

The Monsters That Time Forgot

10 mighty monsters of yesteryear that deserve another look

BY KEVIN HETMANSKI



It's easy to think of candidates for a list of RC's greatest monster trucks: Traxxas T-Maxx, Tamiya Clod Buster, HPI Savage,... We're sure you could easily go on, and we did just that with our features "The 25 Most Important RC Cars of All Time" (June 2014 issue) and "The Greatest RC Trucks of All Time" (June 2015). But there have been many other impressive, noteworthy monster trucks that were stunners in their era but simply haven't stand the test of time (like the Varicom Big Grizzly) or were stepping-stones to later, better-known machines (like the Traxxas Sledgehammer). Here are some of our flashback favorites that deserve another look.



VARICOM Big Grizzly

Oh man, this thing! The Big Grizzly combined monster truck looks with a low-riding chassis and independent suspension that offered very little ground clearance. "Hooray," right? But its beefy tires, light bar, and dual shocks made it a looker, and a lot of Big Grizzlies went home to be poorly assembled by excited middle schoolers. An extended body and bumper mounts hiked the body in the air, which left the components in the tub-style chassis exposed to the elements. While the electronics were mounted low in the chassis, the motor sat on top of a tall transmission, making the weighty motor the highest part of the truck, other than the body. A weird truck for sure, but it was RC's "anything goes" era.

MARUI Big Bear

By today's standards, the Marui Big Bear barely qualifies as hobby quality, but in 1984, it had the distinction of being the first realistically proportioned RC monster truck. The 2WD truck's "Super Wheelies" chassis was inspired by the 1982 Tamiya Wild Willy and was as bare bones as RC gets. There are no shocks, just springs, and the Bear's 380 motor definitely put the lowercase "p" in "power." But look at this little guy—those big ol' tires and Datsun body still hold up, and in 1984, you were just happy the truck could cruise around at all.





KYOSHO Giga Crusher Dual Force

After *RC Car Action* built a "project" dual-engine Nitro USA-1, not one but two manufacturers came out with dual-engine production trucks: OFNA with a Pirate-based rig, and Kyosho with the superior Giga Crusher Dual Force. The standard Giga Crusher was a single-engine truck, but as its "Dual Force" name implies, Kyosho shoehorned a pair of .26ci engines into the chassis, each with its own fuel tank and tuned exhaust. The engines straddled a 3-speed transmission, and a pair of pull-starts brought the rig to life. You did not own one of these unless you were serious about nitro!

TAMIYA **TNX**

In the early 2000s, the nitro monster truck scene exploded thanks to the popularity of the Traxxas T-Maxx. Along with just about every other manufacturer, Tamiya wanted its own piece of the action, and the result was the TNX. It stuck close to the T-Maxx formula in terms of features and layout, but it was unmistakably Tamiya with its typically high fit and finish. And it ripped! The TNX was lighter than the T-Maxx and had plenty of power thanks to its FS-18SR engine, which Tamiya developed with help from O.S. Engine. Team drivers David Jun and Jimmy Jacobson campaigned the truck back when the Nitro Monster Truck class was a thing, and Tamiya even offered a hotted-up TNX Pro Racing Edition that included Pro-Line Bow-Tie tires, dish wheels, and PowerStroke shocks right in the box.



TRAXXAS **Sledgehammer**

Before the Traxxas Stampede, there was the Sledgehammer. The tub-chassis 2WD truck was originally molded in white (or "natural") plastic like other '80s-era Traxxas models, and the truck rode out on eight oil-filled shocks with independent suspension shared by the Bullet buggy. The transmission held the motor up high for extra wheelie clearance, and you could get the rig as an RTR or kit. The Sledgehammer was a popular truck, but it went away for a good reason: the Stampede. The 'Pede's simpler design and superior performance made the complex, old-tech 'Hammer obsolete, and the Stampede has gone on to become a classic in its own right. But we'd still love to have a Sledgehammer on the shelf.



KYOSHO **Big Brute**

The Big Brute was one of Kyosho's first monster trucks, and it could be had in electric and nitro versions. The electric came with a stock LeMans 540 brushed motor to push it along, while power for the nitro version (dubbed "Nitro Brute") came by way of an O.S. .12 CZ-2 rotary-carb engine. A unique feature of the Nitro Brute was its drivetrain. The gearbox was shared with the electric truck, and Kyosho simply added a belt to spin it via engine power. Cool truck, but once Kyosho unleashed its USA-1 Clod Killer, the Brute's days were numbered.



TAMIYA Juggernaut & Juggernaut 2

After reigning as Tamiya's top monster for more than a decade, the Clod Buster was showing its age and Tamiya thrilled monster truck fans with news of an all-new solid-axle monster: the Juggernaut. The gorgeous Ford F-350 featured a tilt bed that allowed easy access to the battery tray, and the truck's leaf-spring suspension and shaft-driven axles made it more realistic than the Clod's motor-on-axle design. Truckers soon discovered the gears inside the new axles weren't up to monster abuse, and Tamiya sent out stronger replacements that became standard (along with a few other tweaks) on the Juggernaut 2, which soon followed.



Meet Monster Collector Craig Braden

Special thanks to Craig Braden for his help with the photography in this article. High-res pics of forgotten '80s rigs are hard to come by, so we're glad that Craig made his monster collection available to us. He has been into RC monsters ever since he saw a picture of one on the cover of a book at his local hobby shop in the '80s. After doing some research, he was able to figure out that it was a Big Grizzly, and now he has two of them—along with 34 others. His favorite? It's an original 1987 version of the Tamiya Clod Buster, which he scored on eBay along with a few other trucks in his collection.



MRP High Roller

Before the Tamiya Clod Buster was the monster truck to have, there was the MRP High Roller. Its unique design gave it the look of a solid-axle monster truck, but independent suspension gave it a smooth ride. Long, skinny shocks attached to the top of the upper A-arms controlled the suspension and added to the scale look. The chassis was a large injection-molded tub, which added plenty of protection from the elements to the components inside. The High Roller was also the only truck besides the Tamiya Clod Buster to have 4-wheel steering, thanks to dual steering servos. So why was the Clod king? It was simply a tougher truck, and it was a Tamiya at the peak of the '80s RC boom as MRP was headed for footnote status. But we remember you, High Roller (pours drink into lawn).

KYOSHO Big Boss

The Big Boss was a pretty mild machine with 540 power and 2WD, but it scored highly on style. The Ford F-250 body was Kyosho's first RC model of an American truck (and was also used on the Big Brute), and the chromed-out engine with massive blower and zoomie pipes (nonfunctional, of course) set the Big Boss apart from the other monsters of the era. The detailed grille, light bar, and turbine wheels sealed the deal, and the truck's '80s-tastic paint job with heartbeat stripe didn't hurt, either. The Big Boss also had the benefit of being modeled on a full-size monster truck, all the better to capture monster truckers' attention in the hobby store.



TRAXXAS SportMaxx

Four-wheel drive has been an essential feature of the T-Maxx from the start, but there is one T-Maxx that didn't send power to the front wheels: the SportMaxx. At the peak of Maxx-mania, Traxxas introduced a RWD version of the best-selling monster that made it easier for people to get into nitro monster trucking on a budget. The SportMaxx got the same TRX 2.5 engine as the 4X4 truck, but with two fewer wheels to spin and a few ounces of rotating mass removed from the drivetrain, the SportMaxx was even more of a straight-line screamer than the T-Maxx. When you were ready to go 4WD, Traxxas had you covered with a one-box conversion kit that included all the parts to get the front wheels in on the party. 🚗