

**ALPHA from Shanghai** One of the two ALPHAs in MCS is the prewar German system with Bakelite Wheels and a brass Gun Barrel, see 26/758; the other has mostly MECCANO-like parts, but with some differences including a 7-hole long Flanged Sector Plate. It was said to be German in the original MCS Part 1 but later the hole pitch was discovered to be 12.7mm and Frank wondered if it might be British. In fact it is Chinese, witness a new find by David Hobson - a manual (right) from a Shanghai firm for Sets 000-1, and nearly all the parts from a No.0 outfit. The manual also shows that it is connected to HAO WANG (H W henceforth), see 8/182, and that the MCS entry relates to a later phase of ALPHA. Both systems probably preceded the 12.5mm pitch WISDOM-type Chinese sets in which, though many of the parts were similar, none were identical, with slight differences in even the characteristic 7h Sector Plate & 7h Trunnions. The thread was changed too, from  $\frac{5}{32}$ " BSW to M4.

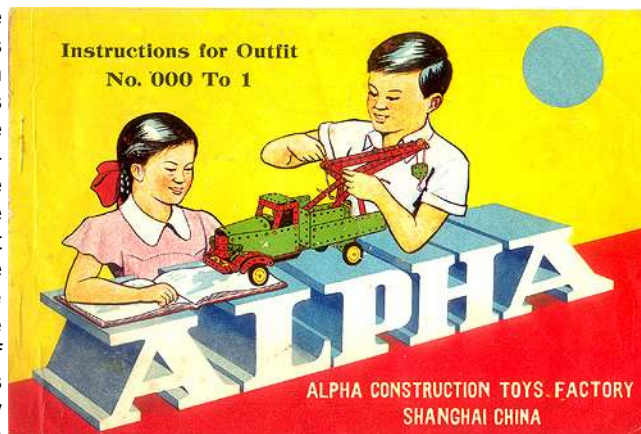
**COUNTRY** China

**MAKER** Alpha Construction Toys Factory, Shanghai, China (from manual cover).

**HISTORY** The manual dates from after 1954 because, as with H W, some of the models are clearly taken from the MECCANO 1954-61 manuals. Of the manual models below the 100. JETPLANE looks like a late-1940s, early-1950s Mig 15 (apart from its wing roots), & the flag on 86. AUTOMOBILE (actually a Motor Boat) is the Chinese People's Republic flag adopted in Oct. 1949.

**SETS** Nos.000, 00, 0, & 1 are covered in the Manual, but the MCS manual has Nos.2 & 3 as well.

**HOLES:** Most are 4.3mm with a few 4.4, and 4.5mm in the



Flat Trunnion. **Slots:** only in the Flat & Angle Brackets, 8.5mm long, and in the Curved Strip, 6.5mm. **PITCH:** 12.7mm.

**MATERIAL/FINISH** The main parts are painted steel - Strips & the Trunnion are light red, Plates & the Flat Trunnion, apple green (near the PALIKIT shade), and the Pulley & Bush Wheels are orange, including their bosses.

**PARTS Basics:** • Most parts look like the H W ones shown in 8/182 (but #25,33,34,55 have not been seen). The few exceptions are noted below along with some

dimensions and other points of interest. • **Widths** Strip parts vary from 12.8 to 13.0mm. • The **Ends** of the Strips are near fully rounded; the **corners** of the Plates are fully rounded. • **Bosses** are 9.6mm Ø steel with a bore of about 4.2mm; they are 9½mm long, double-tapped, with a narrow ring of flat peening. • **Quality** The parts are generally well made with quite good paintwork.

• **DAS:** 64½mm o/a with lugs about 13mm deep. • **Flat Bracket:** very like M10 but is ½mm shorter at 22½mm o/a. **A/B:** made from the Flat Bracket, 11\*13mm. • **Trunnions:** the Flat Trunnion is 37½mm wide & 38mm high; the Trunnion is made from it but one is 27\*12½mm and the other 25\*14½mm.

• **Flanged Plate:** 66½mm wide with 12½mm deep flanges. **Flanged Sector Plate:** flat across its front/back top edges; 14mm deep flanges. • **Flexible Plates:** about .4mm thick and not easily curved.

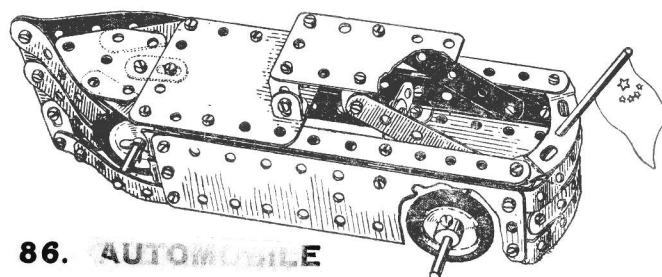
• **Pulley:** 24.3mm Ø, with narrow 3.5mm wide vee. Its **Rubber Ring** is black, 4¾mm wide. • **Bush Wheel:** 36mm Ø.

• **Axles:** 3.96mm Ø, 52 & 89mm long, nickeled, with slightly rounded ends. **Crank Handle:** as Axles but 136mm long o/a with 85mm shaft & 28mm handle offset 16mm.

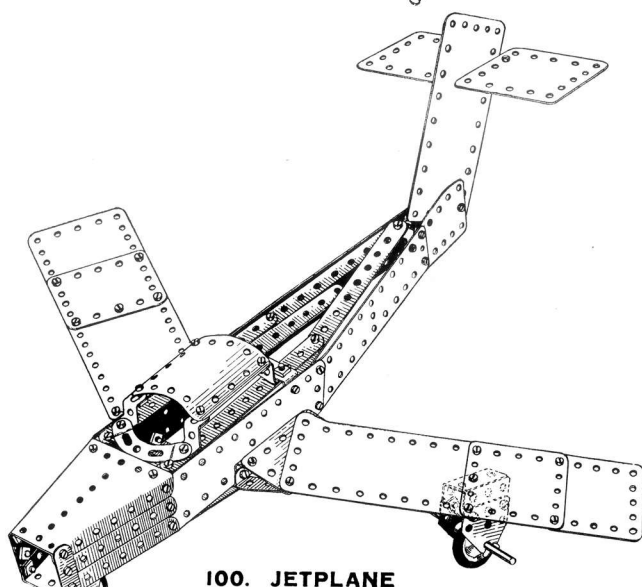
**Fixings** Brass steel,  $\frac{5}{32}$ " BSW N&B. **Nuts:** square, pressed, 6.5mm A/F & 2mm thick. **Bolts:** 6.8mm Ø RH, 6½mm u/h. Also used as set screws. **Spring Clip:** nickel, 5mm wide with 5mm long wings.

**Misc:** • **Screwdriver:** 3.96mm Ø nickeled wire, 113mm long. • **Hook:** unpainted zinc, flat, 30¼mm long, very like the MARKLIN pattern but at 2-2¼mm thick, a little thinner. • **Cord:** a short length of red cord was found with the parts.

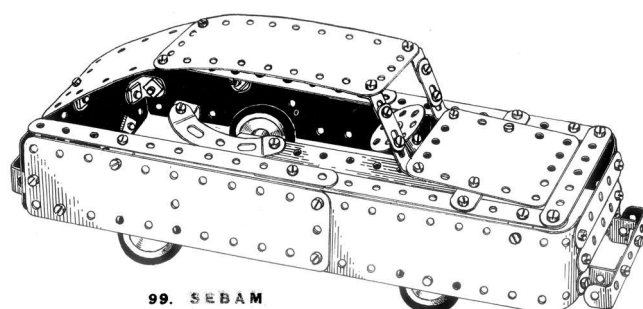
**SET CONTENTS** As given in the Manual they are the same as Sets 000-1 in MCS except that they contain no Driving



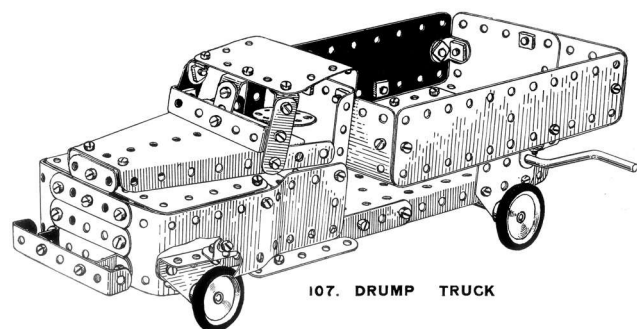
86. AUTOMOBILE



100. JETPLANE



99. SEBAM



107. DRUMP TRUCK

Bands (Light) and have the following for Sets 000/00/00/1: Hanks of Cord, 1/2/2/2; Bolt & Nut, 22/25/50/100 of each.

The other parts in Sets 000/1 are: 0,2,0,4/6,12,10,6 of 3,5,7,11h Strips; 2/6 DAS; 2/4 Curved Strip; 4/8 Flat Brkt; 4/15 A/B; 0/4 Rev A/B; 2/6 each of Flat/Trunnions; 1/1 Flgd Plate; 0/2 Flgd Sector Plate; 0/19 Flex Plates; 2/4 Pulley & Rubber Ring; 0/1 each Small Pulley, w & w/o Boss; 1/1 Bush Wheel; 0/1 Wheel Disc; 2/4 Axles; 1/1 Crank Handle; 0/1 Hook; 4/8 Spring Clip; 1 each Spanner & Screwdriver.

**MANUAL SUMMARY** •Name: ALPHA •Details of maker: ALPHA CONSTRUCTION TOYS FACTORY, SHANGHAI, CHINA. •Dates &/or Ref Nos: none. •Page size: 227\*153mm. •No. of pages: 42+covers. •Language: English. •Printing: dark blue with ½-tones of 'Meccano' models & line drgs of others. •Page Nos. of Illustrated Parts & highest PN: 2,72a. •Page Nos. of Set Contents & highest PN: 3,74. •Sets covered: 000,00,0,1. •No. of models for each set: 29,38,9,33. •Name, Model No., Page No. of first & last model of each set: 000: GARDEN SEAT,15; BOXTER TRAINING,29,13. 00: INVALED CHAIR,30,14; CRANE,67, 23. 0: CHEVALIER,68,24; PEDICAB,76,25. 1: SWIVEL CHAIR,77, 26; HWA-PIAO (CHINA PALACE PILLAR),109,42. •Other notes: C2-4 blank; Intro on p1. Some, but not all, of the incorrect model names have had new names pasted over them (and some of those have been torn off).

So, quite a thick manual with a page size a little larger than A5. All the text is English and in the Intro it is said that 'ALPHA runs a special service department to satisfy the desires of the young engineer as to the manner of construction and purchase of extra parts. All letters will be given special attention.' But the only address given is the Shanghai one on the front cover.

The 67 **models** for Sets 000 & 00 are all MECCANO models from the H W manual, with the same presentation of a halftone plus a parts list for each. After that there are a few MECCANO models but most are a fair range of original, simple designs with a clear line drawing of each. Four No.1 models were shown on the previous page, the Boat is full-size, the Jet 75%, & the others 50%. No list of parts is given for any

of the 0 & 1 models.

**REMARKS** There are several links between ALPHA & H W. Both were made in Shanghai. Their Illustrated Parts pages are identical, with the same PNs except that the former has '72a' under the Bolt. Also the 00 Set Contents match except that a Spanner & 2 more Rubber Rings have been added to the ALPHA outfit. And as has already been noted the H W models are used in ALPHA. Perhaps ALPHA came a little later than H W, or perhaps it was improved a little for export.

The original MCS ALPHA with its sets up to No.3, is no doubt a later phase. The cover is completely different and has 'ALPHA CONSTRUCTION MODEL 1' in the centre with a boy and 6 models around it. One of the models is the Lorry on the present cover, and two are larger models of a Gantry Crane & a Railway Breakdown Crane. The range of parts has been doubled and new 3- & 4-figure PNs have been introduced, but the illustrations of the parts common to the present ALPHA are identical except that the MÄRKLIN-type Hook found in David's set is shown. 2 unusual spellings have survived: Flate Trunnion & Screw-Driver. The contents of Sets 000-1 are unchanged except that 2 of Driving Band (Light) are added to Sets 0 & 1; 2,4,4,4 Hanks of Cord replace 1,2,2,2 in the 4 sets; 3 extra Bolts have been added to Set 000, and 5 extra N&B to Set 00. Finally, the page (20) of 4 models in MCS has identical model photos to those on a page (19) of the present manual (the Model Nos. differ & the PLs have been changed somewhat).

A different manual cover is shown in the /FB MCS and it is identical to the present one except that it has no text on it, just '00' in the top right corner. It isn't known if the 000-3 Set Contents also relate to this manual, but most likely not.

Very few WISDOM etc models look similar to the ALPHA designs and it's probably fair to say that they are generally not as attractive.

OSN 32/943

ALPHA [1]: S2

**Snippet – A MECANIC Set** This Ebay item was a set said to be Belgian. The lid, right, scales at 5¼\*6¾" and there is probably an '0' is the cream circle. The models on it seem to be made of green Strips. Like the lid, the bottom of the box has red sides, and in the Ebay photo it is full of MECCANO & TECNIC parts, plus a red Pulley Disc that looks like the 39mm MERCATOR one described in 29/851, and a red 3\*3h Plate, possibly flanged, and possibly also MERCATOR. Below some model sheets, each with a front like the lid picture but in B&W. Not much else of interest can be seen except that the few legible words are in French.



There are brief details of a Belgian MECANIC in MCS. It is said to be from the same family as MERCATOR and to have polished steel parts with 5mm holes at 12.4mm pitch. The MCS manual



cover shows a typical MERCATOR scene with a boiler-suited boy waving a spanner and flying through the skies astride a floatplane. So it remains to be seen, I think, whether these two MECANIC's are one and the same.

OSN 32/943

MECANIC [6]: S1



**Snippets. 'New' System: LE PETIT CAMPEUR** This simple French system has wooden Rods held by metal Connectors which are tightened by Bolts with Wing Nuts. The photos here are from an Ebay offering. A second Ebay set was said to date from the 1940s, but from the scene on the lid a pre-WW2 date for the system is perhaps also a possibility.

The main heading to the introduction on the Model Sheet (Fig.5) is "L'EMBOUIT UNIVERSEL" [Universal Fitting]. This refers to the Connector (there are actually two types in the Set) which it says has caused a 'Revolution' in the 'L'ASSEMBLAGE DU BOIS ET DANS LE JOUET DE CONSTRUCTION'. A patent (Breveté S.D.G.D.) is claimed.

There are 4 lengths of Rod, said to range from 25 to 48cm in length, and their diameter scales at roughly 1½mm. The 2 types of Connector can be seen in the box right and are shown enlarged in Fig.3: a T-Piece, & a Right Angle Connector. On the small Wheels which are used in some models, the Model Sheet indicates that they can be bought separately, and they may just possibly be included in a different, unspecified set

The label on the box lid is signed Hoyos. The Model Sheet is glued onto, and nearly fills the underside of the lid. It is said on it that the Set contains 30 Rods & 30 Connectors.

The second set is in a wooden box, 23\*50cm, with similar, but wooden, partitioning. Said box looks well made and has the labels as before on & inside the lid. If it is home made the labels must have been carefully transferred from a cardboard box. About half the Rods remain, and all are plain wood.

After the introduction the Model Sheet (yellowish but B&W here for clarity) has 12 models (Figs.4,5,7) from SUPPORT DE TABLE to LE BANC. 10 can be made with one set, except that 4

of them need Wheels, and one of those needs Rods cut to length (Fig.4). Of the others, the Church (Fig.7b) needs 2 sets, and the Chariot, Fig.5 top right, needs 53 Connectors, Wheels, & Rods cut to length. In some models the Wheels are shown dotted but it's not clear why. The actual Wing Nuts look more prominent than as shown in the Model Sheet models.

A loose sheet with the cardboard boxed Set showed 8 models which had won prizes in a model competition. They include 2 rather rudimentary Aeroplanes & the Swing in Fig.6, the only model, apart from those on Wheels, which has any movement.

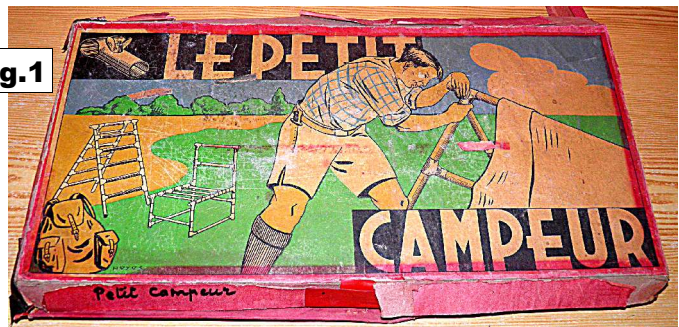


Fig.1



Fig.2

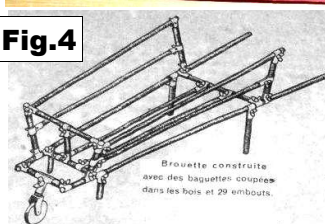


Fig.4



Fig.3

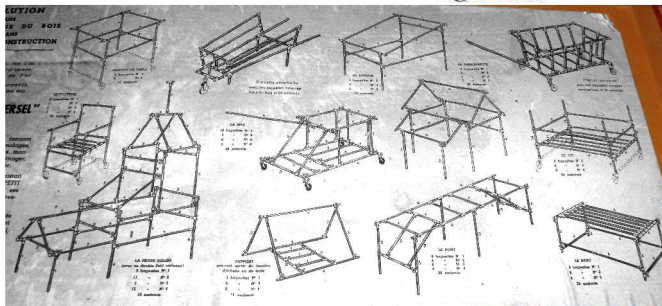


Fig.5

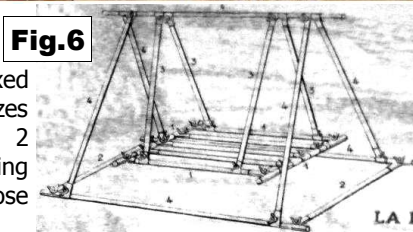


Fig.6

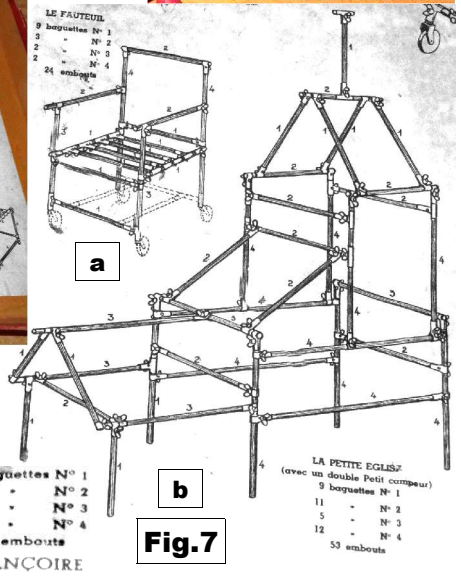


Fig.7

## OSN 51/1577

## LE PETIT CAMPEUR: S1

### Snippet. Chinese

**ALPHA** Further to 32/942 the Ebay photos here are of a manual cover & open box from the style of set shown in MCS. The Set's lid is identical to the cover except that the '000' is on a green circle.

The parts visible are as described in OSN 32 except that the Bush Wheel & Pulley are silvery rather than orange.

The contents of Sets 000-1 with this style of lid/manual were listed in OSN 32; the parts in Sets 2 & 3, above those in Set 1, are as follows, using MECCANO PN's (all parts look like MECCANO): 0/2 #1; 0/2 #11; 0/2 #15b; 0/1 #18a; 4/6 #38; 0/2



Fig.1



Fig.2

#38d; 0/1 #44; 4/6 #111a; 0/4 #142c; 0/1 #176; 1/1 Driving Band (Heavy); 1/2 #187; 0/2 #192; 2/2 #199; 1/2 #200; 0/1 #212; 0/1 #213; 0/2 #214; 0/4 #215. Both sets have 100 N&B, as in Set 1.

## OSN 51/1577

## ALPHA [1]: S3