

REVIEW

CONSTRUCTIONAL TOYS by Basil Harley, Shire Publications Ltd, £1.95. (32pp)

This is a book of modest dimensions and ambitions, but also of a correspondingly modest price. Books in the Shire Album series are to be found in almost all museum shops in this country and aim to give the reader a brief and cheap introduction to some quite specific areas of the antique and collecting worlds. For instance, other titles include "Buttonhooks and Shoehorns" and "Old Telephones". Basil Harley already has two books in the series on "Toy Boats" and "Optical Toys" and also writes regularly in modelling magazines, especially on the subject of steam engines.

Given the editorial constraints he was working under Harley's major problem in writing this book was not in getting enough information to include but in deciding what to leave out. As we all know the field of constructional toys is vast so how has he narrowed it down to 32 pages?

His chosen chapter headings are Building Blocks, Meccano, Limited Variety Outfits, Imitation Meccano and Lego. The obvious omission is of constructional systems that are not Meccano-like in nature, but otherwise the choice is a reasonable one.

The Building Blocks chapter deals with the origins of constructional toys which are to be found with building blocks made by Bavarian craftsmen in the 18th century. But it goes on to consider a large number of building toys in a variety of media, such as rubber Minibrix, wooden Matador, plastic Bayco and many others about which very little has previously been published.

The Meccano chapter mostly covers familiar ground, with quite a comprehensive and accurate account of the development of the system before the war. However, Harley is very dismissive of developments post-war which he characterizes in terms of a steady decline into oblivion. This section ignores several technical developments and contains certain errors of fact. For instance, he describes the Calais factory as existing to "produce plastic Meccano kits for the European mainland" and does not seem to know that the factory still produces the full range of parts for world-wide sale.

The chapter on Limited Variety Outfits is very brief but none-the-less considers a good range of products including Meccano aeroplane and car sets, Marklin and Schuco car sets and Bowman steam outfits. The equally short section on Imitation Meccano again encompasses a wide range including Marklin, Erector, Primus, Juneero, Masterbuilder and modern foreign alternatives. The details here are brief but substantially correct.

The Lego section is longer and quite comprehensive although the fact that the original Lego bricks were the invention of an Englishman, namely Hilary Page of Kiddicraft fame, is not mentioned. The engineering limitations of Lego in comparison to Meccano are recognised although in other respects Harley is clearly quite taken with the system, claiming at one point that "Lego can be used to make cars and ships, robots and space stations far more realistic than those made by the old bolt-together metal outfits", an opinion with which I, and I suspect many readers of this journal, would wish to take issue.

Despite its brevity over half the space in this book is taken up with illustrations in the forms of both photographs and reproductions of original literature. At this point I have to declare an interest in that a large number of the photographs are of items in my own collection. However I think I can fairly say that the illustrations are of good quality and complement the text nicely.

This book is far from being a magnum opus on the subject of constructional toys, but then it does not pretend to be, and within its limitations provides a useful introduction to the subject. It is broad in scope, well written and attempts to place the toys it mentions in their social context.

Malcolm Hanson

NEW SYSTEM - FALCO A reference was recently seen to this construction set, it was Italian and was said to date from the interwar period. A colour photo of a model, made in 1937, showed it to be of the Dinky Builder type with red, blue and silver plates.

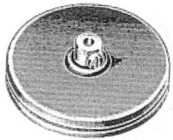
MARKLIN 1990-91 Along with the latest copy of Infos from JEAN ESTEVE OBJETS was a 1990-91 MARKLIN brochure in English, French and Dutch. Compared with 1989-90 (see OSN 2, p16) all the sets are continued except that of the three Nostalgia Sets only 1075 (the prewar No 3) is listed. Both the Motors and the Power Screwdriver continue and so do the 7 Packs of Parts (1040 - 1047). The individual Parts available have also remained unchanged.

Photos from Italy The notes below are based on photos that Umberto Delaini has kindly sent of sets in his collection, the first German, the rest Italian.

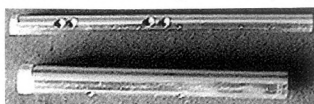
ALPHA Kanonen-Baukasten This is **Set K** of ALPHA [2] in MCS, the 1930s German 12mm pitch system, mentioned in 17/476. BK gives the dates as 1931-33 but it may have continued longer than that. The **box** is red with white partitions and scales at 23*38cm. The small parts are in a little blue box, with a white label printed in red with the ALPHA star and stamped 'K' in purple. The lid label below is blue on white, and features the model shown in MCS part 5.



Some of the **parts** in the Set are still wrapped in tissue – notes on the others follow. The dimensions given have been scaled; all bosses are brass. • The **Flanged Plates**, #36 & 39, are red, with MÄRKLIN pattern tops, as in MCS. • The Bakelite **Wheel #40** looks just like the illustration (left) in MCS. It is 60mm Ø, or a little larger, with a brass boss, and is a dark colour, perhaps with a slight mottle. • The **Bush Wheel & 25mm Fast Pulley** are red.



• The **Fine-toothed Gears**, #86 & 88, are brass. From the dimensions given in MCS they are probably Mod. .65. The larger one has an unpierced disc, not the 4 spokes shown in OSN 17. (The 5-spoke Gear shown in the illustration of the No.3 outfit in MCS scales at about 55mm Ø and might therefore have 84t. It isn't shown in the Illustrated Parts but there is no PN 87.) • The **Coarse-toothed Gears**, #70 & 71, have 16 & 32 teeth, giving a Mod. of 1.5, and they look nickel plated. • The **Gun Barrels** are brass, probably tubes. The white end that can be seen at the left end of each in the view below might be a plug to give a centre hole, or the end of a full length bushing. (I think it says on the label that rubber Shells were used, but there is no indication of size.) One Barrel is about 15½cm long by 1cm Ø, and the other, the one in the model in MCS, is 13 by 1½cm - it has 2 cross holes which can just be seen at the bottom of the photo. • Left the wooden-



handled **Screwdriver**, 18cm o/a.

A **leaflet** with the set has the Illustrated Parts as in MCS, and another (model?) leaflet or manual, headed "Alpha Modelle", has photos of 2 models on the front, the one in MCS and one similar to the OSN 17 model, but with 25mm Pulleys as wheels at the corners of the Flanged Plate.

FALCO This is the system mentioned in 5/83, with parts like ASSEMBLO, etc. The photo in the next column is of the linking set **No.0 bis**, with the parts strung to a yellow card by white cord flecked with red. They are red & green and the red Pulleys have a thin Rubber Ring on them. The Rods are in a blue packet, and on 3 sides of the Large Square is what might be a U-shaped Rod. The **box** itself is red and the lid has just the small label right, in red,



white & black, and the set number in a small white circle bottom right. The 'Brevettato' at the bottom of the label means patented.

With the Set is a **leaflet** in Italian advertising the range of FALCO sets. It is headed FALCO Toys, with

underneath '1937 prices have increased by %'. At the bottom is the maker: Ing.Falco & C., Torino, Via Rossini, 25 (or maybe 26). The constructional sets cost from L.14 to L.1950, and 15 models of buildings & vehicles are shown, with red, green, white, and perhaps grey or silver parts. The illustrations are too small to reproduce, or to see much detail, but generally the models look interesting with for example a Tipping Lorry, & a large Delivery Van. There is also what looks like a small box 'A.B.C.', at L.8.

Two **other FALCO sets** are shown. An Aero outfit (Scatola Aeroplano) at L.35, with the model below in red & green, with white wings.

The second is a Scatola Paesaggio (Scenery



Costruzioni FALCO Scatola AEROPLANO L. 35

Set) at L.70, and the illustration shown for it (right), is a small Church surrounded by green fields & trees.



Costruzioni FALCO Scatola Paesaggio L. 70

ELET Also on the FALCO Leaflet is ELET, with sets from L.5 to L.40, and 3 models are shown. ELET was mentioned in 15/426 as the same, or similar to the German ELECTRIC (see 24/694). All that can be seen clearly in the models is that the Flanged Plate certainly looks like the distinctive ELECTRIC pattern. This Plate and some Strips look grey, a Coil green, & what might be a Bell & a Ball, red. Underneath the ELET name is 'Costruzioni MECCANO ELETTERICHE'. Had Meccano's long arm not reached Torino in 1937?

ITALMECC The name was mentioned in 23/658, and this account is based on a **No.0 set**, packed in a wooden box, with red/green parts generally like MECCANO, but with a touch of MÄRKLIN here & there. The pitch of the holes isn't known exactly, but the scaled dimensions given below assume it is ½".

The **box**, of plain unpolished wood, is about 14" square, with partitions inside, as below. The lid label, 9*7", is yellow



3. **Snippet. A FALCO Set** A little on this Italian ASSEMBLO/DINKY BUILDER style system was given in 26/758. This Ebay 2-layer set has '1' on the lid below and an animal head logo in



the top left corner. It was said to have been made by a firm called S.A.I.C.E. and to date from the 1940s or 1950s.

Below its partitioned tray with the manual sitting in its own



space. The part at bottom right looks to be flanged with perhaps a centre cutout, and if so I'm not aware of such a part in any other comparable system.

Below, the tray, without the manual, resting on the



partitioned box and presumably the parts shown have been taken out of it. The Rods etc are in/from the blue and red-brown packets.

FALCO [2]: S1

[39/1165]

4. **POLYLONG Etc.** Graham Aldous wrote that he has compared sets which are definitely from Polylong (see 37/1123) with TECH & METAL KITS outfits (see 37/1125), and he thinks that the latter are from a parallel manufacturing system in China. The parts are very similar but there are small differences, for example the Curved Strip has a slightly different shape. Also the TECH metal parts are more smoothly pressed with more uniform plating, and the plastic parts are slightly better moulded. The TECH parts right (and a Flanged Corner Bracket of opposite hand) were not among those in the Polylong outfits. It was also noted that TECH has a different numbering system for its parts (Polylong tend to use Eitech numbers, sometimes changing the first digit from 1 to 2), and that TECH models, though similar to POLYLONG items, differ somewhat and are perhaps rather more attractive and more solidly built.



TECH & METAL KITS boxes have a UK address on them and Graham wondered if the components are imported and packaged here. The larger TECH models are the Dragster shown in OSN 37, a Plane, a Tank, & a Helicopter; the smaller ones are as METAL KITS.

[John Peach and several other readers have sent details of the various 'POLYLONG' sets they have seen or bought, often multi-model outfits which are 'bundles' of single-model sets, not all of which are the same brand. I don't think that it's really sensible to try to record all these piecemeal and so for the moment I am filing them away against the day when an overall picture can be written. Needless to say though, I am grateful for all such comments and especially for details of parts not recorded so far – Ed.]

POLYLONG: S12

[39/1165]

5. **METALLIX** The Metallus range now includes (at the end of the 'Single Components' web page) a selection of TRIX-like parts which are listed under the name METALLIX. They include all the parts that were in the old TRIX Sets A, B, C, D, & G, plus 2 Tyres. New parts are more Strips & A/Gs up to 57h long, longer Bolts (M3.5), and 4 Flexible Plates, material not stated, from 5*5 to 5*26h. They are blue; the other parts yellow, except the Brackets, Hook, Spanners, Worm, and N&B which are shown black. The Gears are light coloured Delrin discs with and without brass bosses. The Bosses are also sold separately in a range of lengths (of the shank that goes through the disc, that is) and no doubt more than one Gear could be mounted on the longer ones. The shanks have flats and they are presumably a push fit in the discs. Also listed a METALLIX set called 1ABCD, but nothing is said of its contents.

Postscript. Revisiting the site a few weeks ago the Flexible Plates are no longer listed but a 12v Motor has been added, a cylindrical motor mounted on a red, TRIX-like flanged base.

METALLIX [2]: S1

[39/1165]

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Small Ads Short ads are free to subscribers; insertion guaranteed in OSN 40 if received by the end of January (but repeats may not always be possible, please ask).

OSN – Your Credit Balance:

was	after OSN 38
was	after your remittance of
is	after this Issue

Please send at least £ _____ if you wish to receive the next Issue.

5. STABIL Website Update. Werner Sticht wrote that he has recently updated his (already very comprehensive) STABIL website: www.stabilbaukasten.de. Click on Neuigkeiten to see what is new, and erweitert or Änderungen for updated items. The first new topic is a brochure showing 20+ models for dealers to display, and they can be enlarged by clicking on them. The following 3 items all include photos of factory display models. There is also a full account of the LILIENTHAL system, something of which was given in 22/623. It will be recalled that it was based on an 1888 patent and though it had wooden parts it could claim two firsts: Strips with equispaced holes, and one model, a Windmill, with an Axle to allow the blades to rotate. Surprisingly the Axle wasn't used in any of the other models. Another unique feature was that sets were available with 2 sizes of parts: their hole pitch was 25mm in one series, and (probably) 100mm in the larger version.

STABIL: S9

[51/1549]

Snippets. AUTO-CONSTRUCTOR Update. A number of sets have been seen on Ebay since the last notes in 42/1291, and have contained a few points of interest.

Basic Sets It will be recalled that 2 basic sets are known, one in a larger box than the other, and it seems that, with one exception, they all have the same contents, enough parts to build the Nr.1 manual models. The additional parts in the exception, a 'large' box, include 4 Buckets, some DAS, extra Chassis Side Members, & a Headlamp (with a second noted as missing), the same extra parts that were in my 'small' set (see OSN 40) but there is no way of knowing if they were originally in that set or if they came from say another outfit. The Set is unusual in having yellow Body Panels, all the parts that are usually blue or sometimes red.

All 3 of the larger sets seen & 1 of the 7 smaller ones, have 'Auto-Constructor' on the lid; in the others all the letters are capitals, as are those on all the manual covers. Where a maker is given in the Ebay ads it is usually Heinrich Fischer but Philipp Kühner is sometimes mentioned. However it now seems likely that the latter was the printer of at least some of the manuals, and the maker before Fischer was Curt Schrader.

Set Nr.1A None of the sets seen have the set number on the top of the lid but it may have been on one of the lid aprons, as in the Nr.1, a small set, mentioned in 40/1216. Most Ebay photos don't show all the aprons and the only set number that can be seen, from another small set, is shown left.



Apart from its unexpected 1A designation, it looks a typical

6. Snippet: Another FALCO Set. Like the outfit in 39/1165 it has 2 layers of parts, but is larger and some parts, mostly those with piercing, were not in the OSN 39 set. But not all the earlier parts can be seen, only a single Wheel size for instance. The lid is as before except that the white Set No. circle is missing.



FALCO [2]: S2

[51/1549]

small set, and fairly complete, but it does have at least 12 of the DAS in it. However they probably belonged to a Nr.2 set which was included in the Ebay lot, and which, though looking largely complete, had no DAS in it. No reasonable explanation of the 1A designation comes to mind. It's of dubious relevance but the box had a trade label from a shop in Prague on it.

Set Nr.2 2 sets have been seen, both similar to the one in Fig.5 of OSN 42 but more complete, and the better one is shown below. Its dimensions were given as 25.5*15.5*3cm.

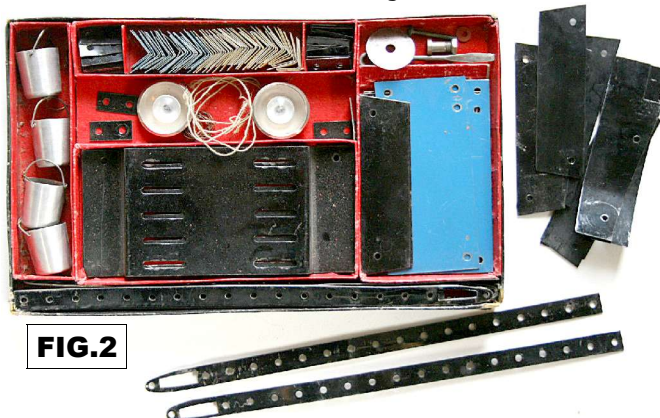


FIG.2

Its DAS are missing, but as explained above they may well be the ones in the Set 1A. The disc top right could be one of the Hose Reel Ends. It was suggested in OSN 42 that the latter were in the Fig.5 set but on a second look it is clear they are Headlamps with a deeper reflector than those in Figs.2 & 11 of OSN 40. No doubt a later, more realistic design. The Headlamps in the other 'new' Nr.2 are also this 'later' type.

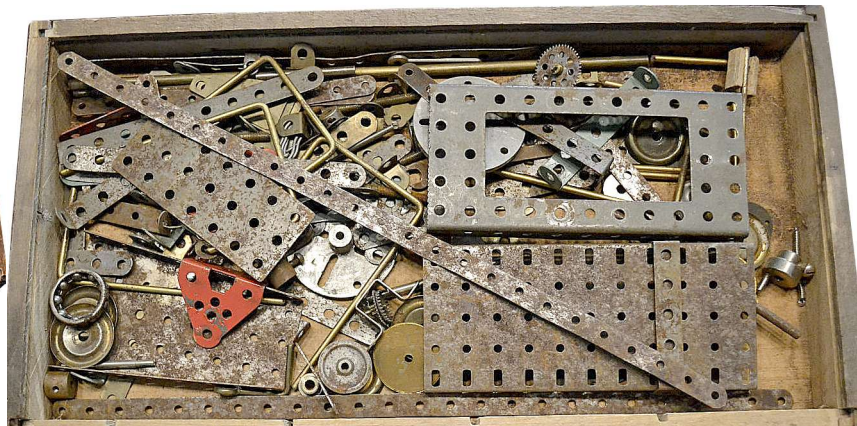
OSN 51/1549

AUTO-CONSTRUCTOR: S6

Snippet. 'New' System: MECHANIKUS



The set shown here was offered on the German Ebay recently. A PR bottom left on the lid reads (Dr.?) 2443 1047 10000 MDV Haldensleben ??/ 2456. 1047 seems a likely date and Haldensleben is a town 30km NW of Magdeburg. All that can usefully be said of the parts in the box is that they are clearly from more than one system.



OSN 51/1549

MECHANIKUS: S1

CLIPPA Never heard of it, well not surprising because it only ever reached the pre-production stage. John Timms has a factory produced No.1 sample set & model, and also a copy of the company's business plan. He kindly supplied details.

The Clipper Toy Co. was registered in the early 1950s with the intention of producing CLIPPA, a version of the by then defunct KLIPTIKO, but with a limited number

of parts to aim mainly at 2-8 year old youngsters. 3 men were involved from the start but the main player was a Mr A Roseberry. By around 1955 two applications for Registered Design had been successful, and sample sets had been produced, but then activity ceased due to lack of money. A failed attempt to revive the project was made in 1959.

The SETS It was intended to market outfits 1-3 plus 2 linking sets, all using the same range of 10 parts as in the No.1 (see Fig.1). The same size box was to be used for the main sets; likewise both linking sets would be packed into their own same size box. John's set has a plain bright yellow lid edged with red but in production Sets 1-3 were to have a 3-colour label, and the 'a' sets a simple label showing its set number. The No.1 had 30 parts in all.

The PARTS Compared with KLIPTIKO there were some changes made as improvements. There was an extra, longer Clip which could form a diagonal in a square made of the shorter Clips, thus adding rigidity. And for added versatility a variant of the shorter Clip had angled ends. Another new part is the Connector in Fig.2 which pushed into Tubes to make it easier to join them – it was to be plastic in production. Also a pair joined by a Connector became a Long Clip but with the advantage that the ends could be at any angle, and differ between the ends.

So the 10 parts comprised 3 Tubes, 4 Clips (Long, Short, Short with Angled Ends, Half), a Wheel, a Connector, & a Hub Cap. The steel parts were to be made from .015" sheet (28 swg), as in KLIPTIKO, but were generally slightly smaller than their KLIPTIKO counterparts. Dimensions as follows with the KLIPTIKO values in brackets. Tubes are $\frac{3}{10}$ " ($\frac{3}{8}$ " \varnothing) and $1\frac{3}{4}, 3\frac{1}{2}, 5\frac{1}{2}$ " ($3, 4, 6\frac{5}{8}$ ") long. Clips are $3, 4\frac{1}{4}$ " ($3\frac{1}{2}$ ") long. The Wheel is 3" ($3\frac{3}{4}$ " \varnothing). The Hub Cap is wooden, but to be plastic (metal). The Connector is $1\frac{5}{8}$ " long.

The MODELS 12 models were to be shown in the Model Leaflet for Set 1, with 4 Guns, including the Field Gun in Fig.3, 3 furniture models, a Robot Man, a Dog, a Windmill, a Bike, & a Ch't (?Chariot). With only 2 Wheels in the set none of the models can really be pushed along.

RETAILING For cheapness distribution was to be by representatives rather than wholesalers and the likely retail prices for the sets, based on factory costs and the usual margins, were 11/-, 19/-, & 27/9 for Sets 1-3, and 8/5, & 10/- for the 'a' sets. The aim though was to sell the No.1 for 9/11, 10 shillings being an important pricing point for potential purchasers.

The Plan has a comparison of prices between CLIPPA and various other toys. In nearly all cases the CLIPPA prices are well within the range for the other toys. The only one where a more or less direct comparison is possible is with MECCANO



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig.3

where Sets 00, 0, 1, 2, & 3 cost 6/9, 11/-, 16/11, 24/- & 33/6. It is suggested that the 3 CLIPPA sets compare with Meccano's Sets 1-3 on the basis that Sets 00 & 0 contain fewer parts if their N&B are excluded. True, but at least the No.0 had 4x 1" Pulleys with Tyres so push along models could feature.

KLIPTIKO Pre-WW2 In 1939 a No.1 KLIPTIKO set had 53 parts including 4x $1\frac{1}{2}$ " Wheels, and sold at 2/6. A MECCANO No.1, with 2x 1" Pulleys & Rubber Rings, cost 3/-, or a No.2 with 4 at 4/6. The KLIPTIKO manual models certainly doesn't do justice to the Set with again no model that could be pushed along on 4 Wheels. If the Fig.3 model is typical of the others CLIPPA models they were a distinct improvement on KLIPTIKO's. The MECCANO manual of the time showed many more models with a wide variety of subjects and full use of the wheels. KLIPTIKO had the advantage of being easy to assemble and those today who still remember having it speak fondly of it and of the ease of 'inventing' new, often large models. The only complaint is that it seemed impossible to incorporate steering in Lorries etc. KLIPTIKO needed a revamp but it was not sold again after the war so perhaps sales had not been high enough to warrant the investment.

SNAPSTICKS In 1959 Roseberry wrote to Games & Toys asking if any other toy similar to KLIPTIKO was being made, and the answer was no. SNAPSTICKS (see 44/1345) had been advertised in G&T in 1948. No doubt it had not succeeded in establishing itself. It wasn't mentioned in the Plan either but it's interesting that it too had additional longer Clips, two in this case.

An ASSEMBLO-FALCO Connection? The French ASSEMBLO was of course the original system of this type and is well known (see 15/420,444, 30/877); FALCO was Italian with the same style of parts (see 26/758, 39/1165, 51/1549) but full details are not available. Jean-Pierre Guibert though has spotted a possible connection between them as below, with an almost identical picture used on the covers of two documents. So was there a connection between them with the same owners perhaps, or a licence agreement. Or did FALCO simply copy the ASSEMBLO image.



Fig.1



Fig.2