THE 100 "BEST DESIGNED" PRODUCTS

Last year Jay Doblin, director of the Institute of Design of the Illinois Institute of Technology, embarked on a fascinating—and brash—project. Finding it no trouble to pick out 100 "leading" designers, architects, and design teachers of the world, he figured that they in turn should find it no trouble to select the "best designed mass-produced products of modern times." Each member of the outsize "jury" was to name his top ten choices.

About eighty ballots were returned. Some well-known designers declined to participate, saying they thought the assignment was impossible. Some complied under protest: the selections, they said, would "merely reflect individual prejudices"; "assorted objects cannot be compared."

After the ballots came in, the institute found that only sixty-two products had been mentioned often enough to warrant their inclusion in a final list. The list of all products mentioned was sent back to the members of the jury for a second ballot. The final votes were tabulated and the products listed from 1 to 100 according to the number of votes they received. The selections led off with Olivetti's Lettera 22 portable typewriter (fifty-five votes) and ran through to the Gilbert Erector set (fourteen votes). They are shown on this and the following pages as a group for the first time, with captions (keyed to their ranking) giving the name of the product, the date of design, the designer, and the manufacturer.

Some of the selections obviously were chosen for purely aesthetic reasons, others because they were trend setters, still others out of sentiment or nostalgia. A few (the Talon zipper, for instance) are surely more invention than design. And motivational-research men might find it fruitful to speculate why automobiles are the objects most frequently cited (fourteen times), with chairs runner-up (thirteen).

The selection as a whole is certainly provocative. It comprises many of the "classics" on which designers seem to agree. This may bewilder the layman, who will be surprised to find the Franklin stove, the Model T, and the Victor talking machine next to the slickest modern design. A single judge would undoubtedly have come up with a more homogeneous selection. But it would hardly have been as interesting.


8 Frigidaire Sheer Look appliances, 1957. Designer: General Motors Styling Section. Frigidaire Division, General Motors Corp., Dayton, Ohio.


20 Leica Ille camera, 1940. Designer: Oskar Barnack. Ernst Leitz, Wetzlar, Germany.


46 Director's chair, Traditional design. This model manufactured by Telescope Folding Furniture Co., Inc., Granville, New York.


57 "Vienna" café chair, 1876. Company design. Gebrüder Thonet, Vienna, Austria.


63 Pyrex chemical flask, Traditional design, before 1914. Corning Glass Works, Corning, New York.


80 Frigidaire fold-back surface cooking unit, 1955. Designer: General Motors Styling Section. Frigidaire Division, General Motors Corp., Dayton, Ohio.


85 Luger Standard Army 9mm pistol, 1908. Designer: Georg Luger. DWM Aktiengesellschaft, Karlsruhe, Germany.


90 Franklin stove, about 1750 (model shown, about 1785). Designer: Benjamin Franklin.


92 Budd Pioneer Zephyr, 1924. Company design. Budd Co., Philadelphia, for Chicago, Burlington & Quincy RR.


98 Tappan "400" wall-hung electric range, 1901. Designers: Smith, Scherr & McDermott, with Truman Clark (Tappan Co.). Tappan Co., Mansfield, Ohio.
