

Florida. I'd stop at a garage sale and find a shoebox filled with Red Line Hot Wheels left over from 30 years ago.

"Unfortunately, that good stuff is all gone now. I still find Hot Wheels at the occasional flea market but not often. My best sources are word-of-mouth and eBay. And guys'll hear about the Toizrit Web site and contact me when they decide to sell their collections."

Web sites aside, are there any practical tips for novice Hot Wheels sleuths?

"If you're interested in Hot Wheels, look at your co-worker in the next cubicle," said Bertolino. "If he's between 30 and 45 . . . ask him if he has any Hot Wheels he wants to sell. You'll be surprised by how often you find cars this way."

Bertolino said Mattel doesn't know how many Hot Wheels models it has produced since 1968. He points to multiple castings of specific cars, all with subtle variations. Nobody kept track of the total, though he es-

known to exist, and the last one was found in Milwaukee. The more common production run had a surfboard held by slots on the side of the car. If you have this car it's only worth between \$50 and \$100 in mint condition."

Bertolino estimated that there are 50,000 Hot Wheels collectors worldwide. Most are purists going after specific models, castings and colors.

But lately, he has seen increased interest in gussied-up Hot Wheels. Artisans such as Roselle's Rich Stillmaker are snapping up junk Hot Wheels for \$3 each, drilling apart the bodies and re-building them as customs.

Stillmaker, owner of a garage-door firm, is a former drag racer who began tinkering with Hot Wheels several years ago after unearthing his original collection from a train set box in his mother's basement.

He now owns 2,000 cars-mostly from the Red Line Tire era of