

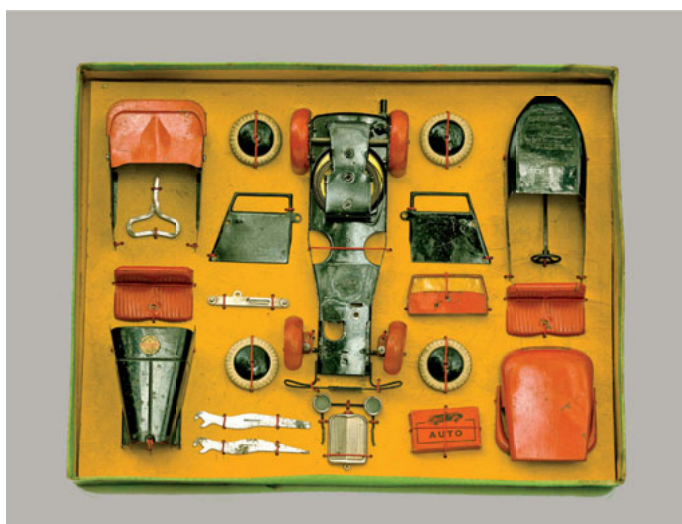


The Meccano Motor Car Constructor Outfits

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Boxed No 1 Motor Car Constructor Outfit



The No 1 Outfit showing solid square section key, and clockwork motor formed inside the chassis. Wheels are separate but axles are already attached. Two tails, one bonnet, and hardtop. One spanner/screwdriver and spanner/drift (podger). Boat tails have low doors. Larger doors were to use if roof was fitted



Close-up showing chassis and motor as boxed. It was necessary to take off the guards to assemble the body

By the late 1920s Meccano Ltd was regularly adding to the range of Meccano Parts to stimulate sales, including the surprising set of 24 special Ship's Funnels. Following introduction of the completely different style Aero Constructor Outfit in 1931, Meccano's management must have decided this "constructor" form of outfit was selling well and by August 1932 a new Motor Car Constructor Outfit appeared in the Magazine advertisements. This was supplied with a simple fold-out sheet "Manual" showing six different models which could be built using a new range of beautifully detailed interchangeable metal parts, held together with nickel plated 6 BA Bolts with hex Nuts, as supplied in the smaller Aero "O" Outfit, also introduced in 1932. Again, the Car Outfit Parts were completely different from the standard Meccano range, but far more detailed than anything made before. There were many cleverly shaped, well formed sheet metal panels, two sets of different mudguards or "wings", a large number of intricate brackets, five diecast 1½" wheels with nicely moulded white rubber treaded Dunlop tyres (later Firestone, for the American market) and a very special clockwork motor shaped to fit the "boat tail" pressings. It was to be fixed together with the very small and hard-to-handle 6 BA Bolts, now in a number of different lengths, and hex Nuts. The radiator could be changed, as could the tail shape, and the body length could be varied to suit different styles of vehicle. Full working steering gear plus a cleverly designed operating outside hand brake were also included.

The original 1932 Car Constructor was advertised as a single Outfit in three body colours, red, green or blue. By 1935 this had changed to four colour combinations--red with light blue mudguards, light blue with cream guards, green with yellow guards and cream with red guards. Spare body panels could also be bought in orange and yellow with guards in orange and green.

Again this new product must have been a sales success because by the summer of 1933 the range was extended with a new, smaller and cheaper No 1 Motor Car Constructor Outfit.

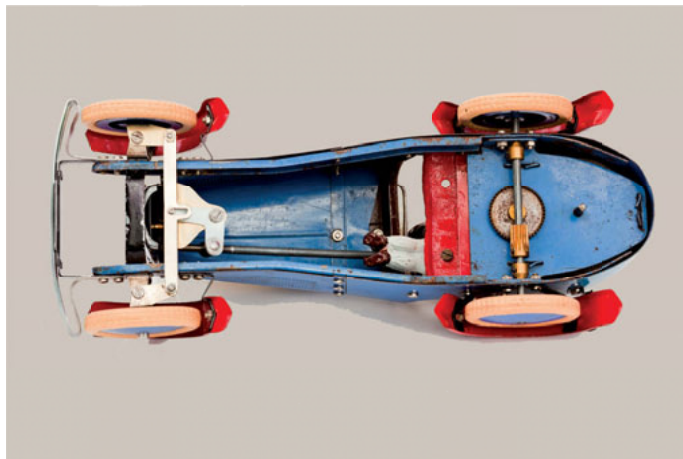
As with the small Aero Outfit, this new range was not interchangeable with the larger Car Constructor Outfit, having a small, almost one-piece set of body and chassis pressings, plus a hardtop, all beautifully detailed and still assembled with nickel plated 6 BA Bolts with hex Nuts. Another simple fold-out "Manual" was provided showing four possible combinations. To make the range logical the original outfit was renamed No 2 Motor Car Constructor Outfit. The opportunity was taken to add to the No 2 Outfit as well. A diecast Driver with nicely shaped arms for holding the steering wheel was introduced, which necessitated the punching of a hole in the seat pressing. A hole was also provided on the passenger side, but no suitable passenger was ever included.

The No 1 car headlights were a diecast pair on wire mountings. The No 2 cars included formed chrome-rimmed headlamps with

acrylic lenses which were later used, with wiring notches cut in the body, in the “Meccano Lighting Set” for Meccano models, introduced in 1934. This followed the 1933 introduction of a simpler “Meccano Electric Lighting Set” for the No 2 Car (more correctly a Wiring Set), to connect a small battery to “pea” globes inserted in the headlamps. A new design of Dashboard with a central hole for the lighting switch was supplied in the No 2 Outfit from here on.

The original No 2 car came with a proper Spare Wheel fitted with a rubber tyre, but this was soon replaced by a diecast and painted “Imitation Spare Wheel Cover”. Both No 2 and No 1 Cars were supplied with assembly tools—a narrow blade standard wire Meccano Screwdriver, a Meccano Drift and small pressed steel 6 BA Spanner/Screwdriver for the large car, a similar 6 BA Spanner/Screwdriver and special Spanner Screwdriver/Drift with a tapered tail for the smaller car.

These two outfits provided a good range of excellent Motor Car



Underside of a No 2 car without the undertray, showing the steering, the motor and the final drive assembly—a contrate driving a pinion (both gears non-Meccano standard). No brakes on this one. Like the Aero sets, you need to roll the tyre off to get to the grub screw on the wheel boss. The axle has three dimples for the wheels and pinion. The steering column incorporates one of Meccano’s more interesting novelties, a left-hand, two start thread. The steering operates via a fixed nut on the L-shaped bell crank visible here. The nut (and thus the crank arm) is moved towards or away from the dashboard by a thread on the lower end of the steering column. This is a left-hand thread, because a normal thread would turn the front wheels to the left (by pulling on the crank) when the steering wheel was turned to the right. Also, with a normal thread, the steering would require six turns lock to lock. So Meccano used a “two start” or twin thread. Instead of one spiral groove making a thread, there are two grooves, side by side, giving twice as much “lead” for the same thread pitch, thus twice the movement of the nut for each turn of the shaft. And the steering becomes three turns lock to lock. The No 1 car had a simpler system—a bent end on the steering column fitted into a slot on the crossbar.

models to be built, from a Brooklands racer to a road-going open or closed sports car.

As an interesting diversion, a “non constructor” clockwork powered Meccano Two-Seater Sports Car broadly based on the then current MG sports car was added to the Motor Car Constructor Outfits 1 and 2 during 1933, available in red, blue and cream.

All Car Outfits came with Keys. The No 2 Car was supplied with two types of standard Meccano Key, originally the “C” Key with inserted handle and later the cheaper “L” Key folded from sheet steel—both with the “rail gauge” top. The No 1 Car had a special “reverse” key, formed from square rod, later marked “P”, which was inserted in a hollow winder hole. The Two Seater Sports Car had two types of special Meccano keys, originally a “square tube with wing” key, later an “M” Key, both similar to the pre-war Magic Motor’s first Key and the later “A” Key, but made with longer shafts to clear the windscreen when winding.

As with the Aero Outfits all these wonderful Cars continued to be made up to WWII when the factory was turned over to the war effort. Unfortunately they didn’t re-appear post war. As far as I know, both the Motor Car Constructor Outfits were supplied around the world including Australia with no special variations other than the tyres for America. Given the slow state of the Australian economy in the early 1930s, it is unlikely that many No 2 Motor Car Constructor Outfits were sold, although I have found here in Victoria two unboxed partially complete No 2 Outfits, and a fellow Club member has a complete boxed No 2. I have two No 1 Constructor Cars found locally, but my Two-Seater Sports Cars both came from the UK.

The Australian prices from the 1935 List show the Car Outfit No 2 at 39/- (thirty nine shillings, or \$3.90) rising in 1940 to 50/- (fifty shillings, or \$5)--about the price of a pre-war Meccano No 5 Outfit at 52/6 (fifty two shillings and sixpence, \$5.25). The cheaper Car Outfit No 1 retailed at 27/- (twenty seven shillings, \$2.70) surprisingly dropping to 26/- in 1940, perhaps from unsold stock.

Again if we assume a very good wage in 1940 was around 100/- (one hundred shillings, \$10) per week then a No 2 Motor Car would comprise 50% of the weekly income. It is interesting that the now very rare and valuable non constructor Sports Car was listed at 14/- (fourteen shillings, \$1.40) in 1935 and not listed at all by 1940.



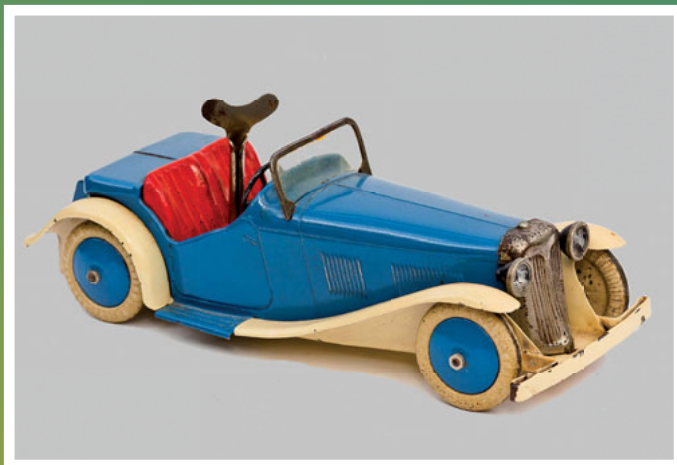
The first Meccano constructor car, which had no outfit number. It has an actual spare wheel and tyre, which could also be mounted on the side of the bonnet.



Left, the 1933 Meccano Electric Lighting Set for the No 2 cars—two pea globes, and wires with clips to connect to an old-type battery with brass tabs. Also in the box, the switch for the dashboard. For instruction, the parts are strung in place on a diagram of the car. One part (a support for the battery) is missing from this set. Right, standard issue 1934 Meccano Lighting Set, for any Meccano models. The table lamps were as produced for Dinky Builder, lights as for car constructor outfits.



A late No 2, short tail without the spacer behind the seats, missing spare wheel, cycle guards (all No 2 kits had two sets of guards). This example has been restored. More pictures, back cover



More Motor Car Constructor pictures

Clockwise from top left

Non-constructor car, bought already assembled with folded tabs, showing the key made only for this model

Small parts boxes for various sets

Some of the car outfit parts. The spanner/screwdriver and spanner/drift, different length 6 BA bolts, special collars for back axles (coned to avoid bolts), non-standard very short grub screw with standard 5/32" Whitworth thread, spacer from the steering column, and mudguard brackets from the No 2

The five keys for the car sets. Left, the two long-shank Meccano Sports Car keys, not used for any other Meccano application. Centre, the No 1 Outfit key. Right, the two keys used for the No 2 cars. One has a rail gauge for the O gauge electric train track. One has a rail gauge for clockwork trains, flat because there is no centre rail to avoid. The two keys on the right were also used for other Meccano clockwork motors, including those in the speedboats.

Another late No 2 Outfit car, different colour, with the so-called "Imitation Spare Wheel Cover" and a driver. His arms don't move when the steering wheel is turned

Assembled No 1, with doors, roof, cycle type guards, vaguely SS Jaguar

