

# Battle of the Daleks

Steve Walker of *Origin Products* chats to Mike Reccia about his fight to produce a contemporary *Doctor Who* collectable.

**F**rom the front it looks exactly like a sixties TV Dalek. Look closer, however, and you will notice that it is hinged and capable of opening up down the middle to reveal a detailed "Dalek domain" within... In this tiny setting an Emperor Dalek rules over proceedings, its head swinging open to reveal the head and shoulders of Davros; a small Tardis sports opening doors and an artwork interior; a diminutive Dalek with ball-bearing suspension menaces from an unfolding ramp. There's a pop up ray gun, a trap door, and an inch high figure of Tom Baker as Doctor Who. You have entered the world of the Dalek playcase, an all-new British *Doctor Who* collectable that has been made available mainly due to the dogged determination of one man. In the following article project creator Steve Walker of *Origin Products* tells us of his two year fight to feed a collectors' market hungry for new, quality *Doctor Who* product...

**SF&F:** Can you begin by giving us a little background on the company you work for, *Origin Products*?

**Steve:** *Origin Products* is a toy development company. We have close affiliations with *Bluebird*, *Mattel* and *Disney* and a world reputation for producing micro miniature toys. The most famous range we produce is *Polly Pocket*, which has been in the top ten of world toy sales for the last eight years. We also have a licencing

side which I'm involved with and for which we produce a lot of movie tie-in merchandise. I can't really say a great deal about our future releases because toy design on a film usually has to begin at the same time a film goes into production, which can be two years ahead of the movie's release, so we usually sign a secrecy agreement.

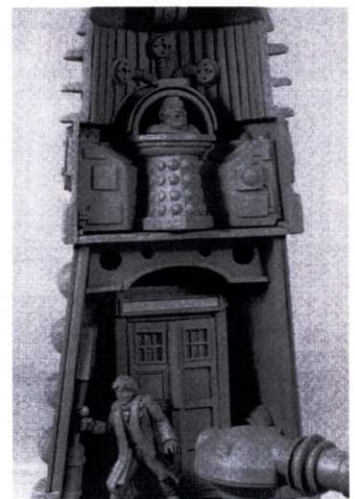
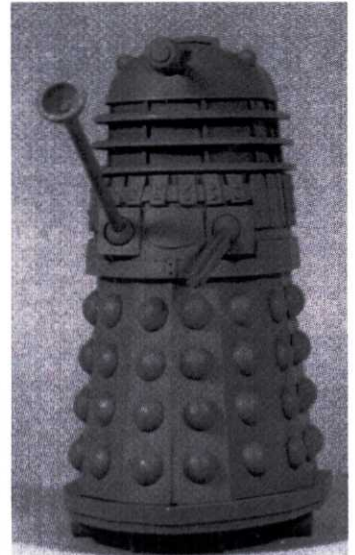
I have my own personal interest in science fiction and about two years ago I suggested to my employers that the licence of *Doctor Who* still had something there to be explored. They said "fine" and asked me to put a presentation together, after which we could see what happened. In this industry we have different toy "price points" to work to. For instance, we have £6.99 price point, which the *Dalek playcase* comes under, then we have £9.99 price point, a £19.99 price point, and so on. I put together a presentation of what we call "sketch models" and a few ideas, one of which was a *Dalek* play case, one a *Cyberman* play case, and another a large scale, £24.99 *Tardis* playset, which at the time was based on the then current Paul McGann movie. We then presented our ideas to *Bluebird Toys*. They liked the idea... They were very nervous about it, but they liked the premise. They weren't happy about going with an entire *Doctor Who* range, however, and decided just to release one item to test the water. We then took our presentation to the *BBC*, and to Terry Nation, to get approval. The *BBC* said, "Fine. Yeah. Go ahead. Develop it."

**SF&F:** You tracked Terry Nation down? Wasn't he based in the 'States?

**Steve:** Terry Nation's licencing company is based in Camden and, funnily enough, is run by Tony Hancock's brother. They, too, said, "Yes, go ahead and develop it." I therefore came back to work and, over the course of about a year, developed the designs and sketch models.

**SF&F:** You, personally, built the sketch models?

**Steve:** Yes. I did all the designs and made the sketch models, all centred around the *Dalek*. The two other subjects hadn't been decided on because everyone concerned, including my employers, was very, very nervous about developing a toy based on a television series that had ceased production nine years ago. Their argument was that we have children out there who are nine years of age and have never seen *Doctor Who*. My argument all along had been that I believed there was a very large collectors' market, particularly for the *Dalek*, borne out by the way things are with *Hasbro Kenner's Star Wars* range. Most of that range is still being collected and a large proportion of it is being collected by adults. I was trying to make the point that I wasn't being blinded by my own personal interest. In fact, I have a friend who runs an internet providing service. About a year and a half ago he put out on the internet a photograph of the sketch model and a brief history of what we were trying to achieve with it. We literally had thousands of enquiries. I was able to bring that information back and say, "Look, people are interested from all over the world... literally."



Left top: *Cyberman* playcase mock-up.

Other pictures: prototype *Dalek* playcase.

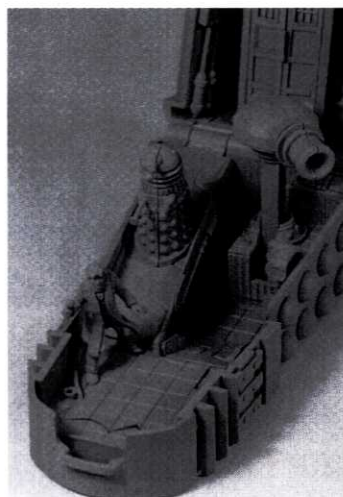
The toy then continued to be developed to a stage where we produced what we call the final prototypes, made before the final engineering models are created.

**SF&F:** What size are these final prototypes made to?

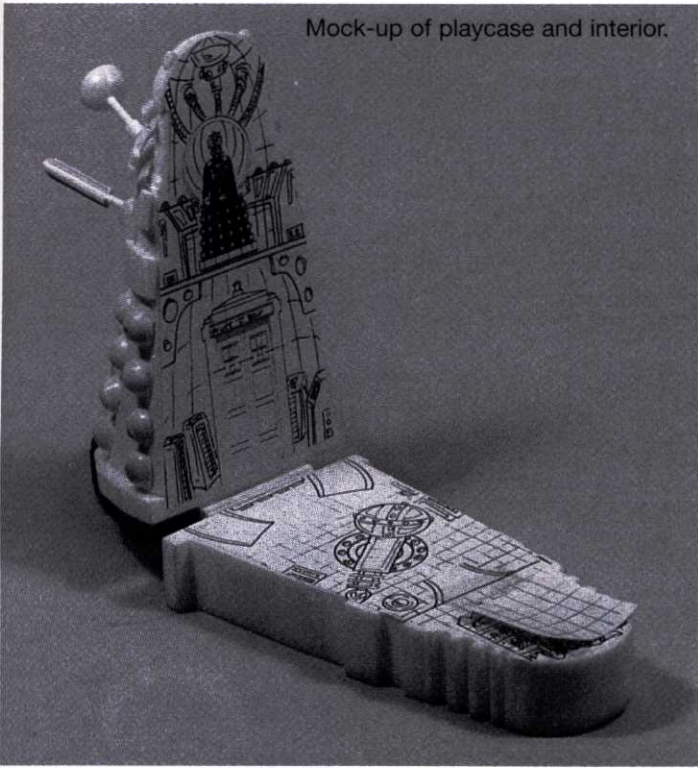
**Steve:** The same size as the toy. People think we *Pantograph* subjects down; that we build subjects three, four, five times bigger than the actual size of the toy, but all our work is done actual size, including the tiny figures that accompany our playsets.

**SF&F:** That's very precise work!

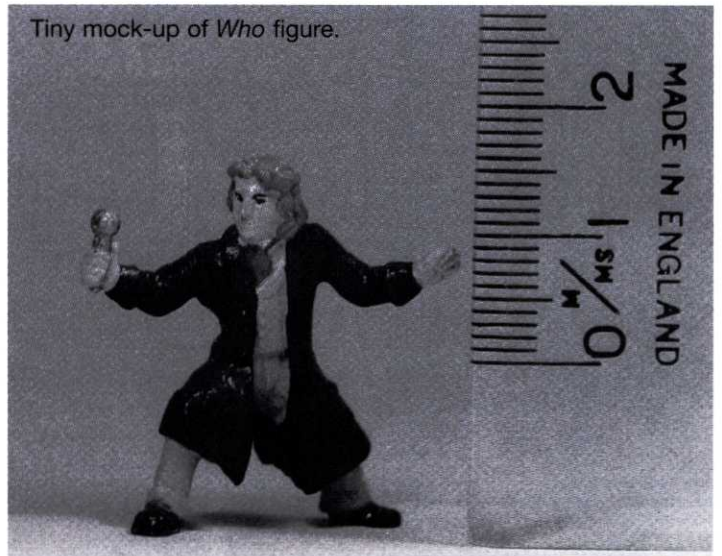
**Steve:** It's very precise work. We have



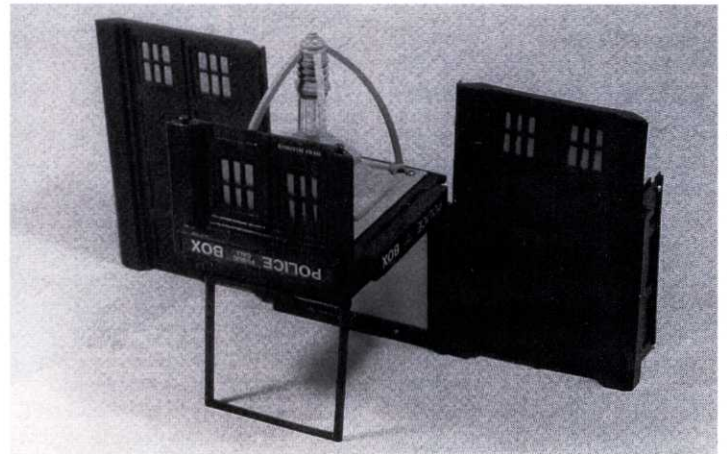
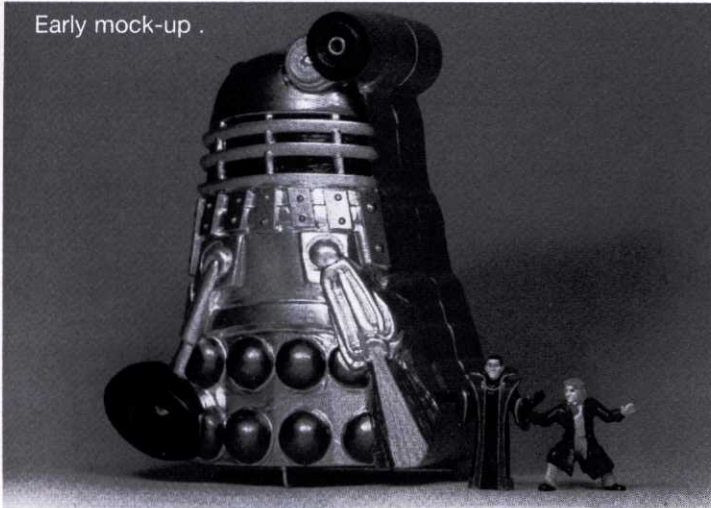
Mock-up of playcase and interior.



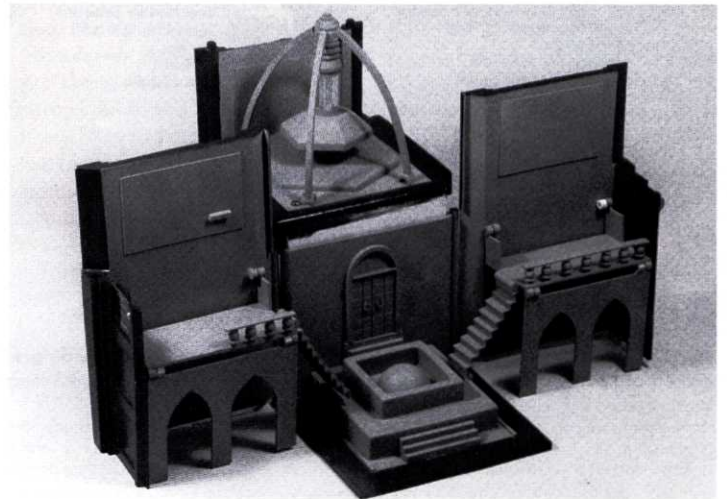
Tiny mock-up of *Who* figure.



Early mock-up .



Above and below: How the proposed *Tardis* playset would open to present play opportunities.



Left: Mock-up packaging for figure and vehicle set.

some of the most talented sculptors in the country working for us.

**SF&F:** What do they sculpt in?

**Steve:** Whatever they feel comfortable with. People here sculpt in *Sculpy*, in *Milliput*, in wax, whatever the

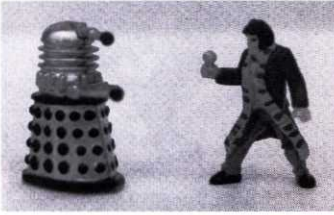
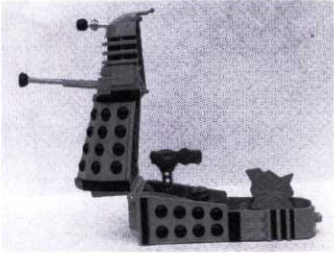
individual prefers to sculpt in. It doesn't matter what the engineering models are made out of at the end of the day. What is a shame, because there is a certain amount of loss of detail when things go into production, is that you don't get to see the detail on the original

engineering models.

**SF&F:** What did you use as reference for the *Dalek*?

**Steve:** There was no problem there being a fan of the series. I had access to the *BBC* archives, so I spent an afternoon going through their photo library. Various plans were also available; a *Doctor Who Technical Manual* appeared some years ago, etc.

As a kid I'd had all the *Dalek* toys and stuff and I could never understand why the shape of them was never accurate, particularly the hemispheres on the *Dalek* which were always softened and blended out. It wasn't until I started working in the industry and I discovered the way things are manufactured that I realised it's all to do with the way things are pulled out of the tool. You can't have any undercuts and, with the shape of the *Dalek*, it's very



Above: Playcase opens to reveal a *Dr. Who* adventure. The tiny Dalek and *Who* figure included with the toy. Bottom left: Mock-up Sonic Screwdriver toy. Inset: *TARDIS* playset design. Right top: Early Dalek design. Bottom right: Two of the playsets on the rampage.

difficult to avoid undercuts. My argument all the way along to this process was that we had to make – because we were aiming at the collectors’ market – the exterior in particular as accurate as possible. When you are working to a £6.99 price point you are limited to the amount of spray operations you can have during decoration and the amount of separate pieces you can have because these factors impact on assembly costs, so you’re working, particularly for a £6.99 product, to a very, very tight margin.

The exterior front half of the Dalek playcase is made up of four pieces. That was the only way to have the hemispheres moulded so that they retained their accuracy. That was a battle up to the last minute of production because *Bluebird*, the manufacturing company, were saying, “Oh well, we’ll just glue

all this on, make it one piece and we’ll blend out the hemispheres.” I can see their argument, of course, which was based on the fact that four pieces would add a hell of a lot more money to assembly costs, but I told them they were shooting themselves in the foot and persuaded them that the more accurate it was, the more we would sell. Thankfully they believed me and stuck with the more complex assembly.

**SF&F:** What “Mark” of Dalek is it based on?

**Steve:** I based it on your standard, run of the mill 60’s Dalek. The colour scheme is your standard bluey-grey drone Dalek. The figure inside was originally going to be John Pertwee, not Tom Baker, by the way. It was changed because I included Davros in his most recent incarnation as the Emperor Dalek at the top inside the playcase and the BBC argued that he didn’t appear in the series until Tom Baker was the Doctor. I argued that the incarnation he was depicted in didn’t appear until Silvester McCoy was in the series and that no way was I going to put Silvester McCoy in the playcase! They maintained that Tom Baker would be the most popular figure and that was the only aspect that was ultimately beyond my control. It’s not a great problem... at least it’s Tom Baker... it might have been Colin Baker, in which case I would have disowned the product altogether!

**SF&F:** Why does it have a flat back?

**Steve:** Ultimately it is a case and therefore has to open and sit flat on a surface so that a kid can play with it. That’s why it’s the shape it is. It’s a cost compromise. Likewise, we had to lose a lot of the spray operations. The Dalek was originally intended to be a lot more heavily decorated.

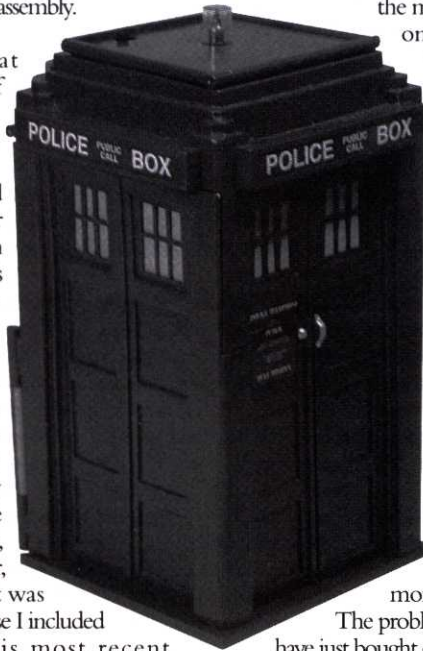
**SF&F:** The little Dalek inside with the ball bearing is a nice touch.

**Steve:** It was based on the 60’s *Rollakun* Dalek. We had to double check to see that there was no licence still existing on that toy and its mechanism. It sounds something

simple – a little ball bearing in a toy – but these kinds of things do sometimes have patents on them, but we found that everything was fine in this instance. Originally we were going to put two Daleks in the case, but again cost prohibited that.

**SF&F:** It’s a nice package.

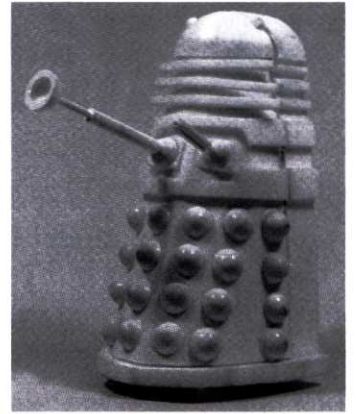
**Steve:** I think for what you get for the money the finish on the exterior is very crisp... you find on a lot of toys that the spray masks are a bit shabby and that there’s a lot of overspray.



The Dalek has gone into production pretty much as I intended it to be, which I was extremely relieved about. It’s in a state of flux at the moment, however.

The problem is that *Mattel* have just bought out *Bluebird Toys*. The Dalek has been available for a couple of weeks in a few shops and has just started to be distributed. I must say at this point that another reason *Bluebird* was nervous about producing the Dalek is the fact that they had to convince their buyers – *Woolworth*, *Argos* and *Toys R Us* are the three main toy distribution companies in this country – to buy it too. They had the same reservations that *Bluebird* had originally. They don’t want to order this stuff and have it sitting on their toy shelves.

It has gone into production. It has been tooled. It has been distributed to a certain extent, but things are a



little bit on hold at the moment because of the takeover. Hopefully *Mattel* will continue to run it. If not, we will find another manufacturing company.

I’m also toying with the idea of making it available on the internet. It’s actually cheaper for us to just distribute it in the UK and then offer it mail order worldwide. Most of the internet response we got from our original exercise was from the States and Australia. We have to look into how we are going to distribute it. Some kind of warehouse will be set up somewhere with a mailing address where the toys will be packaged and processed and shipped. It is going to happen.

**SF&F:** What of the future?

**Steve:** If the Dalek is a huge success – and I’m doing my best to make sure that it is – if I can prove to *Mattel*, *Bluebird* and my company that there is a market there for it, then they will be less nervous about doing other *Doctor Who* items.

So, tell your readers to go out and buy it and we can produce more items, not only for *Doctor Who* but based on other classic British TV Sci Fi too.

**SF&F:** We’ll pass on the message.

