoodrich, a couple of jerry cans and a case of Dinki-Di dog food. Even Max’s hide-away knife and self-destruct mechanism are there!

Max fans have been waiting a long time; a decent scale model would have been good enough. This AUTOart piece is far beyond that. This is a great model of a great movie car—a must-have. A piece of history. 🐾



For the second film, the Pursuit Special was outfitted with twin tanks for storing purloined petrol.

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