

共产主义 乐高
COMMUNIST
LEGO
SUMMER 2014

**Fewer
errors!**

**New
CACK
award!**

**Disturbing
clone
minifigs!**

**More
girls in
tanks!**

COMMUNIST LEGO SUMMER 2014

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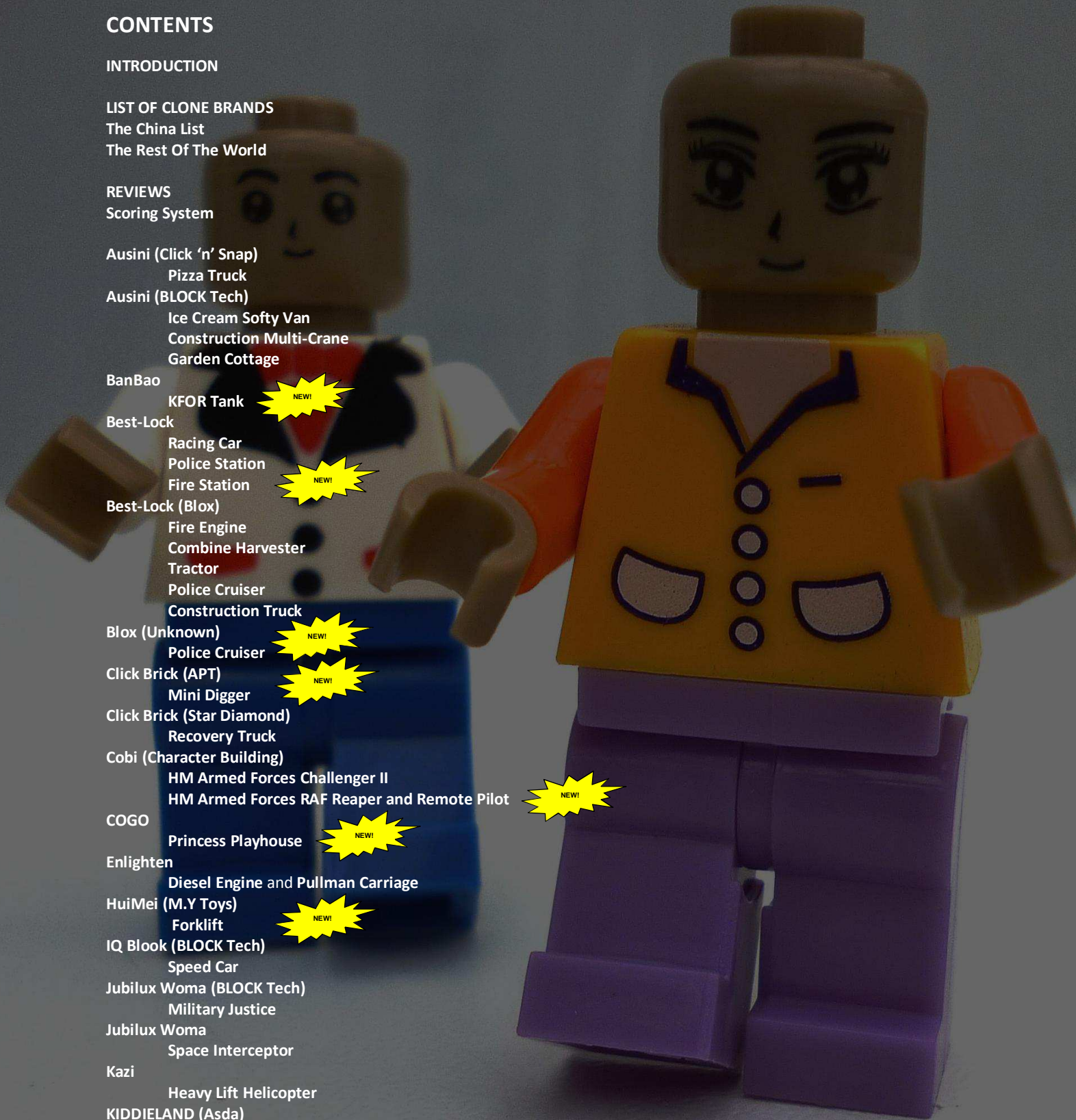
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Change History

V1.2 Original release, Autumn 2013

V1.3 Second release, Spring 2014

18 new reviews

Updates and corrections on existing reviews

Addition of covers and introductions

Addition of Camouflage

Addition of Zombie Nation and score tables

Much more sarcasm

V1.4 Third release, Summer 2014

26 new reviews

Updates and corrections on existing reviews, rearranged in alphabetical order

Revised introduction and condensed summaries

Addition of Camouflage: Tank Girls

Lots more pictures and colour to boost toner cartridge manufacturing industry

Reviewer's slow descent into insanity

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Introduction

Hooky LEGO. Hate it or love it, it's all over the place. What's good? What's bad? And why *are* BLOCK Tech kits so variable?

'Communist LEGO' came out of a curiosity at the large number of hooky brick kits appearing in shops all over the UK. Diehard LEGO fans have tended to ignore them, mainly through practical and moral reasons – they're rubbish, and have copied LEGO. Internet searches did show however that some makes had themes that LEGO does not cover (such as the military) where it might be possible to use parts, much as BrickArms or similar products. The big question was – were they any good?




This report tries to cover the enormous number of LEGO clone companies and kits, concentrating on those made in China. It is obvious that quite a few are blatantly flouting copyright laws, although these tend not to be easily available in the UK. Given the continuing huge popularity of LEGO it would seem obvious that other companies would try to cash in on the brand, but unlike many other toys LEGO copies have to be exact clones, or else they won't fit. The LEGO brick itself is not covered by copyright, but the minifig shape still is, as are (of course) the set designs themselves. Searching 'LEGO' and 'copyright' brings no end of news stories of legal cases with a mixture of results.

Although this report now has over 60 reviews, it is impossible to cover even 5% of the vast array of clone kits. There are probably over 30 Chinese companies each producing an average of at least 50 kits each, with a similar number doing DUPLO. The review results are also heavily skewed (as any statistician will notice immediately) as the sets are usually bought because they look either interesting or obviously rubbish. However, there are a number of surprises, showing that they were scored fairly. Well, mostly.



Many reviews are relatively mundane, so they have all manner of embellishments to try to keep the reader awake and generally rapidly decline into diatribes about zombies. Sincere apologies are offered to the entire Chinese nation for slating their country in so many ways, and there is hope that the humour translates into Mandarin. However, it is true that thumbs were damaged during the re-assembly of the Sluban kit, with blood and everything. “Immensely Strong Hands” in Google usually brings up this report on the first page. Also, I have come around to tolerating LEGO Friends, which is progress, and tolerating Smurfs, which probably isn’t.



Note: The LEGO kit moderation reviews are not covered, even though occasionally some parts are made in China so strictly it is (partially) Communist LEGO. The Airfix Quick Build kit review is also not included, as it was entirely designed and manufactured in the UK – in fact, the only product tested that has no connection with China at all. 



The China List

LEGO is a global brand and has been the subject of many copies over the years. The US company Tyco were the first with 'Super Blocks' in 1984, after LEGO's brick patent expired in 1983. Almost every attempt at cloning has been inferior, mainly due to production costs being lower resulting in inferior grade materials and poor fitting pieces. Set design has generally varied from mediocre to rubbish. However, the recently invigorated factories of China have begun to churn out various LEGO clones. It's worth noting that the potential Chinese domestic market is far, far larger than that of Europe and America combined.

There are many Chinese companies making LEGO copies, with new ones starting up at an astounding rate. For example, a brief trawl of the AliBaba and AliExpress export websites finds a list of 50 companies making plastic building blocks, with probably at least half doing LEGO clones. Most if not all are based in Chenghai, the toy capital of China. Some companies appear to source their products from each other and subcontract, so working out exactly who makes which branded kits is not always straightforward. Many are of random quality and there is a lot of chaff and little wheat. The following is an incomplete list of some of the more actively promoted brands. By the time you read this, there will probably be more. It is interesting to note that many Far East websites list the keyword 'Enlighten' above 'LEGO'.

Many of these names have been found from import websites, internet blog sites and video reviews, of which there are many. Some of the reviews are very comprehensive.

Ausini – This brand is manufactured by the Guangdong Ausini company and have a very wide range of products, generally matching the larger Chinese clone companies. Set design seems quite good, with the latest railway kits probably the best available in China. They state they have an in-house design team producing 200 new products per year (although these may include other non-brick items). They appear to be well priced. However, minifig expressions have the mildly disturbing huge-eyed look typical of East Asian tastes, and the skin colour is verging towards the zombie. Interestingly they package in either English or Russian, giving some idea of their perceived markets.

BanBao – This brand (made currently by the Penbu Toy Factory) hit the news in 2012 as its copying was so blatant even the Chinese law courts ruled in LEGO's favour. They now have changed their designs enough to not make them obvious rip-offs, have mostly moved into themes where LEGO do not produce sets, and have new minifigs called Tobeas that look a bit like characters from South Park. New kits include a large 1400-piece Long March 2F space rocket. They also market under the **BaBlock** brand name.

BELA – Brand of a currently unknown manufacturer, possibly also selling under the name **Jilebao**. They are probably hiding for a reason. Produces blatant copies of Ninjago, Bionicle and Hero Factory, Technic and (recently) Chima sets. Have also been copying the Cars sets under the "Let's Go!" theme. Seem to be goading legal action.

Blocko – The brand name of the **Coco** Toy Company based in Nanjing, China, also marked as **Kimboli**. Their product range covers DUPLO, naval vessels (military and historic), farm and town, fantasy castle themes, and the military. The HUMVEE sets (both military and civilian) look particularly impressive. They apparently have 43 design patents listed in China. The minifigs are of a slightly different design with wider torsos.

Blue King Kong Toys – See **JLB**.

Bom Bom – Brand name of an unknown manufacturer making blatant rip-offs of LEGO Star Wars (called Star War). Has amusing logo of a round black bomb with a smiling face on it looking upwards at the lit fuze, presumably representative of upcoming legal action.

Brick – A rather awful cheap copy brand producing small kits that appeared in the US a few years ago, but may have been rebranded to **IQ Block** after a few legal words (and damning website reviews).

CB Toys – Currently unknown manufacturer. Makes mediocre blatant copies of Legends of Chima minifigs.

Chaobao – Currently unknown manufacturer. Makes copies of Tamiya model and radio control sets, but also includes a range of LEGO clones.

Chuang Li – Currently unknown manufacturer. Relatively good quality copy brand making small city-type sets.

Coco – See **Blocko**.

COGO and **Little White Dragon** – Manufactured by the **Loongon** Animation & Toys Industrial Company Ltd. This company proudly states their product is compatible with LEGO and even shows off pictures of their factory machinery. Their range includes all LEGO sizes (Quatro, DUPLO etc.) and standard brick sets include pirate ships. They originally used their own name, but now market under both the COGO and the Little White Dragon brands and oddly seem to overlap some themes. Their products apparently meet European and American standards. COGO cheekily have 'Expert to Enlighten Children' written on the boxes. Loongon make sets of the famous Chinese boy pig hero 'GG Bond' and have (apparently) recently picked up the rights to produce 'Monkey King' kits - the 2010 52-episode cartoon version of 'Monkey' – although whether these will be brick-based kits remains to be seen.

COKO Bricks – Clone brand producing mainly DUPLO-type sets. They have an elephant logo and are available in Asia and Australia.

Concord Toys – See **Enlighten**.

Decool – Bizarrely-named brand that specialises in Technic-based clones, including the supercar sets and Hero Factory robots. Recently have produced blatant Ninjago, Superhero, and Chima clones.

Diamond Blocks – See **LOZ**.

Dr Luck – See **Ligao**.

Enlighten – The trade name of the **Zhongyue** Industry Company that makes many blatant LEGO copies and is *the* major brand in China. Currently they market under the name **Concord Toys**. They make a full range of LEGO themes, and also a lot of military sets with camouflage patterned bricks (although they can be a rather startling green colour). Some more recent sets have begun to diverge from duplicates, although mostly the kit design is not as good as LEGO and is rather blocky. They sell their non-motorised train sets as separate kits, so whole rakes of trucks and carriages can be purchased. Enlighten minifigs are direct copies of LEGO. Rather more unique is their kit of a worryingly realistic full scale working handgun that fires 3x1 technic rods (set '407' is *well* worth a web search).

Everlasting Bioer Plastic Factory – oddly named producer of cheap bricks. Photographs suggest they are the most plausible manufacturer of **Quick Bricks**, although there is no direct evidence.

Fuh Yeah – See **IQ Blocks**.

Funny Toys – See **Peizhi**.

GX Toys – See **Weagle**.

Hawk Blocks – Cheap copy brand available briefly in the US. Not only was it badly made, it was a different size to all of the other clone brands. Managed to score 0/10 on a review site.

HELO – See **Zephyr Knight**.

HOLI – Stud name on some **Xing Qi Le** bricks.

Hui Mei – Export brand for the **Xing Dou Cheng** company. Concentrates on small impulse-buy kits. Some have found their way into the UK via **M.Y Toys**.

Intelligence Bricks – Small designer-type sets found in the US, with the maker name **Xingda**. Bad Chinglish but original designs and quality found to be quite good according to internet reviews.

Intelligence Toys – See **Xin Qi Le**.

IQ Block – Used by BLOCK Tech as a supplier. Different under-brick locking method that is almost incompatible with LEGO. Probably rebranded from **Brick**, judging by the logos and lack of quality. Also amusingly printed as **IQ Blook**.

IQ Blocks – Not to be confused with IQ Block, these are produced by the **Fuh Yeah** company and look to be DUPLO size. They may or may not be compatible.

IQ Blook – See **IQ Block**.

Jie Da – This brand markets town and pink princess kits. They have two types of minifigs (possibly for home and export) – a standard clone shape, and an odd rounded figure that resembles a small DUPLO figure. The company exports to Russia.

Jilebao – See **BELA**.

JLB – Brand name for **Blue King Kong Toys** that produce minifig clones.

Jubilux – This company market themselves under both the elephant logo Jubilux, and the four-plated **Woma** registered in Hong Kong. As with other brands they produce a variety of themes, some rather closely modelled on genuine LEGO (such as the pirate ships). They make their own Army range and a **very** pink princess castle theme. The 'Space Team' logo looks suspiciously Lucasfilm, although the kits themselves appear to be home designed. Woma and Jubilux are exported to many countries and can be found occasionally in the UK, sometimes rebranded as **BLOCK Tech** or **Blox**. The minifigs are similar in shape and size to LEGO but have moulded knees and weird heads.

Kanitong Toys – Copies of DUPLO.

Kazi – The Kaiyu Toys Company is a rival to Enlighten, with a full range of LEGO clones branded Kazi. Their recent kits look to have had some thought put into them, although earlier sets copy genuine LEGO or are fairly basic. Kazi appear to compete with Enlighten on cost, with inevitable quality issues. Kazi is also spelt 'KaiZhi', although for the UK, Kazi are probably not fully aware of brand-name irony.

KIDDIEBRICKS – DUPLO copy marketed by Asda in the UK.

Kimboli – See **Blocko**.

LELE – Clone brand copying Ninjago, Bionicle, Ninja Turtles minifig sets, manufactured by **Qun Long**.

Le Qu – This cloner manufactures cheap-looking DUPLO / Mega Bloks equivalents.

Levi – a new company with another mildly amusing name, made by the Shantou **Megafun** Toys Industrial Ltd. Their mottos include 'Products can be copied but not the value', and 'We highly value honesty'. Their stated selling point appears to be producing stuff that doesn't harm the environment or children (insinuating that their Chinese rivals do). Blog sites suggest quality is actually at Kazi level. A brief browse of their website shows a vast array of their own kits (including a 2000-piece aircraft carrier) but also many blatant copies of LEGO sets, including Star Wars and even using the LEGO and DUPLO names on the boxes. Either none of their marketing guys have ever been to law school, or they all got 1sts and are itching for a flight. With everyone.

Li Cheng – This brand is one of two (the other is unidentified as this went to press) which use the same product. The brand has a logo of three 1x1 plates (red, green, yellow) and produces a variety of town-based sets.

Ligao – Another copy brand with a somewhat amusing name, made by the **Wange Toys** Industrial Company. Previously also occasionally branded as **Riddle Bricks**, the **Wange** name itself, or used as a sub-contractor, they have a wide product range which includes DUPLO, town vehicles, and 1000-piece architecture kits such as Big Ben and Tower Bridge. They seem to be a low-cost brand. Interestingly, their safety compliance documentation is missing off the export website... Wange Toys have recently launched the '**Dr Luck**' range that seems to be replacing the Ligao name. They have started copying LEGO themes such as Cars.

Lingnan – Brand of the Lingnan Toys Co. Ltd, who also market **Zhi Ling**. Their website states 'It is all about imagination', which is probably the only sensible translation of any of the clone brands. Products are the typical range of town, boat, and pirate themes. Minifigs appear to have yellow heads and hands.

Little White Dragon – See **COGO**.

Loongon – See **COGO**.

LOZ – brand name made by ZhenFeng Science and Educational Toys, and one of UK importer BLOCK Tech's suppliers. According to their website they were formed in 1998 to make plastic toys, building blocks and baby potties (which they still do). Many early LOZ sets are very blocky and reminiscent of late 1970s LEGO. The **Diamond Blocks** brand (marketed as **Microblox** in the UK by **BLOCK Tech**) uses half size bricks to standard LEGO, sometimes with odd-looking half-scale minifigs. The sculptures in 9300 'Gift Series' of Diamond blocks has what has to be the strangest product line in China, ranging from (amongst others) a watermelon, a Minion, a toucan, Captain America, a piano, Bender, a

Chinese vampire, Steve Jobs, and a toilet. Newer products include a Pirate-themed motorised fairground ride range with Znap-type blocks, although the minifigs seem closer to zombie pirates forcing the punters to stay on the rides. LOZ appear to be aiming at the Chinese domestic market with 'only' \$10m in exports. Many older small LOZ-based **BLOCK Tech** sets are sold in the UK by discount stores such as Poundland and JJB Sports. It would appear that LOZ have been superseded by **PeiZhi** and **IQ Block** in the BLOCK Tech empire.

Megafun – See **Leyi**.

Microblox – See **LOZ**.

OK – Basic building sets available in the Far East.

Pengcheng – See **Plastic Toy**.

PeiZhi – Another brand marketed by **BLOCK Tech**. Their kits are either direct copies of LEGO or strange blocky creations reminiscent of those made with the leftover bits at your gran's in the 1970s. PeiZhi have also been marketed as '**Funny Toys**' to the mild amusement of some of their US customers. They are one of those brands that have 'contents may differ from artwork' on the boxes which doesn't exactly instil confidence.

Plastic Toy – made by the **Pengcheng** Toy Co. Ltd, who are subcontracted by others (such as Loongon). Various kits are shown on their website with the box logos blurred out. One kit of interest is the **Loongon** brand military sand-coloured MLRS with sandbags. The minifigs look fairly similar to those used by **Best-Lock**.

Pioneer Blocks – LEGO Basic clone sets of appalling quality, probably aimed at the US and Canadian market as the boxes have English and French writing.

Qiao Le Tong – A brand producing town-style sets which appear to have unique designs and some special vehicle pieces.

Qigao – This brand is only available in Asia and looks to be a close copy of Enlighten.

Qun Long – See **LELE**.

Riddle Bricks – See **Ligao**.

Senno – This is the brand name of the **Sen Nuo** company. These have a number of clone kit ranges, and appear to have reasonably competent box art.

Sluban – This company mainly copies old South Korean **Oxford Toys** kits (a copy of a copy?) complete with the slightly odd-looking minifigs. They have a Europe-based export company based in the Netherlands with an easy-to-use mail-order website – although postage is a bit steep. They have many military kits which include a dark olive green colour, various town-based sets, and DUPLO clones. Some older sets appear rather blocky, but the website looks very professional and they even display building instructions. They have recently brought out new themes including train sets, which have black plastic tracks with half the curvature of the standard LEGO track (although they don't look directly compatible). Another new subject is 'Redcliff', a mediaeval Chinese castle theme suited to their domestic market. Best giggle come from the Navy submarine kit, which is translated simply as 'Nuke'. A more oddball Sluban theme is skiing. Is this big in China? New sets for 2014 include an impressive 1800 piece aircraft carrier.

Star Diamond – Strangely-named brand made by the Lianhuan Toys & Crafts Company which started up in 1994. Has a relatively wide range of products and again seems to be aiming for Enlighten's market in China. They have their own kit designs, with extremely similar instructions to LEGO and identical minifigs. They cryptically have the phrase 'About Sluban' under their Culture page, but there is no other obvious link to this company and as they seem to be in direct competition it seems unlikely they are the same. Blog sites suggest excellent quality but high prices. Star Diamond kits are not directly imported to the UK, but some are rebranded under **MY Toys**, and parts have been used by the UK-based **Click Brick**.

SY – Produce utter rip-offs of LEGO Friends, Super Heroes, and Star Wars minifigs, using the same artwork, names and designs. They have cheekily put a trademark next to the Friends writing. Until the lawyers call.

VIGE – Brand name of the **Wei Gao** company, producing DUPLO clone kits.

Wange Toys – See **Ligao**.

Weagle – Also known as **GX Toys** and manufactured by the **Zhi Ying** Toy Factory. They appear to have a wide list of products, but the website is currently inaccessible so may have been closed down or rebranded. Some designs have been imported into the UK by **BLOCK Tech**.

Wei Gao – See **VIGE**.

Wei Te Feng – See **Wit Toys**.

Wit Toys – These creator and DUPLO clones are made by **Wei Te Feng**. They occasionally have **Bela** on the box, but it is not obvious whether they are the same **BELA** copying modern Chima minifigs or a completely different company. Set 8879 has the phrases 'Fully exert your inagination' and 'Amazing visual convulsion' on the front. Not sure the wording would make anyone who spoke English buy it. The DUPLO creations seen are motorised train sets with big figures having the standard Chinese zombie pallor and expressions. Really scary.

Wo Fu – Brand name connected with technic robots, similar to Bionicle.

Woma – See **Jubilux**.

Wonder Land – Branded series taking Friends clones into a VERY pink princess-style castle setting with wind-up musical boxes.

Xingda – See **Intelligence Bricks**.

Xing Dou Cheng – See **Hui Mei**.

Xing Qi Le – Sometimes abbreviated to **XQL**. A cheap copy brand producing **Intelligence Toys** a few years ago. They may be responsible for, or be the same as, the much maligned **Zephyr Knight**, as the packaging and products look very similar. Stud names include **YIHE** and **HOLI**.

XQL – See **Xing Qi Le**.

YIHE – Stud name on some **Xing Qi Le** bricks.

Yixing – The most likely manufacturer of BLOCK Tech Junior pieces, although no direct evidence.

Zephyr Knight – Awful cheap copy brand found a few years ago in the US. May be related to **Xing Qi Le** and **Intelligence Toys**. The bricks have **HELO** printed on the studs.

Zhi Hang – This company produces their own sets, typical of LEGO Basic and Creator kits.

Zhi Ling – See **Lingnan**.

Zhi Ying – See **Weagle**.

Zhongyue – See **Enlighten**.

The Rest Of The World

For balance, there are various **non-Chinese** companies producing LEGO-type products, although almost all are probably made in China anyway.

Airfix QuickBuild – The brand of the plastic model company Airfix, covering LEGO-style bricks making realistic aircraft. The sets are manufactured wholly in the UK, apparently to guarantee quality. Parts are unique for each model with a few LEGO-type plates.

Best-Lock and **Cobi** – Best-Lock were originally a joint UK and German company (although registered in Hong Kong), and merged with the Polish-based Cobi a few years ago. Cobi produce a lot of military sets, and McLaren, Jeep and Boeing-licensed models. Cobi are the source for the UK-based **Character Building** Toys, who produce various themed kits including Doctor Who, UK Armed Forces and Scooby Doo – albeit with completely different minifigs vaguely similar to LEGO Jack Stone. **Chad Valley** also use Cobi-sourced bricks for their own range. Best-Lock mainly source from China, are the cheaper end of the range, and tend to sell in the US. Cobi used to be made in Poland, but have switched mainly to Chinese manufacture. Best-Lock are licensed to produce US Army military kits, and recently acquired the rights to produce Stargate SG-1 and Terminator branded kits, selling themed minifig sets in a similar way to **Mega Bloks**. Wilkinson **Blox** range were mostly old Best-Lock or **Jubilux** kits. Asda have also used Best-Lock.

BLOCK Tech – This is a UK import company that rebrand many Chinese cloners.

Blox – Brand name of Wilco's range of clone LEGO. Have used **Best-Lock** and **Jubilux-Woma** in the past, but are now sourcing from a variety of Chinese companies such as **PeiZhi** and **Ausini**.

Brik Tek – French clone brand, unknown supplier.

BTR – Produced some GI-Joe themed kits about 10 years ago. Minifigs were like small versions of Action Man.

By The Pound – Canadian brand made by Northern Technology. Sold as basic bricks in big buckets in the US.

Byggis – Swedish copy brand that has produced Super Mario, Flintstones and Jurassic Park themed minifigs and sets. Also may be related to the **Kloss** brand.

C3 Construction – US brand of loosely similar LEGO clone bricks who produce the Minimates figures.

Chad Valley – See **Best-Lock**.

Character Building – See **Best-Lock**.

Cheva – This is the brand name of the Czech manufacturer Chemoplast BEC. Products are vaguely similar to LEGO, but have different underbrick grab designs and straight-armed minifigs.

Cobi – See **Best-Lock**.

Construblock – A fairly new Spanish brand, originally appearing to use old **Oxford Toys** sets but branching out by having more unique minifigs similar to LEGO Jack Stone.

Cra-Z-Art – US brand of LaRose Industries LLC based in New Jersey, making the **LiteBrix** range of clear LEGO-type sets with... lights.

Funtastic – Brand company name for some Poundland products, using a variety of Chinese cloners either as sources for entire kits, or pieces for own designs.

Famoclick – Spanish re-branded **Cobi** products.

Ideal – Another South Korean company, formed by some ex-**Oxford Toys** employees.

Kloss – Swedish copy, may be related to **Byggis**.

Kre-O – See **Oxford Toys**.

LiteBrix – See **Cra-Z-Art**.

Mega Bloks – this Canadian-based company has been churning out their own bricks for years. They have licence agreements to make Halo, Call Of Duty, World of Warcraft, Need for Speed, Moshi Monsters, Hello Kitty, Barbie, and Smurf branded sets. Some parts are Improved over earlier products, but quality can still be decidedly random. Mega Bloks are made in China.

Ministeck – German company selling LEGO clones, most probably sourcing from **Jubilux-Woma** in China. A variety of themes, with the most interesting their range of train kits. They sell black railway track with curves double the radius of LEGO tracks. The minifigs appear to have yellow heads and hands.

M.Y Toys – UK import company that rebrands many different Chinese clone manufacturers.

Oxford Toys – This company is South Korean and has produced a lot of town and military stuff in the past. They trade under both the Oxford Toys and the **Kre-O** name. After being bought out by Hasbro they now make Transformer sets and have the rebooted Star Trek franchise. Their new Kre-O minifigs are distinctly different from LEGO minifigs. The standard kits are however very similar, and even have advertising with moving minifigs in the same way as LEGO.

PEBE – The original Communist LEGO, made in East Germany from 1955 until about 1990. Slight different underbrick locking method, but compatible.

Rik et Rok – French LEGO type sets with different minifigs vaguely similar to Playmobil figures. Most sets are themed around town and rescue sets.

Super Blocks – See **Tyco**.

Topaz – French brand looking very similar to the Czech-based **Cheva** with straight-armed minifigs.

Tyco – The first LEGO cloner with **Super Blocks**, now long since ceased trading.

THE REVIEWS

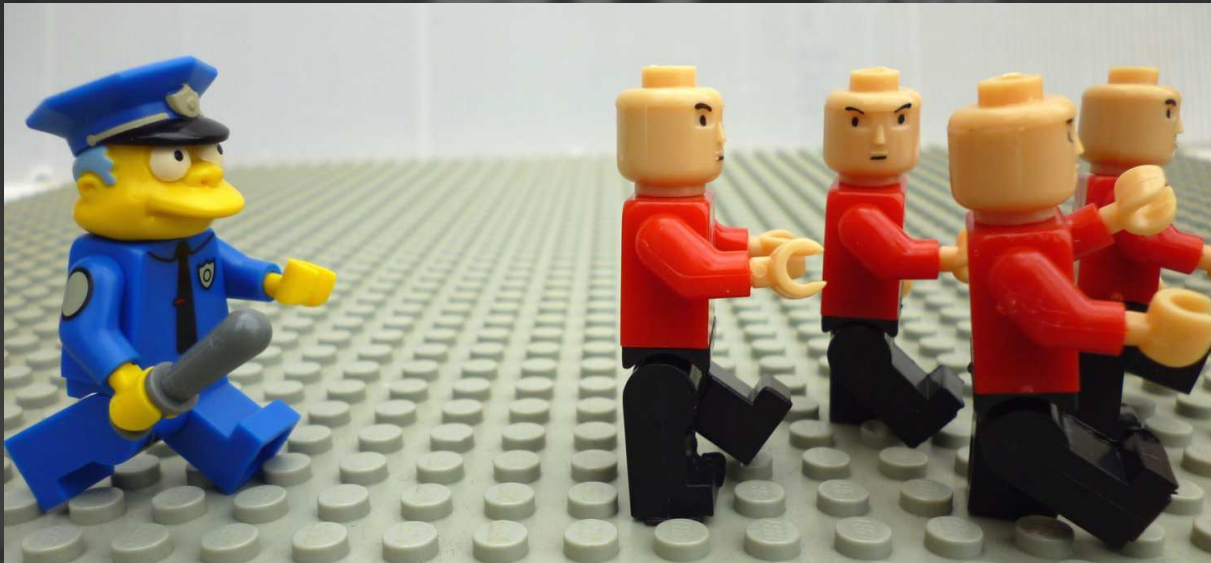
Scoring System

The original idea for Communist LEGO was to evaluate the Chinese clones that were beginning to appear in the UK. It soon became apparent that (a) there were far too many to properly review, and (b) almost all were awful and had terrible minifigs. Purchases were then skewed to allow acquisition of military-themed bricks and figures, discovery of new manufacturers, building an army of zombies and Smurfs to be chased by psychotic LEGO Friends, and to generally vent anger at obviously appallingly bad kits. The reviews do allow comparison between manufacturers, but mostly as an excuse to apply new levels of irate writing against cheap materials and poor marketing.

The hooky bricks and minifigs are now being held in an immigration centre until genuine reasons for citizenship or deportation can be established, with the perimeter policed by the heavily armed Counter-Zombie Dominance wing of the Heartlake City Neighbourhood Watch. Most of the set purchases were made to acquire minifig zombies, and here many of the clone sets came up trumps. Maybe the skin colour is a cultural thing. A lot of the bricks are no longer in my possession and have helped fire UK industry (or more truthfully, the local incinerator).

As a consequence of a whole year of reviewing, it appears that I now periodically become angry and militaristic and randomly impose no-LEGO zones into my neighbours' gardens. Although I do not yet have the immensely strong hands required to build all of the kits, I can crush golf balls with ease. The zombiefigs have definitely caused some form of mental scarring. Olivia the LEGO Friend talks to me all the time and assures me that the medication will work eventually...

Many more reviews of clone sets can be found on various dedicated blog sites all over the internet, and most are far better than these ones. However, hands-on experience and scoring from a British point of view may be more relevant to the UK reader, and of some interest from everyone else in internetland.



The following are reviews of some of the kits. Obviously, the scoring rules are based on a large statistical sampling exercise with a comprehensive auditable peer review process - or maybe I made up the numbers in the pub. Anyway, all comments are of the opinion of the occasionally sarcastic reviewer only, and do not represent Brickish, LEGO, or anyone else alive or dead, real or fictitious, etc. etc. Well, not officially, anyway. Results are colour coded, and are split into the following categories, with the important Quality, Fit and Minifig scored twice:

Quality	- how well the bricks are made, including manufacturing defects;
Value	- the overall cost of the set compared to what is in the box;
Fit	- the 'grab' of the bricks against one another and to real LEGO;
Compatibility	- how well the parts would combine with real LEGO if ever given the chance (shudder);
Minifig	- the comparison of a minifig with a genuine LEGO minifig;
Design	- the overall skill and interest of the kit;
Instructions	- the size, colour, layout and helpfulness of the supplied instructions;
Total	- addition of all the above, with quality, fit and minifig being scored twice.

The following is recommended as a helpful guide if thinking of purchasing kits of the clone bricks:

Explanation of colours, scoring and consequence:

Green: 90%-100%+: *no real problems at all. Be happy and build on. Have cup of tea, relax, and survey your masterpiece.*

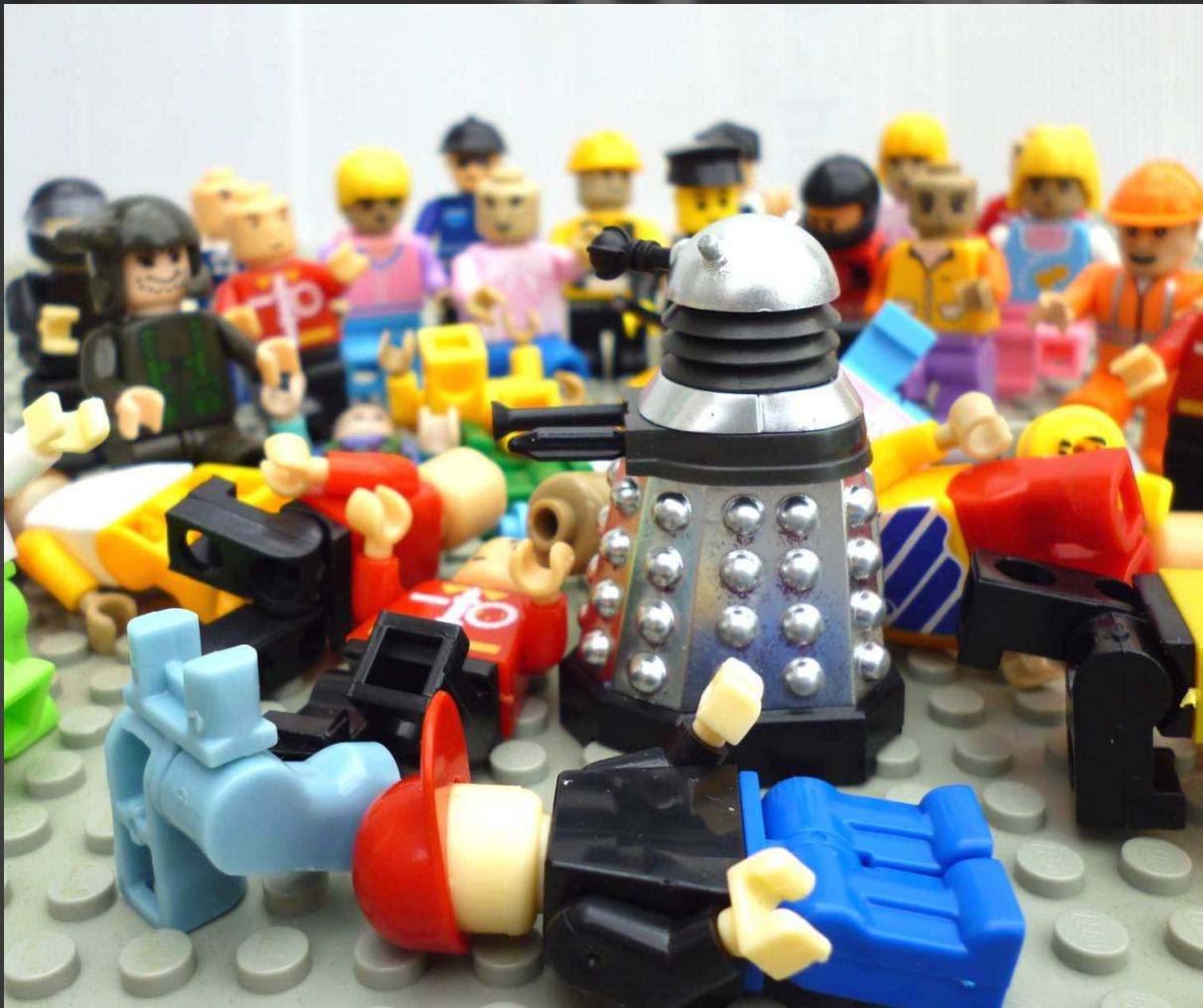
Light green: 70%-89%: *some minor issues, but generally OK. Get mildly irritated. Have a cup of tea to steady nerves. Relax, it'll be fine from a distance.*

Yellow: 50%-69%: *some problems. Get annoyed. Have a cup of vodka to steady nerves. It'll probably be OK from a distance in poor light with some superglue and if no-one touches it. And it's in a display cabinet. Probably.*

Orange: 30%-49%: *some serious problems. Get angry. Tea, vodka and therapeutic massage by supermodel do not help to steady nerves. It looks bad, even in the dark. Take set back to the shop or attack it with a hammer.*

Red: 0-29%: *Show-stopping problems. Get apoplectic. Prescription medicine does not help to steady nerves. Wonder how the miserly little set ever got out of the factory. Send multiple letters of complaint to shop, company, local MP, Chinese government, Ban Ki-Moon, and Daily Mail. Use home shredder for purposes unforeseen. Burn plastic shreds whilst cackling insanely. Jump up and down on ashes, apologise to neighbours and police officers, sweep up using dustpan and brush, and deposit into tiny urn. Have cup of tea, relax, and survey your masterpiece.*

The lowest overall scoring kit will be the winner of the **Crappiest Available Clone Kit (CACK)** award.





Click 'n' Snap (Ausini) – Pizza Van (Autumn 2013)

Poundland was found stocking the “Click ‘n’ Snap” brand of LEGO clone. Closer inspection showed that this was marketed by Funtastic. Apparently there are more than one to collect in the series, but the shelf only had numerous boxes of the Pizza Van. The box art showed a terrible zombiefig which if all else failed would be perfect for attacking Shaun at The Winchester. I enquired of the Poundland staff how much the set was. It was a pound. Apparently a lot of items are a pound in Poundland.

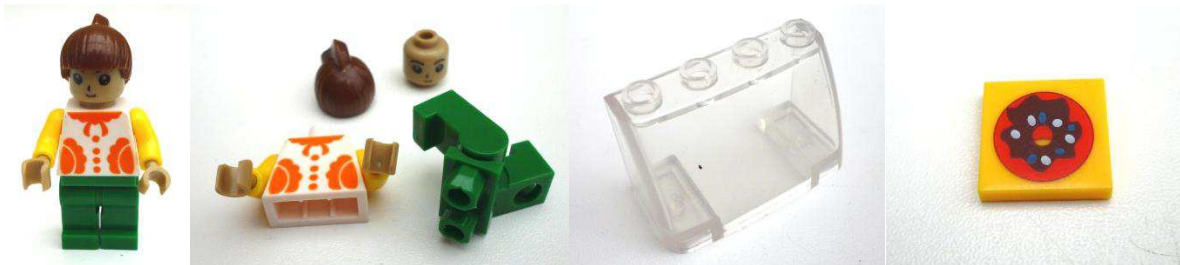
Unlike the BLOCK Tech kit, Click ‘n’ Snap had a thicker single box with instructions and parts inside. The photo on the instructions suggested the kit already existed in China from an established brand, and although it was initially thought to be COGO, an exact match was found with Ausini kit number 25204. There was a sticker set that was not shown on the box art but was in the instructions. The pieces were not awful quality and were slightly better than Enlighten in feel and ‘clink’. They appeared very similar to, but better than, the Little White Dragon pieces,

Quality was a bit suspect. At least one brick had an organic substance on it (I’m becoming more convinced this is a plot to give us Europeans avian flu), and the windscreen had something black embedded inside the (approximately) clear plastic. The red, white and yellow colour strengths were actually quite good. Wheels were hard plastic but were a good enough fit on the axles. Making the kit was not a chore, with brick grip erring towards the hard but immensely strong hands not required. The zombiefig came assembled and was actually quite good, potentially giving hours of graveyard fun and japes without too much chance of losing limbs. It would certainly need a cricket bat more than a Dire Straits record to fell it.



Short Order Pizza Van as supplied, and made. Bit of a design issue with Big Hair. And... design issue solved! So what WERE the designers doing?

There were, of course, a few issues with the set. The zombiefig skin colour was identical to the Loongon Little White Dragon tone, making it hugely scary for Western tastes. The head also had a very Eastern-themed big eyed expression which only served to enhance the potential terror to any small sensitive child. The torso print was OK quality but looked awful. The ‘pizza’ was a print on a 2x2 yellow tile. The print itself was a hologram, which was mightily impressive. The fact that it was a donut was not. The stickers on the truck had not been reviewed by anyone who spoke English as a native tongue, with the ‘PIZZA APPETIZING’ just about acceptable, but ‘SHORT ORDER’ only funny. [This would all work as a set: what makes more sense than an undead creature turning up with a donut and not taking ‘no’ as an answer?] Also, the design of the van meant that the female zombiefig would not fit in the seat without losing her hair. This was very simply fixed by reversing the rear van compartment. Perhaps all Chinese clone sets have errors in them to stimulate children and benefit the future of The Nation. Personally, I reckon it highlights the sloppiness inherent in the lacklustre and formulaic culture that is inevitable from decades of bureaucratic control, but maybe I’m wrong... anyway... erm, the kit was OK but had faults. Actually, after getting a few more of these kits for flammability tests the hairpiece seemed to vary randomly in type between sets.



Good quality zombie with disturbing face. Windscreen has black mark embedded in plastic. “Pizza” hologram print is a donut, let’s be honest.

Overall this kit was actually a rather good bargain – although this has to be tempered by the fact I was looking for a zombiefig and scored a jackpot. For the price the set offered a very playable vehicle with a figure that did not break in less than a minute. As long as the recipient had a strong stomach for the appalling skin colour and genuinely disturbing expression, they would not be disappointed. Ausini have some excellent modern train designs which would probably be worth getting if your H5N1 vaccine is up to date. And be warned, the sets will be staffed by The Undead.

Ausini figures mostly come out at night. Mostly.

Scores	Pizza Van
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	60
Design	70
Instructions	70
Total	73



BLOCK Tech (Ausini) – Ice Cream Softy Van (Spring 2014)

A spate of post-Christmas discounting in a local shop saw a number of BLOCK Tech kits at reduced prices. The size and variety was quite good. The Ice Cream Softy Van was immediately identified as an Ausini kit, mainly due to the picture of the wide-eyed girl minifig on the box. The artwork seemed to suggest that the terrible skin tone of the earlier sets had been changed to a healthier hue. The kit promised a van and two minifigs, and was reduced to £2. This set was either going to produce a surprise, or give two more enlisters for the Zombie Army.



Softy Van is well presented with enticing photos. Contents reveal unholy skin colour. Van with squashed vendor and happy zombie customer.

The BLOCK Tech Ice Cream Softy Van is a rebranded Ausini set number 25407, using the same (computer generated) artwork. Ausini suggest ages 6+ for their kits; Click 'n' Snap agree with 6+, whereas BLOCK Tech change this to 5+. Perhaps they assume us Brits are made of sterner stuff. The inside box had finger holes to pull it out; the parts were in two bags, along with some small instructions and a sticker sheet. The pieces were quite well moulded, with a tight grab requiring immensely strong hands. There were no obvious organic contaminants but one red brick had what appeared to be a gash which had left 'something' attached. There was a bit of variety in hue between supposedly similar coloured pieces. Ausini have followed Enlighten's lead and decided not to use light grey but a form of light pearl grey which looks cheap. The trans-black windscreen was a slightly darker tint than LEGO. The steering wheel assembly came unassembled, but did have a bigger wheel which was actually quite good. The kit was generally straightforward to put together, with enough pieces to add between steps. The tyres were noticeably excellent quality. The trans-clear pieces were noticeably awful quality. Once made, testing showed the ice cream seller guy was too tall to stand up in his van, and the ice cream studs would only fit with enough grab on the left hands of the minifigs. The supplied stickers were fairly useless as most would not fit on the van; presumably the official Ausini kit 25407 has the correct stickers as shown on the box. Wilko's Blox also market this set, apparently with the correct stickers.



DEAR MOTHER OF GOD - NO!!! Comparison of hands; minifig with LEGO head and hands. Strange marks found on red brick. Nice steering wheel.

The minifigs were supplied assembled, and were OK quality, with simplistic but effective torso prints. The leg assembly was almost identical to LEGO, with the marginally thinner hips the only visible difference. The legs were also a big loose. The girl figure had medium lilac coloured legs which are not, at time of writing, available as a LEGO colour. However, all of this was totally spoiled by the truly terrifying skin hue typical of Ausini. It would seem that the company used this colour in the genuine belief that it was OK. Ausini sell many kits to Russia, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and maybe us Brits are ignorant of the cultural significance of the colour, but every person I've shown these minifigs to recoils in horror. The company obviously know of their error, as the computer-generated box art goes to great effort to show the (untruthful) pink skin tone. Ausini hand shanks are of a slightly different diameter, but with some effort genuine LEGO hands can be swapped and the horrible originals binned, along with the heads. Or the zombies can be kept. If you think you're hard enough.

In summary, a reasonable quality kit, after which the subject will be expected to have immensely strong hands and an immensely strong stomach.

Scores	Softy Van
Quality*	70
Value	100
Fit*	80
Compatibility	80
Minifig*	70
Design	60
Instructions	70
Total	75



BLOCK Tech (Ausini) – Construction Multi-Crane (Spring 2014)

This BLOCK Tech kit was in the same section as the Softy Van. The minifig expressions on the box art was not like any set yet tested, so it was bought full price at £2.99 in anticipation of maybe a new, unidentified cloner. As with the Ausini Softy Van, it promised 104 pieces and two minifigs with delightfully natural skin colour. It was summarised that if the worst was realised, then the Zombie Army would have two new construction worker recruits. Was this to be an affordable LEGO alternative?



Enticing box art. Depicted skin hue is an utter lie. Instructions are large, and 10 tools provided. Finished excavator with attendant zombies.

Er... no. Once opened, the sad reality of two terrifying Ausini minifigs was apparent. Internet searches revealed this was Ausini set number 29406; pictures showed Russian or Polish boxes, no English version could be found. Presentation by BLOCK Tech of the pieces was good; there were 10 tools on two pearl light grey sprues, and the instructions were of a size that did not require a microscope. And then... the 'yellow' varied considerably in hue between pieces, and one hinge plate part had "something" on it. Grab was robust, with the parts feeling crisp, quite sharp and probably able to inflict more pain by stepping on them than real LEGO. Assembly - requiring immensely strong hands, naturally - showed two parts had prints on them not shown in the instructions. The hinge plates were supplied unassembled; since the axle was partially inserted into the hinge it was very hard to extract it first before re-assembly - which was exceptionally annoying and almost impossible to accomplish without tools. Once made, the excavator was OK to play with, noting that extending the arm restricted the turntable rotation (fixed by a few alterations). The stickers were mediocre and most not really suitable for the kit. The box art suggests the real kit has a totally different sticker set. As with the Ice Cream Van, BLOCK Tech assumes UK children of 5 can make this kit, whereas Ausini dictate the rest of the world has to wait until 6.



Original kit no 29406, shown here in Polish 'Drumader' branding. Hinge plates are annoyingly unassembled. Zombies are terrifyingly assembled.

The two minifigs were identical, and supplied assembled with only the hats loose. The figures themselves were OK quality. However, one suffered from a lighter coloured right leg, whereas the other guy had a 'deposit' on his right leg that was hard to remove. The hats were very similar to fireman helmets and so had angled peaks. The zombie-like skin colour was typical Ausini; the expressions were rather dull more than scary and had sunglasses to hide those huge, wide, staring eyes that never stop burning through your soul like needles piecing your skull... um... well, anyway, they were a mild improvement on the Loongon abominations.

The kit was a partial success as the Zombie Army was swelled once more. The excavator can be rebuilt slightly to make it more usable, although the colour has a bit of an orange tint and so cannot easily replace LEGO. The undead usually come out at night, so maybe the colour probably doesn't matter that much. To improve it, the workers could have replacement LEGO heads and hands swapped with the aid of a hammer, but the orange-yellow overalls would make this look a bit daft. A bit of a disappointment then, unless you are zombie hunting.

Mediocre kit. Some infection. Therapy required for recurring undead construction worker nightmares... AAARGH! It's happening again! Nurse, NURSE!

Scores	Multi-Crane
Quality*	70
Value	80
Fit*	70
Compatibility	80
Minifig*	70
Design	60
Instructions	70
Total	71



BLOCK Tech (Ausini) – Garden Cottage (Spring 2014)

Slating Ausini kits was getting too easy, as mightily scary minifigs were guaranteed and cheap laughs easy to engineer. Garden Cottage was another BLOCK Tech Christmas stock clearance find, again for £2. Apart from the obvious zombie army conscripts, this kit promised some interesting colours and trees and flowers. Ausini reviews in internetland have occasionally shown the flora in a good light, so the set was bought with the intention of checking out whether the tulips, bush and 5-stems flowers were any good. And for cheap zombie laughs.



Fun scene looks nice on the box. Finished kit with free red goblet. Pretty tulips and flowers with lots of plant-based stickers. And hideous zombies.

The box suggested 110 pieces, including 2 'Country Girls' (whatever that means) and a decal set. The contents were at some variation with the artwork: there was another conifer replacing the bush; the minifig hair pieces were of different designs; and the stickers were not quite the same as the Ausini originals. Inspection showed the mandatory appallingly-coloured Ausini figures; in this case one torso had a terminal crack running down one side. The pastel coloured bricks were a fairly good match for their LEGO equivalents, with the yellow having a slightly more orange hint and the orange seat being a bit more, well, orange. The window used the LEGO train type with opening trans-clear panes. The doorframe was marginally different from the LEGO type. The bricks themselves fitted together very well, and the kit was OK to make with the instructions large and clear. The choice of light yellow for the baseplate was a bit odd, but worked well enough. A red goblet was included that was not shown anywhere. As made per the instructions, the door opened inwards and blocked the seats; swapping it around so it opened outwards easily solved this.



Home sweet zombie home. JUST CHANGE THE SKIN COLOUR! CHANGE IT! Annoying moulding numbers on glass. Piss-poor quality control.

The two minifigs were supplied assembled but were, of course, dire. The Country Girl zombie versions were utterly terrifying and I will probably need emotional support should I ever venture out of town from now onwards. The torso prints were basic and showed through the background colour. The legs were of rare pastel colours but were a bit loose. The pink torso had cracked on the right side; this appeared to be due to a moulding error on the arm connector that probably caused the torso to fail when the arm was inserted. The hairpieces were an odd yellow colour that made the skin tone even more disturbing. This is all a shame really, as the minifigs were probably the only disappointment in the entire set.

Of more interest were the flowers and trees. No, really. The conifers were great, and apart from the lack of manufacturer on the base were completely indistinguishable from LEGO. The 5-pronged flower stems were excellent, and if given the choice I would have them over the 3-pronged LEGO versions. The tulips were superb and I was actually disappointed there were so few in the set. So... I hate to say it, but for garden flowers, Ausini would be my supplier of choice. Ooh... maybe we can expect some new LEGO parts arriving soon to go with those Friends flowers (I'm sure they'd do it better).

Adding up the scores showed this was the second best Chinese clone kit reviewed, except for Star Diamond. With good minifigs it would have made it into the 90% mark. If Ausini change their skin tone to something more wholesome and buck up on the quality control, their kits would be tolerably decent. They know they have to, otherwise the pictures would not be such a flagrant lie.

Summary: Useful source of pastel colours, good trees, great flowers. All spoilt by the minifigs.

Scores	Garden Cottage
Quality*	70
Value	100
Fit*	90
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	60
Design	90
Instructions	90
Total	81



BanBao – KFOR tank (Spring 2014)



The BanBao company have been one of the very few cloners to have been successfully prosecuted for blatant copying. One outcome was the appearance of their 'Tobee' figures, different to LEGO minifigs and resembling South Park characters. BanBao's World Defence Force range (with 'defence' spelt the English way, interestingly) has a number of tanks, of which the 'KFOR' is the largest. This set was very hard to get cheaply in the UK and was eventually sourced from Germany with a total cost of around £20, although it is suspected that the retail cost is probably around £8-10 locally. KFOR most likely refers to peacekeeping in Kosovo 10-15 years ago; the tank is almost certainly a depiction of an M1 Abrams.

Set 8246 was relatively well boxed, with computer-generated pictures and various Chinglish phrases scattered around the sides. It promised 4 minifigs but only 120 pieces. The minifigs on the box were not Tobees as originally shown but resembled LEGO figs, which given their legal obligations seemed a little brave. It was suspected that the kit was old stock. Extraction of the parts showed a small and badly designed instruction booklet, a separate minifig bag with annoyingly completely disassembled minifigs, and a bag of pieces, most of which were very large.



No Tobees in this box. Lots of huge pieces, resembles a cheap plastic tank. This is because it is. Finished tank holding together, but only just.

Banbao bricks and plates were the same width and length as LEGO, but about 10% taller. The studs were also higher, which did not allow flat fitting of real LEGO plates – or any other clone plates, in fact. This made modification of any Banbao kit mostly dependent on using Banbao itself. Unfortunately, the chances of choosing Banbao over any of the other cloners seems remote as Banbao use very cheap plastic and have mediocre quality control. The tank kit itself went together fairly quickly, not helped by the terrible instructions, awful fit, bent pieces, loose grab and overall poor design. The finished tank was about the same size as Mega Bloks M1 Abrams, but felt very light and nasty and had very little detailing. The army green colour was acceptable, somewhere between PeiZhi and Kazi shades. The gun was far too wide, black and not green, and was loose in the mountings. Major sections supplied as one part were the bottom hull, side armour plates, and turret.

The minifigs had to be completely assembled, which was a real challenge as they rivalled Weagle for quality (or lack of it). The minifigs were exactly the same size as LEGO figures and did allow parts to swap around with a bit of force. All figures had loose parts, flash moulding, poor printing and overall bad design. Two minifigs had helmets, mostly closely resembling 1914-era UK army helmets. The two tank crew had full-face helmets with clear visors that just fell off. Supplied weaponry was of mediocre quality, with very bad grab between hands and guns making the set almost unplayable. The tank machine gun was about 5ft above the turret to scale.



Or.. build with anything else. Minifigs are atrocious quality – these are balanced to not fall apart. Height is incompatible with real LEGO.

It may be worth salvaging the wheels, weapons and turret from this kit, but the rest is useless. Minifigs are straight into the Zombie Horde. Yuk.

Summary. Rubbish. Never ever buy BanBao.

Scores	KFOR tank
Quality*	40
Value	50
Fit*	20
Compatibility	10
Minifig*	20
Design	40
Instructions	30
Total	29



Best-Lock – Racing Car (Spring 2013)

Best-Lock appear to be still trading and releasing new kits. Wilkinson are also selling the earlier kits under their own Blox brand name. They are all noticeably cheap. A Best-Lock 2009 racing car set was found unopened in a charity shop for £1 (noting that the Blox equivalent is only £1.50 new). I passed over a newer, bigger Best-Lock set for £2.50 as it was just too much to pay. The smaller box proudly showed the photo of a rather poor quality racing car and a minifig that had the cohesiveness and pallor of a zombie. Parts were made in China. Could Best-Lock *really* be as bad as everyone said? There now follows an in-depth analysis of the set.

Main set and construction.

AARGHH!



Best-Lock racing car thingy. I haven't seen plastic this poor since the 1970s. Instructions are in black and white! Bumper is unique...

Minifig.

AARGHH!



Minifig comes fully assembled. Pliers needed to pull head off. Skin has unsettling undead hue, but at least it's less scary than Woma figures.

I find it very unlikely anyone would ever buy more than one of these sets through choice. It would be the sort of present that an aunt would get you, and for which your mum would force you to write a thank-you letter with more lies in it than an Italian political manifesto. Truly awful. I suppose the minifigs might come in handy as cheap alternatives for an undead assault theme.

Not only would I never buy these again, I would consider forming a protest group to actively keep them out of the country.

And I thought this was the worst clone kit you could buy today.

Wrong.

Scores	Racing Car
Quality*	Nope
Value	40
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	25
Design	40
Instructions	30
Total	26



Best-Lock – Police Station (Autumn 2013)

The Best-Lock range has been refreshed over the past year or so, with newer kits looking something like 1980s LEGO sets and retail prices at similar levels. The older more blocky sets are still for sale but considerably cheaper. This SWAT kit was found a car boot sale for £2, which was almost good value for the three minifigs. New versions can be found for £8. This kit will be reviewed without glib comments or swearing. Well, not very much...

The rubbish flimsy inner box partially collapsed under the strain of just being carried home. The cars, helicopter and building each had their respective instructions, but the multiple bags held random pieces and had to be all opened at once. The bricks were of typical Best-Lock quality – awful. The grey colour was terrible and resembled LEGO old grey that had been left in the sun for a few months, although to be fair the black colour was strong and the large rubber tyres were excellent. The minifigs came fully assembled, with the police officers having armoured vests and sunglasses prints over eye dimples which was only mildly disturbing. The pilot had an almost opaque visor to hide his extremely angry expression. There were some unique parts, including 1x5 and 3x4 plates, a 1x5 brick, and (bizarrely) a 11x19 plate. Having been well trained by the Chinese to have low expectations and immensely strong hands, the set went together with only mediocre levels of language and disappointment. There were many badly formed or partially moulded parts, and the excitement was almost tedious as the final model was made and the possibility of missing pieces became more likely. In the event there were no wholly missing parts, although the squad car did have to make do with some partially formed bits. Fit ranged from hammer to loose. The whole set was put together without any pieces breaking, probably due to luck more than skill.



SWAT kit, as opened and made. Cops have bullet-proof vests and ammunition rounds – but no guns. Helicopter pilot is incandescently angry.

The squad car was virtually identical to the small Best-Lock and Blox starter kit – utter rubbish. The helicopter was lacklustre in design, with small main rotors, no tail rotor and a non-opening roof so that ramming the pilot in was a major task. The 4x4 police truck was a strange design with some clever use of SNOT – spoilt by the terrible grab of the SNOT-enabling pieces – but at least the wheels went round, unlike the squad car. The main building had no real redeeming features at all, was a pain to put together, and looked plain weird. The loudhailers kept falling off. Some clips broke.

The minifigs came fully assembled, with the helicopter pilot having a loose leg that fell off when moved. The two policemen were sunglasses and happy, but the pilot was very very angry indeed. Inspection showed reasonable quality torsos. The skin pallor was vaguely flesh coloured which made all three figures unsuitable for the Zombie Army. This was quite disappointing, given the awfulness of much of the Best-Lock and Blox range. The set, complete with minifigs, went straight to a charity shop, although was seriously considered for a ‘fire retardant capability test’ nearer Bonfire Night.



Selection of quality control issues. Some spare parts, and the entire contents of the Best-Lock factory rubbish bin helpfully included in the bags.

Overall, this set was dull and uninspiring. The new Best-Lock police station has blue instead of black, a different truck and helicopter, replaces the squad car with a motorbike, but inexplicably keeps the same design of building. It is comforting to know that Best-Lock exist mainly for the British and Germans to jointly produce rubbish for American kids, and not to impart pain just on our own. Best-Lock’s new marketing strategy seems to be to use branded minifig-rich themes, and looking at the ludicrously high prices this could indicate a move to higher quality. It could hardly be lower.

Horrid.

Scores	SWAT
Quality*	10
Value	50
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	30
Design	30
Instructions	60
Total	32



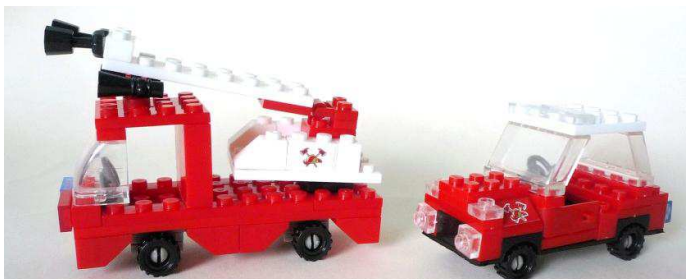
Having built some Best-Lock sets I was of course not on the lookout for any more. All of the Best-Lock reviewed previously was dire in the extreme, but the one ‘redeeming’ feature was the suitability of the minifigs for the Zombie Horde I had been building up. A market trader happened to be selling damaged stock, and amongst various items of crockery and clothes were some water-damaged Best-Lock Fire Station kits. These had considerable damage to the boxes, but the parts were still unopened inside. What remained of the box art revealed the contents would make a fire engine, a fire car and a small station, along with three of the very angry fireman minifigs seen before in Blox kits. Since each set was 75p (£6-8 new) it was a great opportunity to swell the Horde at a relatively cheap price. The two worst looking boxes were shovelled into a bag. One happy trader.

Cutting open the boxes showed that the Best-Lock parts bags had survived the flood, along with one set of instructions (one sheet for each vehicle and the station) and the stickers. All parts were emptied out to make the set. It was immediately obvious that although Best-Lock’s parts bags were indeed waterproof, the contents were still of appalling quality. Colours were mis-matched and weak, moulding was terrible, fit varied from loose to hammer, and the feel of the plastic was abhorrent. The vehicle design was basic to say the least; the car looked very blocky, although in theory it could be played with. The fire engine was so bad it resembled a 1960s cartoon drawing, which would have been just about acceptable if the parts stayed together (they didn’t). The fire station itself was an essay in minimalism, having a raising barrier in front of the 4 stud long vehicle bay which, unfortunately, neither of the supplied vehicles fitted as it was too low. Unlike most other Best-Lock sets reviewed there were no mis-formed or missing parts, which was progress, and there were a few spare pieces at the end of the build.



Contents of manky box – pristine Best-Lock! Completed set with 3 figures, 2 vehicles, and a fire station. Pity the children that got this set.

The three angry, angry firemen were supplied assembled and were identical to those found earlier in the Blox-branded kits. These firemen all had flash moulding on the bottom of the legs assembly so that standing up on a flat surface was almost impossible before sandpapering. One fireman had a moulding error on a hand which was disturbing. However, all three had aligned head prints, and the torso prints were square and clear. This made them less rubbish than earlier Best-Lock minifigs, but still very much destined for the Zombie Horde due to their excessive anger.



Truly awful fire engine and car are cartoonish in their rubbishness. Angry, angry firemen, with Captain Hook ready to take command. Horrid.

Best-Lock kits are probably the most proficient in showing the vast difference between LEGO and clone bricks. This kit was terrible in many, many ways. It was too small, the design was exceptionally bad, the quality of the parts was shockingly poor, the feel and colour match was atrocious, and the robustness was questionable. Perhaps there are children who have received this kit and been pleased with it, but I suspect the majority realise the difference between real LEGO and this rubbish. The fire station appears to have deliberately designed to be too small; but for a few 1x1 bricks, it could fit the ugly vehicles. The most galling part is that the spare pieces have enough plastic in them to allow these 1x1 bricks instead. Some would conclude that because of this, Fire Station is a capitalist ruling class plot to keep down the oppressed masses by obliterating any nascent self-worth in childhood. Others would conclude that it embodies the uninspiring mediocrity prevalent in a stagnant communist regime. Or perhaps, as is so often the case, someone really couldn’t be arsed to do a proper job.

Summary: This kit ought to have a following much like the Morris Marina Fan Club or the Howling Wolf t-shirt. I actually feel sorry for it.

Scores	Fire Station
Quality*	0
Value	40
Fit*	10
Compatibility	20
Minifig*	10
Design	0
Instructions	70
Total	17

blox Blox (Best-Lock) – Fire Engine (Spring 2013)

Some of the bigger Blox kit designs in 2013 looked half decent, even if the bricks were terrible. There was, however, no excuse for the following.

The Blox fire engine kit for £1.50 was bought from Wilkinson to see whether it was any improvement over its Best-Lock cousin. It was deliberately chosen as the box art suggested that it could take the honours of being the worst new set available in the UK today. (It isn't).

The box was of OK quality and the plastic bag wasn't too bad. The instructions were in colour, although they were almost screwed up inside the box, almost as if someone didn't care. The minifig came assembled. Brick quality was best summed up by my daughter who saw the newly opened set and wondered if the bricks had been chewed. The dark grey plate had flash moulding. The red hue varied between pieces. Although stated to be made in China, there was no manufacturer mark anywhere to be found, which was probably just as well. The minifig looks suspiciously similar to the Longton types made by Pengcheng, but the maker could be any one of the many low cost factories around Chenghai.



Blox fire engine as opened. Design as built jams the wheels and brains the angry fireman. This can be rebuilt to work using pieces supplied.

Building the set revealed a few flaws. The wheels were a terrible fit on the axles, so that only two went round freely and one was actually jammed. However, this didn't actually matter as the inverse slopes touched the tyres and stopped all the wheels from moving anyway. The angry fireman minifig could not sit in the engine without having his head smacked by the 'ladder'. There were four 1x1 plates left over in the kit, and with a bit of rebuilding an 'improved' version could be made that would allow the wheels to move (theoretically), and let the fireman fit properly. Maybe the designers realised their mistake after printing everything and included the parts to make it better. The windscreen was of a different design to the LEGO equivalent, but ideally required a hammer to attach it to the model. For balance, the 'ladder' hinge joint was comically loose. There were stickers to apply, but by this time I really couldn't be bothered.



Minifig skin colour less grey than Best-Lock. Arms and legs do actually move OK. Angry fireman is very, very angry without helmet.

The minifig was marginally improved quality over the Best-Lock abomination, and to be fair the hands were better than Kazi and Enlighten and the arms and legs moved freely. The flesh colour was OK, although judging from other Blox photos zombification is random across the range. The head had a moulded nose and mouth with an angry, angry expression. Replacing the head and squinting would create an almost passable LEGO minifig. Almost.

I found another of these sets in a charity shop. This time the angry fireman was hopping mad as his leg broke off due to bad fit and shoddy moulding. Even with some replacement LEGO legs he is still very angry. Both are now listening to whale song and having yoga classes. In vain.

"Mummy - the fire engine doesn't work, and the fireman scares me."
"Don't worry dear, we won't be buying these again."

Scores	Fire Engine
Quality*	None
Value	30
Fit*	15
Compatibility	65
Minifig*	30
Design	20
Instructions	35
Total	24

blox Blox (Best-Lock) – Combine Harvester (Summer 2013)

I felt guilty after slating the Blox fire engine, so in a fit of remorse bought the Combine Harvester new for £4.50. I had not learnt my lesson.

The harvester was a good sized kit for the money, with two minifigs and a well-proportioned machine in green, representing a John Deere of some sort. The box itself was well made and had an internal box with stiffeners. The pieces came in two nice plastic bags. The instructions were in colour and reasonably well laid out. The pieces had no excessive flash moulding, but there were numerous sprue tags. The 2x8 plates had b-e-s-t-l-o-c-k on the studs, so no guessing where Wilkinson got their bricks from.



The Blox combine chasing a hapless minifig, although it's touch and go whether the legs or wheels will fall off first. Stickers help hold it together.

I wanted this kit to be good. It wasn't. The green pieces felt, and were, as poor quality as the other Blox and Best-Lock kits. Two pieces were missing; the fit ranged from mallet to fall off; the model was bent when made; there was a tyre included that only had about ¼ of the moulding; and the design had flaws that could be easily rectified. The stickers were too big, but did stick. The two rustic minifigs were not as angry as the Blox firemen, but did still induce nightmares. The supplied implements were all brown and included a pitchfork and, bizarrely, a chainsaw.

The combine cutter moved round when pushed along the carpet. The seat design was clever. This was good. Absolutely everything else was not.



Minifigs are far less angry than the fireman, but still quite useful for an undead horde. Bestlock green plate. Awful quality. Just awful.

The score table shows that this is not as bad as the Blox fire engine, mainly due to the higher value and the better design. I certainly felt more disappointed with this kit, as the appalling quality and missing pieces just made me cross. The rustic minifigures can just about be passed off as zombies, but they are not as angry as the firemen. An opportunity lost. This set was later for sale for only £2.25. There were loads left for ages.

Sum up: This is a blatant job creation scheme for the Wilkinson customer complaints department.

*** Update: This has been left out in the sun for a year and only the stickers have faded. So annoyingly, it will probably last for a thousand years...

Scores	Combine Harvester
Quality*	Still none
Value	70
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	30
Design	80
Instructions	50
Total	36

blox Blox (Best-Lock) – S.W.A.T. Cruiser; Construction Truck; Tractor (Summer 2013)

Now happy that the Blox range would almost certainly supply appalling quality, I bought the police car, construction truck, and tractor to get some zombiefigs. The police car and construction truck kits were bought for both £1.50; subsequently, the truck was reduced to 75p, with the tractor bought at £1.25 (down from £3.50). The smaller kits were presented almost identically to the Fire Engine.

The Blox “SWAT Cruiser starter box” was a rather angular design, with no attempt at progression from lacklustre 1970s styling. The black and white colours were a bit approximate, and the overall effect was... poor. The brick quality was, of course, as terrible as the other Blox and Bestlock products. The model was roughly straight. All of the wheels actually went round, which was progress. The stickers stuck. Kind of. The minifig could just about hold the radio at an odd angle. And that’s all the positive spin I can muster.

The “Construction Truck starter box” was of a similar build to the fire engine, which meant it didn’t work as the wheel-arch slopes touched the tyres. Again, this didn’t really matter as the wheels were a tight fit on the axles and didn’t actually go round anyway. As with the fire engine, spare bits were supplied which could be used to correct the design flaw, although most children probably wouldn’t care by that point. Without a ‘ladder’ the construction truck seemed worse value than the fire engine. The yellow was approximately yellow. The minifig was very angry.

The tractor has an inner and outer box and came in two bags. Although the bricks were awful quality the model itself was OK. Yes, the rear connector broke very quickly, one of the windscreens cracked when being fitted, and front wheels didn’t go round – but the tractor was straight and resembled a tractor. There were an astounding 49 spare pieces with this kit (1x1 brown round bricks x12, 1x2 and 1x4 plates galore, and 13 1x1 round ‘black’ plates) which presumably made up the claim of 120 pieces on the box. The set included a farmer guy who was not angry, and a brown horse which was also not angry. The horse was vaguely similar to the LEGO design but with a more realistic head and a movable tail. Tractor stickers were provided, although the instructions didn’t show them and only some were on the poorly finished model photo on the box.



Blox police car and truck, proudly upholding the range’s record of being rubbish. Tractor not great either. Loads of spare bits to build a pyre.

The sets were bought to get more terrible minifigs for a zombie army. Here, Blox were better than expected, with the police car and construction truck giving worse quality than the angry fireman. At some point the head printing machine at the factory had gone out of alignment and the eyes and mouths had been printed 20° further around the head. The effect was to put the moulded noses under the left or right eye, turning the already zombie-like figures into grotesque gothic nightmares. It was difficult to choose between the angry construction worker and the unsettling sunglasses policeman as the most scary. Certainly both would give Chucky a run for his money in any horror film. To be fair, the farmer and another construction worker bought later were not facially special and had flesh-coloured heads, although the farmer had a leg that would not stay on and the construction guy had a deformed left hand. All minifigs came fully assembled, although this tended to rapidly change after playing with them for any length of time.



ARGH! Genuinely grotesque police and construction worker minifigs. Atrocious quality control on tractor. Get orf moi land...

What can I say? I’ve now reviewed 5 Blox kits, and they range from awful to atrocious. I’d guess some middle manager decided “It’s all the same, isn’t it?” when presented with an offer to use the old Best-Lock kits. I really want to read the minutes of their next review board. Suffice to say, most Blox kits became heavily discounted to get rid of the stock, although bizarrely, the fire engine went up to £1.75.

Sum up: Plausibly a Chinese plot to psychologically damage a generation of Western children with shoddy build quality and disturbing minifigs.

Scores	S.W.A.T. Cruiser	Construction Truck	Tractor
Quality*	Erm...	Missing	Only quantity
Value	30	20	60
Fit*	15	15	10
Compatibility	50	40	40
Minifig*	20	20	20
Design	30	10	50
Instructions	35	35	35
Total	21.5	17.5	24.5



Blox – Police Cruiser [unknown manufacturer] (Spring 2014)



Blox are back! Wilko's budget building brick range has been refreshed and redesigned for 2014. Gone are the Best-Lock reject kits, and in their place are a scatter of PeiZhi, Jubilux, Ausini, and... well, something weird. The new manufacturer kits were a budget Police Cruiser, reduced to £1 from £1.75, and a £7 spaceship with two spacemen. The boxes carried the 'Colour and contents may vary from those shown' phrase, giving Wilko's the apparent right to put absolutely anything inside. The rear of the Police Car box promised 'Moving wheels', '40 pieces', 'SKILL LEVEL EASY', and tempted 'What else can you build?' Apparently it was 'compatible with leading brands', thus by simple deduction implying it would not fit to itself...

The cheaply bagged contents included a windscreen in its own little bag, which was a nice idea in principle to stop it getting scratched in transit but had actually completely failed in this respect. The pieces felt quite sharp; they were certainly better than Best-Lock or Weagle, probably about the same or a little less worse than COGO. The manufacturer could not be determined as there were no clues on the parts, box or instructions. The gigantic steering wheel was a bit like the Ausini version but larger. The model itself was very small and had a design flaw which gave it no strength in the middle. Due to mediocre lug grab this made playing with the car almost impossible as it would easily break. The flaw was easily fixed by moving plates around. The parts and colours did actually match those on the box. The instructions were easy to follow but seemed to be drawn without bespoke software so that the wheels were the wrong size by some margin.



New Blox logo a waste of time. Photo discourages customers and lies about relative size of car and figure. Finished model vaguely competent.

The minifig was a weird design not seen before, so may have a response to successful (or potential) LEGO legal action. It was supplied unassembled and needed immensely strong hands to put together, rather mocking 'SKILL LEVEL EASY'. The legs were hollow and had inverse stud kneecaps. The torso was wide and square with a mediocre print on it. The arms were straight and only went down the elbow, so that the hands included forearms gave the impression of rolled up sleeves. The upper arm/forearm peg fit was not very good, whereas the arm-torso fit was excessively tight. The blue shades of the torso and arms were different. The head design was quite similar to the new Click Brick minifig, but with a much larger hole in the top of the head. The black builder helmet supplied was not compatible with any other LEGO or clone manufacturer. The figure had an acceptable pink skin colour but with its unsettling shape would still fit in well with The Zombie Horde.



Figure is a bit odd to say the least, but probably legal. This makes it crap. Car is tiny with small plastic wheels which do actually go round.

Police Cruiser was an improvement on the older Blox kits, but this is not really saying very much. As a whole toy it was just about acceptable but as designed it did break apart very easily. The minifig was weird, the size was too small and the box art photo had been altered to make it appear that the figure was smaller than it really was. I suppose that Wilko's tried to market a product with better quality, and it did score twice as much as their previous kits. The truth is, though, 36% was still crap. Police Cruiser was not atrocious, just very disappointing. It is curious why Wilko's didn't buy other PeiZhi and Ausini sets, which although of mediocre quality are relatively dependable and cheap.

Summary: Why bother?

Scores	Police Cruiser
Quality*	40
Value	40
Fit*	40
Compatibility	50
Minifig*	20
Design	20
Instructions	50
Total	36



Character Building (Cobi) – HM Armed Forces Challenger II (Spring 2014)

Cobi is a Polish company that has been producing LEGO clones for years. While there are a wide range of Cobi kits, they specialise in military sets and model-specific hardware such as Jeeps and types of WWII tank. In the past few years they have launched the 'Character Building' range; these use bespoke figures that do not infringe LEGO copyright. In the UK this is used for licensed products such as Doctor Who, Scooby Doo and HM Armed Forces. All of these have the mandatory lucrative blind bag marketing strategy with many types of figures to collect. The HM Armed Forces sets are based around modern UK Army, Navy and Air Force equipment. Although the Starstreak surface-to-air missile system and the Reaper drone were tempting, a real gem appeared to be the Challenger II tank which was found for sale online at £18.50. This was around 1/3 the price of the more sophisticated Mega Bloks Call Of Duty M1 tank. The Cobi colours were also worth checking for military modelling.

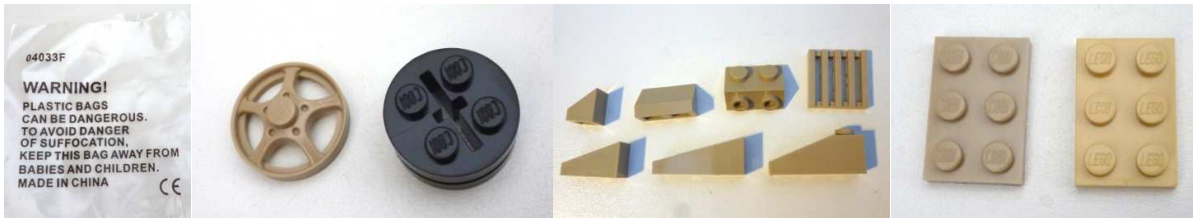
The box was densely packed, and proudly stated the contents were made in Poland but may vary. There were lots of exclamation marks in the descriptions, and it was evident that the photo image on the front had been manipulated to redraw (wrongly) the track protection plate joins - the reason for this is still a mystery. Inside were 11 bags of pieces, with the figure bags having 'Made In China' emblazoned across them. The instructions stated the set was for ages 5 or up, despite the box have 6+ plastered all over it. The instruction steps were quite hard to follow in places as the colours tended to hide the joins, and grey and black pieces looked the same.



Challenger II tank as built on assault course. Opening hatches showing engine bay. LEGO Friend and Character HM Armed Forces tank figures.

The bricks were very well moulded; the studs had Cobi written on them. It would be hard to distinguish them from real LEGO by touch alone. Assembly revealed a marginally less tight grab than LEGO, with some variation in axle grip and quite poor fit of the outer wheels. Overall quality was very good, and only second to Star Diamond for a clone. The tan colour had been well mixed to match UK desert camouflage shade, being slightly darker and pinker than LEGO tan. There were various unique Cobi bricks: 4x4 tiles, 2x2 grills, slopes with no studs, and rings and brackets. The tracks were of a shiny rubber that felt a bit slippery but worked well enough. The tank itself was a bit short, probably limited by the length of the tracks. When finished the tank was a fairly good design; however, the hole for the driver did not have a hatch (although spare plates were supplied presumably for this purpose). This was easily fixed by using two 2x4 bricks underneath, and it seems odd these were not supplied in what was otherwise a well thought out design. The turret hatches did not quite close properly, which was annoying.

The figures were made of a slightly rubbery plastic and were very much like LEGO Friends with dumpy legs – although, being soldiers, they were considerably beefier and looked angry enough to make a Sluban kit. The supplied firearms were quite small and not very realistic. The feet were too wide to easily fit in the turret and needed some manoeuvre. Experimentation showed the tank was eminently suitable for LEGO minifigs.



Made in Poland? Wheel covers that annoyingly keep falling off. Selection of unique Cobi parts. Comparison of Cobi and LEGO tan colours

While there were a few niggles, this set was quite impressive. It is suspected that the bricks are made in Poland and the figures sourced from China. The bricks were very good and as a source of military colours would be excellent and very hard to tell apart from LEGO. The Challenger II itself was quite well represented - if a little short - and would only need a few modifications to form a very impressive tank.

Summary. Very close to genuine LEGO, and probably the best budget choice for a tank kit. Dumpy. Only some annoyance. No disease.

Scores	Challenger II
Quality*	95
Value	90
Fit*	90
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	90
Design	90
Instructions	70
Total	89



Character Building (Cobi) – RAF Reaper and Remote Pilot (Spring 2014)



LEGO Friends has been much maligned by some as a blatant attempt to prolong male domination by reinforcing stereotypical pink and pastel-coloured animal/hairdresser/party-time lifestyles with little real substance, although the Friends range itself has been quite popular since launch. The Character Building HM Armed Forces RAF Reaper and Remote Pilot set takes a rather different line on Girl Power. It featuring a female remote pilot and a General Atomics MQ-9 hunter killer attack drone. Instead of tending to a pony or running a juice bar, this minifig is capable of annihilating anything at a range of 25000 studs at the push of a button from the other side of the world. Essays could be written on the complex moral implications of this kit... but not here.

RAF Reaper was bought for £4.99 including postage. The box was completely rammed solid full of bags, probably the densest packaged building block kit reviewed. Pieces were randomly distributed so that all bags had to be opened. Only the figure bag had 'made in China' on it. Brick feel was quite good, although many parts had moulding marks and the missiles, for example, still had sprue tags. The kit went together relatively well, with good grab on everything except the larger plates which had a noticeably loose fit. Some colour matching between the 'very bluish' light grey was a bit off. Stickers were well detailed, of good quality, and of Crown Copyright. When built, the control centre was OK, with the seat usable but the pilot quite loose in it. There were well detailed control consoles but no joysticks supplied. The Reaper airframe itself was reasonably well represented with some special parts, although the airframe was under-scale (too small) and the missiles slightly over-scale (too large). The rear wings were made with rising plates with flat surfaces, with the dihedral much less than the real aircraft. Oddly, the front landing wheel was omitted so that annoyingly the plane could not be parked properly on the ground. There was a 'spare' 2x8 plate in one of the bags; once made, there was a 2x10 plate left spare, suggesting either a final design change or an automated packing error only realised when it was too late.



Box is small and very full of 92 pieces. The very bluish light grey is close to RAF colours. Sqn Ldr Lulu can keep Heartlake City 'safe' from above.

The HM Armed Forces minifigs came from the same moulds as the rest of the Character Building range. The female RAF pilot was noticeably thinner than the male army guys, and closer in height to a LEGO minifig than a LEGO Friend. As with Friends, the plastic was slightly more rubbery than standard pieces, presumably to allow give during play. The supplied seat was Character Building figure specific, although did not actually hold the figure very tightly. The female hairpiece was removable (with force) and was held by a large block at the rear of the head; this is not true of the male helmets. Head and hands were, strangely, compatible with the Mega Bloks Smurf figures which could produce some very odd combinations...



RAF figure thinner than tank crew, same size as minifig. Reaper underside - annoyingly no front undercarriage. Missile nozzle fits on a stud.

As a kit, this was quite quick to make and a well-sized and unique addition to a military-themed force. Although it could be argued that modelling real hardware used in real conflicts can be controversial, Kazi's 84028 set of the '406' type 092 submarine complete with launching nuclear missiles appears way more disquieting than a drone with Hellfires.

Summary: Quite good value, quite good quality, quite a few moral issues. This girl set does not come in pink.

Scores	RAF Reaper
Quality*	80
Value	100
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	90
Instructions	80
Total	84



Click Brick (APT) – Mini Digger (Spring 2014)



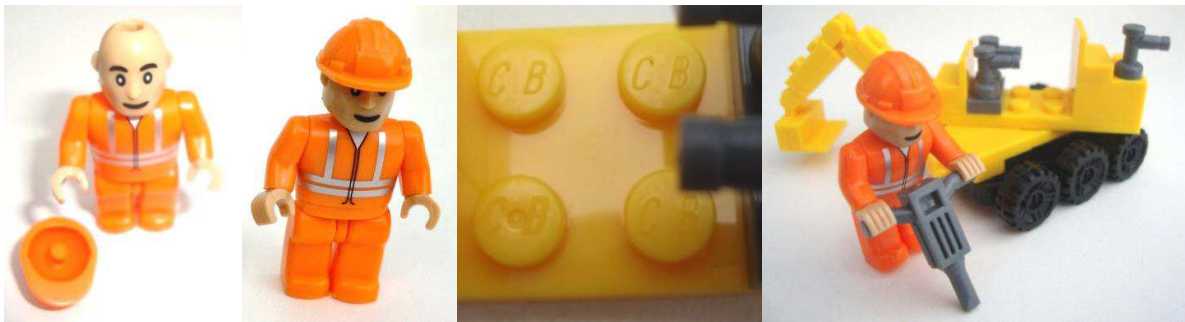
UK-based Click Brick were reviewed here in 2013. They used embarrassingly naive but proudly British designs with top quality Star Diamond pieces and minifigs. Things have changed for 2014. The Union Jack has got bigger, parts are made in China by the 'Asia Pacific Toy Mfg Co Ltd', the minifig design has changed, and that death-knell of quality phrase "contents may vary from illustrations" has appeared on the packages. On the plus side, the new sets seem to have been designed by someone who has actually seen LEGO, pushing Click Brick above PeiZhi to have only the second worst kit design skill in the world. Vehicles are 4 studs wide and have small plastic wheels with no rubber tyres. 'Impulse' sets are blister packs displaying the supplied minifig, but also showing a different tool in a front compartment between otherwise identical packs, either as some kind of strange marketing ploy or to prove that 'contents may vary from illustrations'. This blister pack example was found in a book store with various other kits; Mini Digger was selected as the best of the bunch. It was then swapped two minutes later as a hand was missing off the minifig. Presumably the 'Blue Ribbon' quality assurance claim on the box covered only a subset of the expected contents.

The blister pack was well presented but a real sod to open, which was annoying. The minifig was supplied completely assembled, which was not annoying. The pieces were supplied in a nice re-sealable bag, which was also not annoying. The instructions were well made and easy to follow. Pieces were very close in feel and quality to LEGO, and the yellow was actually yellow. The parts themselves were marked on the studs by 'CB', which could be Click Brick; it looked like a modified Cobi mould. The set went together well. The finished digger worked, although the 'bucket' was very small and the arm did not articulate fully which was mildly annoying. The driver guy fitted and looked quite happy. Mystical oriental superhuman hand strength was not required for assembly, and no significant anger was needed or felt. This was not annoying at all.



Pack proudly displaying gorillafig – this one has both hands. Other sets not exactly inspiring. Finished Mini Digger actually yellow but a bit small.

The figure was very similar to the Click Brick footballer "Swop 'ems" collectibles range and had a large chest, sculpted hands, more rounded waist, and larger head with nose, ears and prominent chin. Although unique in shape this did make the guy look like a gorilla compared to a standard minifig. Skin tone was mostly not zombie. The head had a hole instead of a stud, making the rather well moulded hat completely incompatible with LEGO minifigs, or from any of the clone manufacturers. Overall, the gorillafig was actually quite competent, and presumably legal.



Gorillafig good quality but has brains scooped out. Click Brick stud logo: are they modified Cobi? This is the pneumatic drill set version. Wow.

Click Brick are now fully legitimate with their unique gorillafigs, but still have at best mediocre set designs. The bricks are high quality – somewhere in China can actually make clone bricks well. APT are the sourcing company based in Hong Kong, so the actual manufacturer is not known.

Summary: Good quality when the parts are actually supplied. Weird gorillafig. Adequate design. And way better than almost all other clones.

Scores	Mini Digger
Quality*	90
Value	90
Fit*	90
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	70
Instructions	90
Total	86



Click Brick (Star Diamond) – Tow Truck (Spring 2013)

The 63-piece Click Brick ‘Tow Truck’ was bought in the same store as the BLOCK Tech Space Cruiser, but was double the price at £1.99. It was imported by M+G Agencies NW Ltd FIA TOYS. Click Brick sets are designed in the UK and foreign made. The Click Brick logo bears more than a passing resemblance to that of BLOCK Tech, perhaps ironically as they both import copies. Most kits are small, and include a recently launched ‘mystery bag’ collection of 15 random kits with two ‘jackpots’ of twin minifigs. There is no mention of China, nor of Star Diamond whose bricks are used in the kit. Since it had proved hard to source an actual Star Diamond kit, this was seen as the next best (and cheapest) way to test them out.

The box was an odd design, tall and thin with a sloping top for the opening flap. The pieces were inside two bags, made of plastic of the same type as LEGO bags. The bricks had ‘Star’ on the lugs (with one being flat for moulding). The bricks themselves were extremely well made and passed both the clink and fit test very well. The red and black were very slightly less vibrant than LEGO under close scrutiny. Interestingly, some of the pieces had their own moulding number on the underside, unlike almost any other observed Chinese clone brick. The minifig was annoyingly unmade, helping to make up the piece count. It was however immediately apparent that Star Diamond were streets ahead of all the other cloners.



Click Brick Tow Truck using Star Diamond parts. Minifig is of decent quality – the only good one in the entire test

The instructions were very similar to LEGO and easy to follow, although it was not clear whether this was typical of Star Diamond themselves. All pieces fitted together very well indeed and the only gripe was a very slight misalignment between the 2x1 and 1x1 corner panels (although LEGO have this problem too). The minifig had a marginally different leg design but was well made and would be hard to tell apart from a LEGO figure when assembled. The kit design itself was a little odd (as are almost all the Click Brick sets) but would be at home in a typical brick town.



Star Diamond parts are identical to LEGO in quality; tyres actually slightly better. 1x1 corner panels slightly misaligned if being really really picky.

Apart from a marginal lack of vibrancy in the red and black colours (and ‘Star’ on the lugs) there was very little in this kit to distinguish it from genuine LEGO. ‘Click Brick’ appear to be expanding their range, but apart from a tractor their set design does not come anywhere close to the Star Diamond collection. Click Brick’s larger sets are probably most kindly described as ‘obsessively blocky’ and are certainly no rival to any real LEGO kit – or most of the clone kits, to be honest. Hopefully this is down to legal issues and not wanting British design skill.

It was obvious that real Star Diamond kits might be worth investigating further. So I did.

Scores	Tow Truck
Quality*	95
Value	70
Fit*	95
Compatibility	95
Minifig*	100
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	92.5



COGO - Princess Playroom (Spring 2014)



"Once upon a time there was a toy company called Loongon. This company made lots and lots of toys for lots and lots of children. The toy boxes were guarded by a Little White Dragon. The toys were made out of cheap and nasty plastic so that the children could buy lots and lots of them. But soon, the children thought that the Little White Dragon was cheap and nasty, and there were many merchants who could not sell the toys. So the company made new boxes marked with 'COGO' to fool the children and the merchants, and the Beautiful Princess came to be. But she was born of Loongon, and so cursed forever to be cheap and nasty. Loongon lived happily ever after. Everyone else did not."

COGO set 3257 was found in a local toyshop fading slowly in the corner of the display window. The box was very well presented, with the address of 'COGO UK Ltd' on the back. It even had a hologram sticker to prove it was a real COGO product (as if that was important). The box art was computer generated, and some effort had gone into making up some frankly quite perplexing scenes. Depicted skin hue was a healthy pink; since previous experience with Little White Dragon was all zombiefig, imminent disappointment was judged to be a good bet. Full price of £5.99 was paid.

The bet paid off. Pieces were supplied in three bags, (small, large, and plate) along with a reasonably sized instruction sheet and sticker sheet. The parts were mediocre to poor quality with an awful Mega Blok clink and nasty feel, but at least there were no organic adherents. Assembly really did require immensely strong hands and gave Sluban some competition; this was not helped by the amateur non-interlocking wall design that needed careful mallet application to stop complete collapse during construction. Colours – vaguely light pink, sand blue and dark pink - varied between pieces, and the brown shade was best described as 'poo'. The flowers looked on the box to be the same as the Ausini versions; they were in fact far, far worse quality and the tulips had very sharp edges from the sprue. The standard flowers (substituted for the bush shown on the box) did not fit on the supplied stem without pinging off some considerable distance, requiring subsequent tool manipulation and significant anger.



Genuine COGO contents, densely packed. Finished house bears some resemblance to photo, unlike male minifig. Honey – where are my... pants?

The minifigs were supplied assembled, with skin colour marginally less zombie-like than their Little White Dragon cousins. Expressions were benign, giving a Nightmare Alert Status of only "Amber". The Princess was mostly as depicted but with changed hair; her beau was however completely different and appeared to be wearing no trousers (depending on yellow or zombie skin). Minifigs were poor quality sharp plastic, probably the worst reviewed short of Best Lock, Blox and Weagle. The legs were a piledriver-requiring fit on the studs, but at least the hands held stuff.

Stickers were reasonable quality with some extras, including one with 'Nobility' on it which was more like a mobile phone logo than anything else. The mirror sticker was not reflective but instead showed a generic Manga-style huge-eyed girly. This might have been passable if she bore any resemblance to the Princess minifig. She didn't. Using this fact, and that the rear box art appeared to show Princess attacking a former Prince with a parasol stand, it is concluded that 'Princess' is actually an evil witch with a magic mirror, a pastel-coloured raygun, and a tendency for serial killing.



The friendly face of COGO zombieism. Odd sticker sheet. Nobility? Tulips with semi-lethal sprue remnants. Princess happily impaling her prince.

As Jubilux make better copies of Sluban, Ausini make better copies of Loongon. COGO is rubbish.

Summary: COGO teaches girls that first impressions lead to disappointment, then to get angry and use hammers. Future husbands will go missing.

Scores	Princess Playroom
Quality*	60
Value	60
Fit*	60
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	50
Design	70
Instructions	90
Total	63



Enlighten – Diesel Locomotive and Pullman Carriage (Spring 2013)

Two Enlighten railway sets (a UK diesel in early 1960s colours and a steam-era 1st class carriage) were purchased from a retailer in Hong Kong. These were airmailed without the boxes to save on cost. Purchase price (including post) was about £12 each. These kits were not obvious copies of LEGO sets, as were most of the other Enlighten railway kits. Both sets made much use of dark green, cream, and pearl light grey colours. The carriage had unique printed designs on the windows and doors. The carriage set came with 3 minifigs, the diesel 2.

Enlighten bricks were not the same quality as LEGO and did not pass the ‘clink’ test, sounding only slightly better than Mega Bloks. Close inspection showed the pieces had some moulding marks and the bricks were not fully smooth. The fit was not bad, holding together relatively well. The colours were not as strong as LEGO – the black and red were not so vibrant and the dark green had an odd speckled patina. Most bricks were exactly the same type as LEGO, but there were some unique parts – a very long 1x24 brick, and a 2x2 plate with studs on top and bottom which was a SNOT dream piece. All of the 1x1 round ‘clear’ parts were translucent bright green – probably to save on cost. The buffers were light pearl grey colour but showed horizontal moulding lines along the buffer heads. The wheels and magnets seemed comparable quality to LEGO and ran OK-ish on track.

The minifigs were exact clones of LEGO, but of random quality with some having loose arms, legs and hands. The Enlighten minifig yellow was slightly more orange than standard LEGO yellow. From a distance they looked OK but would be a bit annoying to play with. The fit on the supplied seat in the diesel was tight. At a pinch, the minifigs could be suitable for dioramas which were not touched too often. Hand shanks were of a different diameter to LEGO and so could not be swapped.

The diesel was probably meant to be a UK Class 31 - most likely based the old Hornby D5512, as the front plate had ‘E5512’ and A1A-A1A on it - but visually was closer to a Class 35 Hymec. It had some cab and engine detailing and featured SNOT for the noses. The kit had rather nice modified 2x2 aircraft windows in dark green. The only oddity was the design of the bogies, which had been unnecessarily raised by a plate height and were easily improved with the pieces supplied. Otherwise, this was a rather impressive set which could be used as the basis of a bigger MOC. Since the Enlighten Union Pacific GP38 kit seems to be partially based on Jacob McKee’s MOC, it’s possible the same has happened here (does anyone recognise it?).



Enlighten “E5512” diesel – most likely meant to be a Class 31. Although a bit short, this is actually quite good. Did they copy it?

The carriage resembled a Pullman, with one end rounded and the other a corridor, and was of good length (34 studs), if a little tall. It had 4x3 glass panels with prints of curtains which looked effective. The detailing inside had tables, a good seat design and (rather bizarrely) a computer terminal. The kit was designed to hinge on the roof so that half of the carriage wall swung upwards - a good idea, but spoiled by the fit of the pieces in that it broke apart every time it was opened. As supplied, the kit had a missing black 6x4x1 door frame (this error occurred in the factory and not through the supplier), so this was substituted with a genuine LEGO piece. This showed up both the dullness of the Enlighten black compared to LEGO, and the complete fit compatibility of the pieces with each other.



Enlighten 1st Class Carriage, and behind LEGO Emerald Night for comparison. Looks good, just don’t try to play with it. Pearl Grey is a bit rubbish.

Enlighten appeared to produce bricks of OK quality, but were let down by the minifigs and the fit of some of the pieces. The actual design of these two kits was quite effective and showed some nascent ability to produce interesting sets.

Scores	Diesel	Carriage
Quality*	80	80
Value	80	90
Fit*	90	60
Compatibility	100	100
Minifig*	70	70
Design	100	90
Instructions	90	90
Total	85	79



M.Y Toys (Hui Mei) – Forklift (Spring 2014)

NEW!

A group of four construction-themed small impulse kits were discovered in a discount shop under the M.Y brand. They were all “2 in 1” kits, although most of the second builds appeared to be a random assembly of the bricks. Of the four, the Forklift seemed to be the most competent and was bought for 99p. The minifig appeared to be a close LEGO clone not reviewed before. Careful and ultimately boring internet searching eventually suggested a match with Hui Mei (export) or Xing Dou Cheng (domestic) branded goods. Oddly, the Forklift did not appear properly on the original Hui Mei kit, which only showed the second model completed. The M.Y set described the second model as “this”, although there was no indication as to what “this” was anywhere. Presumably only those who approach ‘the imagine paradise’ as described by Hui Mei will ever get to know.

The box contents were a bag of parts and relatively clear instructions on a sheet of paper. The pieces were of mediocre quality, unbranded, with the yellow colour being a little orange and the black a bit washed out. Assembly of the few parts was straightforward with no clips breaking and the two levers actually fitting together, mostly tight. The design of the forklift was quite good given the pieces supplied. As expected, the set was quite small but did resemble what it was meant to be. No effort was made to rebuild the kit into “this!”, as it was unclear what “this!” exactly was. The quality of the parts did not inspire further play using the bricks on their own, and the use of a mallet to hammer them flat seemed more tempting.



Small impulse M.Y branded kit. 2 in 1! Build the forklift, and... erm... “this!”. What is it? Hui Mei box even more perplexing.

The minifig was supplied annoyingly disassembled. Assembly proved difficult as the pieces were badly moulded, had flash on the ends, and did not fit together well. The arms were excessively tight, the hands were comically loose in the arms, the head did not fit all the way down the torso stud, and the legs had large sprue tags on the top making attachment to the hips difficult without some filing first. The head had a printing error on the top stud, which appeared to be an extra eye and smile pattern hideously warped to induce nightmares in offspring of the Western imperial aggressors. The minifig cap that thankfully covered this abomination looked cheap and was excessively large.



Finished forklift good design, terrible quality from any angle. Minifig almost exact clone but very crap. Unsettling extra face-print on head stud.

The M.Y brand has used a number of different manufacturers, including the awful Loongon and the excellent Star Diamond. Hui Mei look to be a new and perhaps unfortunate choice. The design of Forklift was quite good for the price, but as with many other clone brands it was fatally let down by very poor quality pieces. The minifig might look OK in the photos, but even touching it made the hands fall out and the head required pliers to move it about. This set might not cause disappointment if the minifig was sandpapered down to make everything fit, and the hand shanks bolstered a little to keep them in the arms. Perhaps it would work better if it was remarketed as a model kit, requiring glue, files, craft knife and paint. At least the box art was a good representation of the contents.

The minifig has joined the Zombie Horde without the cap, so that face #2 can babble inately at unsuspecting LEGO mortals.

The overall score of only 39% reveals that this is a very bad kit indeed. You can only imagine how awful Weagle, XQL and Best-Lock must be to fall below this value. I won't be getting the other three in the series. My curiosity has been insidiously drained by Stud-Face who infiltrates my every dream.

Summary: Tools required - bin. And a psychiatrist.

Scores	Forklift
Quality*	20
Value	70
Fit*	30
Compatibility	50
Minifig*	20
Design	60
Instructions	70
Total	39



BLOCK Tech (IQ Blook) – UrbanX Sport (Autumn 2013)

I was tipped off that the local Poundland had some new hooky brick sets in stock. This BLOCK Tech kit was one of them. It would appear that BLOCK Tech are now part of the Funtastic company. The UrbanX Sport was one of three car sets, although this one was the only of the brand that had a minifig. The box art showed a frankly appalling figure, so hopes were high that this kit could be truly rubbish. Diligent internet searching revealed it matched the IQ Blook set 29007 "MX Cross Country Sand Twinkling" which was reviewed as "shit". This review will be more thorough.

The outer box itself was thin and revealed an inner brown open carton made of rather weak cardboard. Inside was a single bag of parts and a slightly forlorn misprinted instruction sheet. It was apparent that the colours of the pieces did not match those on the box, nor on the instructions. Ironically the box was one of the very few reviewed that did *not* have the awful phrase 'contents may differ from model shown', or words to that effect. Once opened, the bag revealed pieces from an unknown manufacturer, a cheap sticker set and an unmade minifig. The clink test and the general feel were quite good, impressive for a £1 kit.



BLOCK Tech are sourcing from yet another factory. Plastic bag quality improving. Finished model actually not too bad. Winner fast, FAST.

Once made up the set itself was OK. The wheels were plastic, not rubber, but typical of the cheaper LEGO car kits. The pieces fitted together surprisingly well, bearing in mind the different moulding on the rear and the price. The blue colour was good and the black strong, although the red was a little weak. The clear yellow looked a little cheap, but the minifig yellow was a very good match for genuine LEGO. Further testing revealed that the pieces did not fit strongly with genuine LEGO or any other clone, making reuse of the parts questionable. The flag stickers read 'Winner fast FAST' that was, erm, vaguely relevant Chinglish. The stickers were thick, typical of those in toys bought from the seaside in the 1980s.

The minifig itself was a different colour to that on the box and when assembled was of decent enough quality – except for the hat, which sat far too high on the head and had numerous flash mouldings. Assembly did require immensely strong hands, in true Chinese fashion. The arms and hands moved freely, with the arms having a slight gap between them and the torso. The torso had a very cheap print on it that was slightly missing. The legs had some odd colour blotches, and one had a large sprue mark that prevented proper movement on the hips. The leg and torso designs were almost identical to LEGO, although getting the figure to actually sit down in the car required some serious force and more than a dash of anger. There was a printing error mark on the back of the head. The expression was a bit odd but one of the least scary of any of the Chinese clones. The torso print wasn't really of a racer, more like a shirt, tie, pocket, Sherriff's badge and work pass all tattooed onto a naked chest. This was more than a little worrying, but could potentially contribute to a very interesting if slightly illegal future diorama.



Different design underneath plates. Annoyingly unmade minifig. Made minifig with rubbish helmet, strange fetish torso and mark on head.

Overall this kit was nowhere near as bad as the box art suggested, coming out as mediocre. There were of course problems with quality, fit with other clone bricks and real LEGO, and the contents differing from the box.

A bit shit.

Scores	UrbanX Sport
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	70
Design	80
Instructions	50
Total	69



BLOCK Tech (Jubilux Woma) – Military Team (Spring 2013)

‘Military Team’ was bought new from a UK toy shop for £10 in a sale under the BLOCK Tech name. Eventually the Chinese supplier of this kit was traced to Jubilux Woma. It is basically a Sluban copy. This makes it a copy of a copy of a copy.

The rather worryingly-named ‘Military Justice’ lorry was the main model, although there were 10 models covered in the large instruction booklet. The standard pieces were far, far better made than Enlighten, Sluban, Kazi, Ligao or PeiZhi: the ‘clink’ test was almost indistinguishable from genuine LEGO and the bricks were smooth. The olive green colour was a very effective shade and was different from Sluban and Kazi. The fit quality was not bad, but single-stud connection was slightly worse than LEGO. Although most pieces were copies of genuine LEGO bricks, there were a few parts (e.g. a 6 stud-wide roof hinge and a 1x2 double 33 degree slope) that LEGO do not make. The windscreens were copies of Oxford Toys and were badly made - poor materials, poor design, and poor fit – although not as bad as Kazi. Also, one of the standard bricks had a moulding error, but there was a spare. Wheel fit was good; the thankfully rubber tyres were however of mediocre quality and were not a good fit on the rims. The supplied seats were only one stud long and as shown in the instructions did not allow the minifigs to sit in the cab.



BLOCK Tech’s “Military Justice” truck from Jubilux Woma, and some unique parts that would be quite useful in real LEGO.

The instructions were quite well drawn and easy to follow, but looked oddly out of proportion. The model design itself was not bad – the truck was large, chunky, held together well and looked like a modern military lorry. With a MOC hat on, the front and rear could be improved, and the roof hinge tended to pull off the rear bricks which a couple of tiles would easily solve. The scale was bigger than most LEGO vehicles at 8 studs wide, although other Chinese manufacturers are beginning to adopt the same width (such as Sluban and Star Diamond).

The huge left and right handed Gatling guns had a non-firing missile attached all as one piece, which was not quite what the box art suggested. To compensate, there was also a triple-armed aimable plastic dart launcher which could properly have someone’s eye out. There were also two supplied sprues with various black minifig-scale heavy machine guns and ammo boxes, perfect for Smurf hunting.



Combined chain-gun / missile parts for those Justice dispensing moments, and zombiefigs guaranteed to induce nightmares for decades.

The minifigs were weird and identical to Jubilux. They resembled Oxford Toys (and Sluban) figures. They had fairly decent torsos and different legs with kneecaps. The torso came assembled and in essence was supplied as LEGO supply their minifigs. The heads and helmets had a strange reverse stud – the heads had a hole in the top to accept the upside-down stud (bigger than a standard stud) in the headgear and so were not compatible with LEGO headgear. The heads and hands were vaguely flesh coloured, but more than suitable for zombies. Experimentation showed the minifigs did not quite fit on a LEGO seat. The minifigs were not in traditional military garb and instead had light blue vaguely space-themed uniforms with helmets and blissfully happy expressions – probably as their brains had been scooped out.

Jubilux Woma are obviously copying Sluban and are doing a much better job of quality control. The olive green bricks would be quite useful, but the minifigs still haunt my every sleeping moment.

And Justice is very well armed in China.

Scores	Military Justice
Quality*	90
Value	80
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	40
Design	80
Instructions	70
Total	74



Jubilux Woma – Star Fighter (Summer 2013)

This Jubilux-branded space kit was sourced new from a UK toy shop for £3. It was a Woma export and imported by Tobar UK in Beccles. Set number J5674A entices the buyer with the promise, “As A Team, We Can Accomplish Anything. Every styles fully wonderful”. Presumably collectives of Chinese children happily build these kits together, occasionally bursting into song and dance routines and praising the generosity of the State. It must be said that I was rather less enthusiastic.

The kit itself was well boxed and all pieces were inside a single plastic bag. The canopy was inside its own bag inside this and was actually quite an impressive moulding. The minifig torso was supplied assembled. The bricks were obviously not LEGO but did not have the cheap clink of most of the other Chinese brands and were quite similar to COGO. Pieces were supplied with printing on them and no stickers which was good. The printing had errors and poor colour matching which was bad. The instructions were quite well drawn and easy to follow. The bricks fitted together reasonably well, and there were some spare parts supplied. The model as made did not quite work – the spaceman would not quite fit under the canopy to allow it to close fully, but use of the spare parts did allow this. Maybe this is what you do ‘as a team to accomplish’. I was not convinced that ‘every style fully wonderful’.



“Star Fighter” as opened. A lot of effort has been expended on the canopy moulding - shame it doesn’t fit well. Best of the cheap clones so far.

The minifig really let the kit down. The torso was well made, if a little dull. The head design was different to LEGO for some reason (legal?) with a hole instead of a stud on top. The legs were also different with hollow backs and tiny knobble knees. When assembled the taikonaut looked OK from the front but would not fit well on the brick studs. The flesh colour was at least not entirely grey and was fairly close to the LEGO minifig hue. This minifig design was Jubilux’s own, which makes the company’s products different to others but resulted in incompatible heads and headgear.



Printing mismatch on wings. Part moulds are handed. Minifig is straight from the Gates of Hell and induces seizures. Well, maybe.

Jubilux Woma are probably aiming at the Sluban market in China and are producing better products. The unique design of minifig is a hindrance for compatibility which ultimately drags this set down. And the fact that it’s scary.

Summary

Another win for the recruitment section of the Zombie Army.

Scores	Star Fighter
Quality*	90
Value	70
Fit*	70
Compatibility	80
Minifig*	40
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	72



Kazi – Heavy Lift Helicopter (Spring 2013)

A set of the Kazi Heavy Lift Helicopter – a CH-47 military Chinook - was sourced from Hong Kong via eBay. Including shipping it came to about £25 (LEGO Chinook kit is £35), although it can be got for about £18 from the export websites. The kit box was sturdy and had an inner box. Pieces were supplied in bags; two were made of the same plastic as LEGO but most were of a much cheaper plastic. The instructions were formed of a small booklet with rather hard to view colours (so, er, quite like some current LEGO kits, then).

The clink test proved marginally better than Enlighten. Pieces had the name ‘Kazi’ on the studs. The fit was OK, but the quality was markedly inferior to Enlighten (and almost every single other clone reviewed) with the sides of the bricks noticeably ‘wobbly’ and certainly not smooth. The set did have all the pieces to build the model with a few extras. As supplied, about 5 bricks had flash moulding and one slope had some of the front missing. The minifig radio and assault weapons were made of a very rubbery plastic which had reacted with the ‘clear’ glass in transit and melted into it (ewww...). The clear window parts were VERY poor quality and badly finished. The few red and yellow pieces were less strong in colour than the Enlighten bricks and looked very cheap. The majority of the kit was dark green (similar to LEGO dark green), whereas the box art definitely suggested an olive green shade. One of the white bricks had ‘something’ on it that wiped off, which was... unsettling... as it came packed from the factory. The box did not state it included free avian flu. Is it a plot to infect us, or are Kazi sets put together in farmyards?



Kazi CH-47 helicopter with all 5 supplied minifigs actually in one piece, and the tiny armoured fighting vehicle, presumably for pixies.

Minifigs (4 soldiers and a ‘pilot’ with a cap, all in dark green garb) were close copies of LEGO figures and were supplied with separate hands to fit. This proved hard as the hands ranged from poor to atrocious in both finish and fit. One of the torsos had a printing error. Arms were OK with fit and movement (better than Enlighten), but legs were randomly loose (worse than Enlighten). Minifig quality overall was thus mediocre to poor, although they looked OK with a good variety of expressions. The hands could not be swapped for LEGO as the shanks were of a slightly different diameter. This just made me angry.

The model itself was extremely well thought out and had a good amount of detailing on the interior and exterior. It certainly resembled a CH-47, and had an opening top to access the inside, and a ramp at the rear. There was clever SNOT use for the nose and technic pieces were used for the engines. A pointless little armoured car was included which, although resembling a Chinese AFV, was way out of scale of the rest of the kit. When built, the helicopter looked fantastic, but taking it apart again would probably break some of the pieces.



It would appear Kazi consider quality control something that other companies do. I wanted to use gloves to assemble this kit. Minifigs are awful.

Overall, this kit was surprisingly bad. It had the potential to be excellent but was fatally let down by the terrible quality. The model was OK to put together but either the pieces were a tight fit or very loose. One of the engine covers just fell off. The clear parts were awful. Comparison with the current LEGO Chinook showed better design skill but much, much worse quality bricks.

Using this kit as a benchmark I would never ever get Kazi again even if free, let alone buy it.

Scores	Heavy Lift Helicopter
Quality*	50
Value	50
Fit*	70
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	60
Design	100
Instructions	80
Total	69

This Farm Set review is a bit of departure from the norm as it is DUPLO sized. Asda had been stocking these for £12, but a rash of stock clearance led to an eventual purchase price of £3. Box art showed 5 odd animal figures, which as the manufacturer was given as KIDDIELAND Dongguan gave some hope of giant zombies. KIDDIELAND – always written in capitals, it would appear - are a Hong Kong-registered self-contained toy manufacturer specialising in pre-school, with a factory employing 5000 workers and its own design, manufacturing and assembly sections. They produce relatively few DUPLO-type brick sets; this set is shown on their promotional pictures but not listed on the products pages.

Inspection of the contents revealed a very well packaged set, with the figures and some special bricks wrapped in tissue paper, all sealed inside a plastic bag and mounted in a cardboard sleeve. The rest of the bricks were stacked beneath this. The bricks were made of soft plastic (in effect copying Mega Bloks more than LEGO) and so were lighter in weight than DUPLO bricks. The figures and some special pieces were made of hard plastic; this was different to standard LEGO material and was probably from KIDDIELAND's own factory experience. It is possible that the soft plastic bricks were sourced from elsewhere. There was a good spread of colours between bricks; 4x2, 2x2, curved inverted and normal curved slopes were provided. The pieces did match up with the list on the box, although the promotional photograph on the front showed more bricks than supplied. Closer inspection suggested that the child had been pasted into this picture by image software.



Asda's Farm Set Construction Blocks by KIDDIELAND. Impressive number of bricks, all clean and no defects. Hours of multi-coloured farmyard fun.

The bricks themselves fitted together reasonably well, with grip suffering from the plastic material itself more than any problems with moulding. Colouring was translucent, although the shades matched across different pieces. The vegetables, animals, tree and windmill were made of hard plastic and required only reasonably strong hands to assemble. The lightness and softness of the bricks might well be preferred by some children (and parents) over DUPLO as the toppling of a tall tower would measure less than 7 on the Richter scale, and stepping on loose bricks would not automatically require a trip to A+E. The longevity of the soft plastic might be an issue. The stud moulding was solid; this made it impossible to fit standard size bricks on top, as is possible with DUPLO and LEGO.



Figures made of hard plastic but really rather endearing. US spellchecker used on side label (grrr). Cute animals in two sections screwed together.

The bricks themselves were of decent enough quality and certainly matched Mega Bloks pieces. The five farm animals were about as far removed from zombies as possible, and were very cute. They were made in two sections and screwed together at the rear. The lamb had a rattle, and subsequent investigation showed two broken lugs inside. Presumably the plastic figures do not shatter. It was decided that the animals should not be subjected to any destructive testing as they actually looked quite nice, so lamb was carefully reassembled. Ausini should take note.

As made, this set was not bad. The design decisions were made to manufacture soft bricks and hard figures, made in different material to DUPLO which resulted in a set that felt a bit cheap and not really compatible in anything other than shape and fit. It was basically a rival for Mega Bloks, but the truth is that they are the market leaders in this area and are naturally the ones to copy over DUPLO. That said, the presentation was very good and there were no manufacturing defects. The animal figures were designed and moulded very well. Even for full price this set was fairly good value; for the sale price it was a bargain.

Not really a rival for DUPLO, but trounces Mega Bloks.

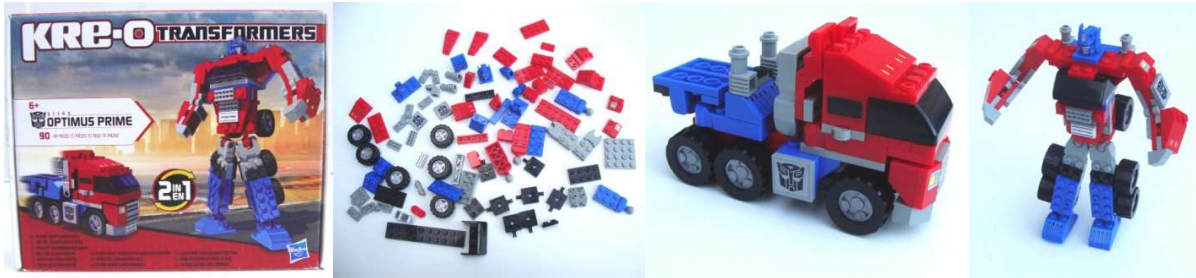
Scores	Farm Set
Quality*	70
Value	100
Fit*	60
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	70
Design	70
Instructions	NA
Total	71



Oxford Toys / Kre-o – Basic Optimus Prime (Spring 2014)

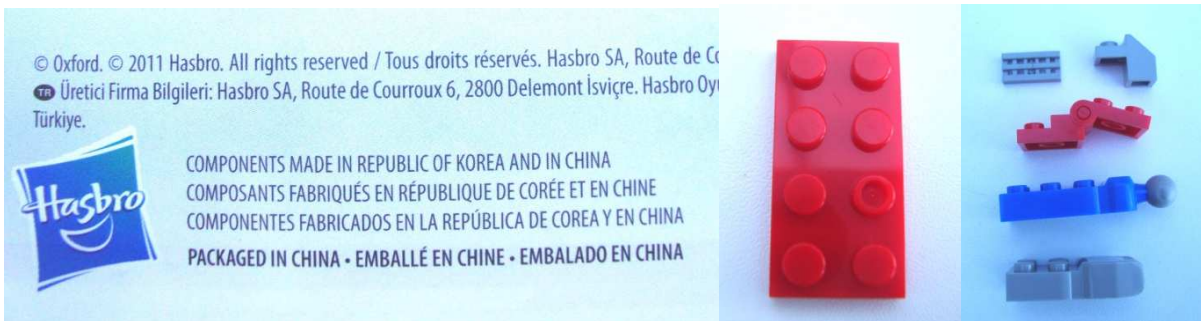
The Kre-o brand is part of the Hasbro empire. It is made by the Oxford Toys company based in South Korea, and concentrates on a number of franchises including Transformers and Star Trek. Although Oxford Toys have minifigs quite similar to LEGO, Kre-o figures have been styled very differently. Oxford Toys kits are relatively hard to source in the UK, much to the chagrin of many military modellers, but Kre-o can be found in many major toy shops. This example of a small Transformers kit was picked up in a charity shop in opened but otherwise excellent condition. Some Kre-o components are made in China, so the set was deemed worthy of ~~abuse~~ review. New, this set was £10 in the UK, although is currently about £8.

Set number 31143 was very densely packaged into a small box, with all 90 pieces in two bags, a very comprehensive instruction manual, a sticker sheet and a large folded piece of paper with the under 36 months warning paragraph translated into almost every single language ever used. Optimus Prime is the big truck leader guy; this kit was the small version of the character. To transform in this kit required completely disassembling and rebuilding as model 1 or model 2, as stated on the front of the box. The instruction manual was thus large, but, it must be said, very clear. The pieces themselves had a characteristic hole in one stud and did not have any branding. The feel of the pieces was a bit hard; the edges were crisp but sharp, and grab verged on the ‘immensely strong hands’ requirement. The black colour was OK, but red had a marginal translucent hue. Light grey was similar to the older LEGO light grey. The supplied wheels were hard plastic and felt cheap; the centres had to be inserted and were a light pearl grey colour (as also adopted by Enlighten and Ausini). Some of the plates were handed (mirror image) with their single hollow stud.



The mighty Optimus Prime in miniature. Many pieces stuffed into the box. Optimus in lorry and robot form - Transformation in a mere 7 minutes.

Assembly of Optimus in his truck guise was relatively straightforward. Most pieces clipped together OK, with only the windscreen requiring a mallet. The exhaust stacks were a little loose to make up for this. The horrible plastic wheels were quite hard to put on and phenomenally difficult to pull off. The films show Transforming can be rapid; in 31143 mode it will probably take at least 7 minutes and a pair of pliers. The truck was well proportioned in a cartoon-ish manner, with clever use of the hinges for the rear wind-jammer. After a prolonged Transformation, Optimus in mech mode was a bit larger; the hinge joints had enough drag to make sure he could be posed and would stand up, even with the cheap wheels protruding from his legs and rear end. The head was posable, allowing Optimus to survey the battlefield that had evolved after he had to nip behind the bike shed for his change. Annoyingly he had no knees or hands, so compared to all other LEGO and clone mechs he was a bit, well, basic.



Which parts are Korean, we are left to ponder? Characteristic hole in stud that defines Kre-o. Some unique pieces.

Oxford Toys are probably one of the more prolific cloners after Mega Bloks. Their proximity to China has ensured that their products were one of the first to get copied themselves, and the Chinese firm Sluban has slavishly done this for years. The similarity between the Oxford Toys and LEGO minifigs has tended to limit exports from South Korea to Europe, and the Kre-o brand seems to have been created to allow a worldwide distribution worthy of Hasbro. Overall the feel of Kre-o was OK, but not up to the quality of LEGO or even the newer Mega Bloks and seemed poor value for money. This is quite surprising given the general maturity of South Korean manufacturing.

Summary. Nothing really wrong with Kre-o, but inferior to LEGO and costly in the UK. Covers franchises that LEGO do not. You're stuck with it.

Scores	Basic Optimus Prime
Quality*	80
Value	50
Fit*	90
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	NA
Design	70
Instructions	100
Total	81



Ligao – Speed Car (Spring 2013)

This example of dodgy Chinese LEGO was a small emergency car set, found unopened in a charity shop for £1. The box was branded Kandy Toys after the UK importer, with the instructions having the brand Ligao. This was apparently suitable for ages 5+: almost all other makes claim 6.

The general quality of Ligao pieces was better than Kazi but worse than Enlighten. The feel (and clink) was fairly close to LEGO, although some pieces still appeared cheap and the red was rather translucent. The pieces had a characteristic half-hollow stud on the top, showing a different mould from Enlighten and closer to Jubilux. The fit was OK, but it was noticeable that they don't hold well with one stud. The 'trans light blue' windscreens were quite well made, but had a very tight fit. The wheels were a terribly loose fit on the axles, which was a big issue as this was meant to be a car for whizzing around the carpet. At least they didn't jam. The tyres were surprisingly good quality rubber and were unbranded.



Ligao 'Speed Car' with minifig from hell. A prime candidate for destructive experimentation. Instructions show less scary LEGO minifig clone.

The design of the car was a bit suspect. It was relatively symmetric front and rear which was a bit boring. It had a design flaw at the rear which meant it tended to break into two every time the roof was taken off to ram in or yank out the minifig (immensely strong hands required, naturally). The front and rear lights were 1x1 tiles in the 'trans light green' colour which was presumably cheap to make. Quite why the rear lights were not supplied in red is a mystery, as the police roof lights included a 2x1 trans-red tile. The side panels had 'Pioneer' printed on them for an as yet unknown reason. The red tiles covering the bonnet and boot were of such bad quality that the white studs of the bricks underneath showed through. The white bricks were, however, not too bad. The instructions were well drawn, with each stage shown in colour and previous stages in grey which was quite helpful.

The minifig was where this Ligao set was really let down. The pictures on the box and instructions showed a direct LEGO police minifig clone, whereas the single supplied figure was a poor-quality copy with different head, arms and legs. The odd-shaped minifig would certainly annoy any LEGO-owning child who got this as a present, as it only just fitted in the car and looked, well, rubbish. Pulling the head off did at least make a satisfying pop. It would be done often. The skin tone was a good yellow, making it unsuitable for the Zombie Army. Pity.



Weird minifig; head has moulded ears. Good quality tyres and moulding numbers on some pieces. Car as made up is bent. Red colour is poor.

Looking at similar sets in toys shops this probably retailed new at around £2-3. The bad fit of the wheels and the terrible minifig made this poor value compared to LEGO. The wheelarches and tyres were quite well made, but there were no other redeeming features to recommend this set.

Tolerable, but I would avoid Ligao by choice. The minifig would be useful for giving to a cousin you didn't like.

Scores	Speed Car
Quality*	70
Value	40
Fit*	60
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	20
Design	50
Instructions	90
Total	57



Loongon / Little White Dragon – Crane Lorry (Summer 2013)

Loongon makes both Little White Dragon and COGO brands. Loongon appear to have an individual approach to set design, although as it seems to be based on a limited brick selection from the 1970s this does not play to our favour. The box art alone rings warning messages that their quality might not be up to LEGO standards. The boxes have a motto 'Clap hands for our children', which presumably is some form of reference to praising improvement of their cognitive skills through using Loongon (some hope). I was not planning to spend any effort reviewing their kits until 'Crane Lorry' turned up in a charity shop, imported and rebranded under the KandyToys M.Y label.

M.Y produce their own good quality boxes. The photo on the front was marginally different from the Little White Dragon set 19122, and showed the Loongon minifigs. 19122 had 150 pieces, whereas the M.Y set had 137. As supplied by M.Y, there were 3 bags with various sized pieces in each. The minifigs were assembled (maybe this was the parts number difference) and had the standard LEGO head expression rather than the larger unsettling Loongon version. Brick quality was roughly at the Sluban level, with a slightly less hard feel and a lightweight clink. Two parts had flash moulding errors. The fit was average to loose which made the long truck liable to break in half. The black was not a strong colour, the yellow much more orange than genuine LEGO, and the clear parts mediocre. The string for the winch was already frayed. The tyres were surprisingly quite good rubber. Instructions were on one piece of paper, with quite a few bricks to add per stage. The model itself went together quite easily; all parts were present and a hammer was not required. I didn't bother applying the stickers as I wanted to do anything less boring than assembling the kit, such as watching paint dry or standing on Didcot station in the rain.



Crane lorry, Loongon version (left) and M.Y import (middle) as opened. Minifigs supplied assembled, blissfully unaware they are zombies.

The minifigs were laughably bad with the most zombie-like skin tone yet reviewed (actually, this was the main driver behind buying the kit in the first place). To be fair, the arms and legs moved quite well, so to play with they were not too bad. Quite who decided that the "flesh" tone was correct must have had questionable colour recognition. The set design was mediocre: the truck looked like it was from the 1940s; the crane used ladders for the arm; the driver had his hands almost up to his helmet at the wheel; the crane operator could only fit into his seat with the 'crane' in its highest position; the ladder restricted how high the crane could elevate; and the string was not long enough to reach the ground. The non-hammer fit meant the ladder kept falling off the hinge plate, and the winch did not stay on its support if used. And the wheel-tyre combination looked rubbish. Outcome: a bored and unhappy child liable to wake up in the middle of the night fearing hordes of the undead building a shopping centre.

Overall, this was a rather uninspiring kit with the only 'selling' point being two very poor-looking minifigs. The fit also meant that the soon to be angry children trying to play with it would not develop immensely strong hands, but would instead be haunted by nightmares of zombie construction workers. Back in China, Loongon have understandably replaced it with a much better-looking kit, although still staffed by the undead.



Crane truck as made. Seriously ugly kit, just what the box art shows. Minifig easily brained by ladder – luckily, zombies have no brains.

Summary – dull design, poor feel, mediocre quality, genuinely frightening minifigs. Will help raise a whole generation of lacklustre underachieving psychotic Chinese civil servants. Don't ever buy Little White Dragon, or you will suffer the same fate.

Scores	Crane Lorry
Quality*	60
Value	50
Fit*	60
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	40
Design	40
Instructions	70
Total	54

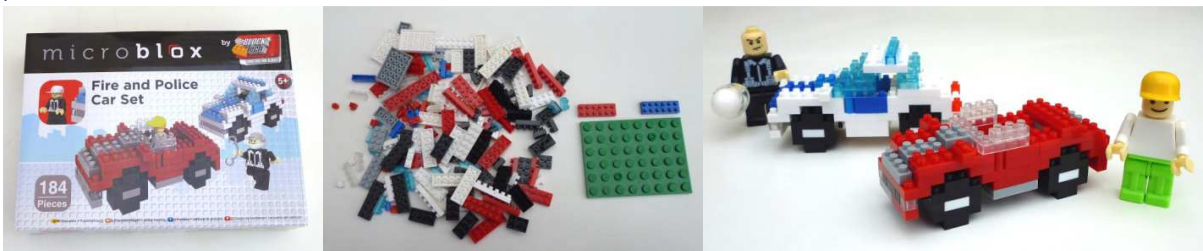


BLOCK Tech (LOZ) – Fire and Police Car Set (Police Chase) (Autumn 2013)

Diamond Blocks are a LOZ sub-brand, called Microblox by BLOCK Tech. The stud spacing is half that of normal LEGO, with each brick/plate almost the height of a standard plate and different to Modulex. They are not a direct LEGO copy as they are not compatible. LOZ minifigs are however styled around the standard LEGO figure which makes the sets fair game suitable for review. Three BLOCK Tech import sets were found in a local shop; the “Fire and Police Car Set” box art suggested it had at least two minifigs inside. It was based on LOZ kit 9222 “Police Chase”.

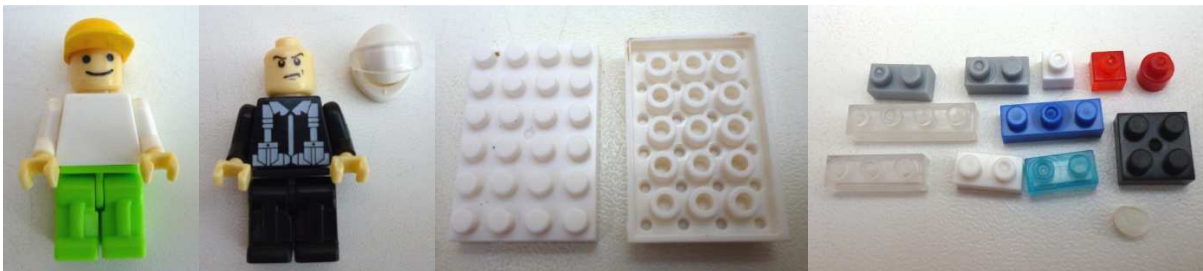
The BLOCK Tech box gave no mention of possible mismatches between art work and actual contents, nor where the parts were made. Inside were three random bags of pieces and one bag of annoyingly unmade minifigs. The plastic feel was rather soft, with colour variation similar to Best-Lock (terrible) with the blue having particularly bad mismatches. The white looked off-colour and dirty; closer inspection revealed some were indeed actually dirty with some form of substance on at least two bricks. One the plus side, the bricks were all reasonably well moulded.

The set consisted of two cars, both of which shared identical bottom halves in different colours. Diamond Blocks sets do not have wheels as such and instead use the bricks to suggest wheel shapes. It became apparent that there was a rather lax approach to colours between the instructions, box art and supplied bricks. The instructions were logical but each step had quite a few bricks to add, making it debatable whether an average small child could easily follow them. A hammer was not needed. Eventually, both cars were made; two pieces were missing but spares found available in different colours. This left 11 spare bricks and one strange plastic blob. Apart from hunting for non-existing bricks, avoiding infection, and having to use a magnifying glass, the kit assembly was actually oddly enjoyable. Final assembly showed that the box art was being considerably economical with the truth about the contents, as the minifigs were (of course) huge compared to the cars, the heads were different, and there were variations in colours. The front also showed the policeman with handcuffs which were not supplied. The “fireman” (or joyrider) could fit in the red convertible, but the policeman was far too large to fit inside the police car, even through the open window.



Microblox with misleading pictures. Pieces half normal size, minifigs full size. Annoyed policeman can't fit in his car. "Fireman" just plain spooky.

The two minifigs had to be assembled, although for once this did not require immensely strong hands. There were two heads supplied in reasonable flesh colour, which were well printed with one annoyed expression and one ‘generic’ smile which was slightly too large and mildly unsettling. Headgear was quite well made, although the helmet proved very hard to remove from the head once attached. The arms had huge shoulders giving a hunchback effect. The hands were square and had some flash moulding still attached. The leg assembly looked very cheap and had extra mouldings down the front of the legs. The overall effect was to give them a strong Frankenstein’s Monster feel, proving ideal for any zombie army. The Fire Car driver had a very odd colour choice – yellow cap, unprinted white torso, and bright lurid green legs – and according to LOZ was a felon. Still, at least he fitted in his car. The policeman could not, suiting his annoyed expression. With the helmet on he looked very, very angry.



Minifigs have useless square hands. Heads have solid top stud and increase choking hazard. Organic substances on some pieces. Tiny spares.

As a £1 buy to amuse a child, this kit is a bit hit and miss. It is good value but depends on the recipient having considerable concentration and keen eyesight. The end result is two car sculptures more than playable vehicles so that most enjoyment would have to come in the assembly. The two minifigs are OK, but that fact that there are two supplied is not immediately apparent on the box. One will give nightmares. Both could be diseased.

Mildly interesting, poorly made distraction. Cheap supply of zombiefigs. Magnifying glass and H5N1 inoculation highly recommended.

Scores	Fire and Police Car
Quality*	40
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	20
Minifig*	40
Design	40
Instructions	50
Total	49



BLOCK Tech (LOZ) – Helicopter and Boat Set (Autumn 2013)

BLOCK Tech were marketing three Microblox kits based on LOZ Diamond Blocks, and the “Helicopter and Boat Set” looked to have at least 2 minifigs included with blank heads. Experience from the “Fire and Police Car Set” suggested the contents would be a gamble, but at £1 it was deemed worth a punt. What was certain was that the depiction of the minifig and brick scale was incorrect, and presumably must have been created deliberately from separate minifig and set pictures. The Helicopter and Boat Set appeared to be a combination of LOZ kit 9212 (Yacht) and a cut down version of the LOZ 9230 (Police Helicopter). 9212 has minifigs with printed torsos and heads, but uses the same unrealistic picture showing the wrong minifig-brick scale; the BLOCK Tech picture had probably altered this by rubbing out the prints. Interestingly, LOZ set 9230 showed a half-size minifig.

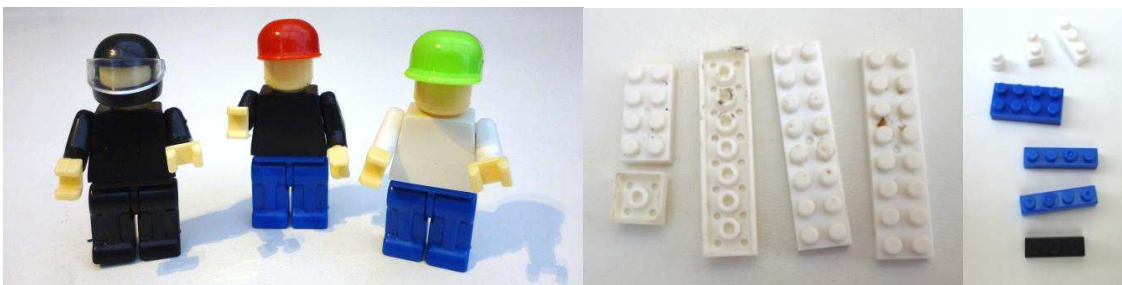
The BLOCK Tech box was very well made. Inside were 3 bags of tiny bricks, one bag with full scale minifig bits, and some tiny instructions. It was apparent that the heads and torsos were unprinted, but there was a pilot minifig as well as the two boatmen. It was also apparent that some of the pieces had “stuff” on them, clearly visible through the bags. Since most of the bricks were white, this was rather off-putting and not exactly aligned with the statements “All of the products have passed 3C certificate, EN71 and ASTM” and “We will provide the high quality product, honest service and hard-working to better serve the client”. Quite what part of the production line allows this sort of contamination to occur would be of interest to many an inspector, although suspicious brown goo on bricks appears to be a worryingly common theme amongst hooky Chinese LEGO.

The instructions were quite complex, with some experimentation required to determine exactly which pieces were to be used in each step. Microblox / Diamond Blocks are half scale and the plastic is similar to Best-Lock quality. The boat was fairly straightforward to make, with a flimsy top part holding the light the only real problem. The helicopter, however, had a poor design of skid which deformed or fell off easily, even with the various amounts of unidentified brown residue on them. This made me angry. At least all the parts were present and there were some spares left over, but this did not make me less angry. The minifigs had to be assembled from their component parts and fitted relatively well, albeit needing force not quite approaching immense. The menacing minifig square hands could not be swapped for LEGO as the shanks were different diameters.



Tiny instructions, tiny Microblox pieces, full size unmade minifigs. Box with misleading pictures – completed set on right with ‘giant’ minifigs.

The set itself gave a lot of pieces and minifigs for the purchase price. Of course, if it was clean and good quality this would be a bonus. Unfortunately, the helicopter design was just annoying, the minifigs were unprinted, the instructions were difficult to follow, the box art was bordering on the fraudulent, and the pieces were grubby beyond belief. On the plus side, the minifigs were an excellent cheap addition to the zombie army, although this probably wasn’t the original ambition of the company.



Three minifigs would be great value if they weren’t terrifying. Filthy pieces as out the bags – just appalling in this day and age. Tiny spares.

Diamond Blocks are a good idea, as the sets go back to basics, commendable in this modern era of 2 minute attention spans and pre-formed pieces. On the surface, 3 minifigs and two half-scale brick sculptures are excellent value for £1, but when the ‘surface’ is contaminated with brown goo it rapidly becomes... crap. Maybe LOZ employees hate us. Maybe they secretly own a bleach factory. Or maybe they just can’t be arsed.

Plausible source of infection for the imminent zombie apocalypse. Minifigs straight out of a Sapphire and Steel episode and will eat your soul.

Scores	Helicopter and Boat
Quality*	30
Value	100
Fit*	50
Compatibility	20
Minifig*	30
Design	30
Instructions	40
Total	41



Mega Bloks – Baker Smurf (Summer 2013)

One day I bought a Smurf Mega Bloks kit. Let's get things straight. I have never liked Mega Bloks, and I am not keen on the Smurfs. However, the thought of a diorama involving a LEGO lawnmower and a hapless tubby blue Belgian unable to outrun it was too great - even after taking set number 10770 to the checkout at Toys-R-Us and saying "How much?". £6.99 for 21 pieces is not good value. Not for LEGO, and certainly not for Mega Bloks. Bad start.

The kit itself was a plastic bubble pack with the character and a small landscape to play with. In effect, this range was a minifig collection exercise which could be joined with the bigger Smurf sets. The main cost of the set, and the main effort expended, was the figure. Here, Mega Bloks had actually done well. Although the little minifig was only purchased with destruction in mind, it was actually very well made and try as I might I could not fault it over a LEGO equivalent. The chef's apron made it hard to pose the legs, and the head had a hexagonal fit so it did not move in angles other than 60°. The torso swivelled around the hips (an improvement over Friends). Overall it felt very good quality. Even though it was a Smurf.



Mega Bloks Baker Smurf kit as bought. This is all you get for £6.99? I don't think this guy would win Masterchef. And I really hate Smurfs.

The Bloks were another matter entirely. The fit was not too bad, with about the right amount of grab, but the feel and quality was still poor, with sprue marks, mismatched colours and bad overall look. The clips and minifig hands did at least hold the tools. Colours were not the same as LEGO and so it would be hard to mix parts up without being obvious. This was a good thing.

The instructions were well laid out and used photos of the actual bricks with marks showing where to put the new pieces. They were, however, almost screwed up inside the container which spoiled the effect. They did not score 100% as the first word was spelt 'color'; I thought the Canadians had more culture than that. Reading through the text, apparently the Italian for Smurfs is "I Puffi". I suppose that's interesting. Chinese for Smurfs is Lan Jing Ling. There are no Chinese brick copies of The Smurfs, except for the LOZ sculpture 9311. I suppose that's not surprising.



Minifig is very good, even for a Smurf. The bricks are rubbish. LEGO should not worry. The Smurf should. Olivia says, "This IS worth £6.99".

In summary, this kit was way too expensive for a few poorly made bricks and an OK character minifig. Mega Bloks may have changed their marketing strategy and moved into areas LEGO do not occupy, but based on this I would never get Mega Bloks again, unless much cheaper. And they had something I wanted. Which they don't. Mega Bloks seem to think they can charge as much as LEGO for a similar sized product. That is a risky strategy indeed.

Mega Bloks are as rubbish quality as ever but now more expensive. The surprisingly high overall score of 74% is the benchmark for all Chinese clones to beat.

Scores	Baker Smurf
Quality*	60
Value	40
Fit*	70
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	100
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	74



Mega Bloks – Halo Covenant Brute Prowler (Winter 2013)

Halo is the vast multi-billion dollar Microsoft-owned shoot-em-up franchise that has been part of the X-Box since the early 2000s. Mega Bloks acquired the rights to produce themed kits in 2009, after their disastrous Magnetix recall that almost bankrupted them and the loss of their Disney manufacturing rights to LEGO. Although a fairly odd franchise (using a 12+ rated video game to aim at boys aged 6-11) it kick-started Mega Bloks' current revival and is currently by far their largest range. The theme included specialised highly detailed minifigs based around the various characters and races in the Halo storyline, and new colours to represent the vehicles and weaponry. The 96869 Covenant Brute Prowler kit is the Type-52 Infantry Support Vehicle featured in Halo 3, and dates from early 2011. This example was found at a car boot sale, effectively unused but with the minifigs missing (although these were subsequently sourced separately for completeness). 96869 originally sold for £24.99, with current prices about £14. Mega Bloks Halo sets are roughly comparable with LEGO Star Wars themed kits, with an inflated price due to desirable minifigs. There are now 7 series of highly lucrative figure-based blind bags, and recently Mega Bloks also started a Call Of Duty Modern Warfare range.

The 96869 box was large, thin in shape and held mostly air, although there were 5 bags of pieces and instructions somewhere inside. The bags all had to be opened simultaneously to make the kit. The box stated that it had the new 'camo effect' bricks. The effect used to make them was similar to the original LEGO Pearl Grey: metallic, with another colour swirled randomly throughout. The main Prowler colour was best described as a light metallic copper, with mixed rust hints. The plastic used for this was very good quality, way above previous Mega Bloks offerings with excellent feel, look, and fit. Black also seemed to be improved, with dark blue, dark grey and trans-purple colours quite good too. The odd gold-sand metallic was the only colour with that legacy Mega marginal translucent hint. Instructions were small but very well presented, and although all parts had to be hunted through to make it, assembling the Prowler was actually quite enjoyable - even for this cynical LEGO nut. The finished ISV was a reasonably good representation of the game-play version and featured the swivelling gun turret. Also included was a Spartan 'base' to defend, although looking at the pitiful size and single soldier you'd have to question his chances with only a barrel and fence to hide his bright orange armour behind.



Early Mega HALO Covenant Brute Prowler box, and considerably smaller contents. Prowler and outpost as made, with 'camo effect' colour.

The minifigs, one of the main selling points (and high original price) of the kit, were two dark blue Covenant Brutes and a single startlingly orange UNSC Spartan, based on the Halo 3 game version. As with the Smurf, it was rather hard to score these figures directly compared to LEGO minifigs as they are, in effect, specialist dolls. The figures were well detailed and made of a very slightly rubbery feeling plastic which would help to improve durability. The shoulder and hips were ball joints to give a wide range of poses; these were stiff enough to hold weapons. The feet could fit on standard studs, although the Brutes were a bit loose and all figures had to stand with at least one stud apart between feet. The alien Brutes were militaristic, very angry, and appeared to have immensely strong hands – almost enough to build a Sluban kit.



Very angry Brutes, brightly coloured Spartan, minifig for scale. Mega Bloks parts mostly not rubbish; odd code on brick. Some spares included.

From past experience I was expecting a dismal quality, poorly designed adolescent pile of rubbish. Instead, Mega Bloks appear to have marketed a well made, well designed niche-market toy. It wasn't quite up to LEGO standards, but it was close. Compared to other Mega Bloks offerings, this kit was a revelation. Good design, high quality and playability (and being based on a 12+ shoot-em-up) all contribute to this being an almost perfect kit for the target group of hyperactive video-playing weapon-crazy boys. The only downside would be the original purchase price that would put value someway off excellent. Overall the score of 94% represents a huge improvement over their other products. If all Mega Bloks kits were this quality, LEGO would have some serious competition. But... err... no.

Scores	Brute Prowler
Quality*	95
Value	70
Fit*	100
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	95
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	94



Mega Bloks – Call of Duty Heavy Armor Outpost (Spring 2014)

The Call Of Duty franchise is a recent addition to the Mega Bloks range, and follows the same strategy as the Halo sets. The kits model mostly modern US military hardware and use highly detailed figures that resemble miniature action men. Largest of the 2013 Call Of Duty kits is the 06822 Heavy Armor Outpost, featuring an M1 Abrams tank and a small base with camouflage netting. The kit uses Mega Blok's 'camo' colour, here mainly a random mix of a vaguely dark green-ish tan with green, rust and black. The sets have recommended ages of 14+ and are roughly the equivalent of LEGO's collector Star Wars or architecture sets. Heavy Armor Outpost retails for £60 in the UK; this example was found discounted for £40. The co-ordinates on the box revealed the Outpost was in the middle of Montreal's Botanical Gardens. The use of the American spelling of 'Armor' for the European exports presumably puts us Brits in our place. Do LEGO print 'tyre' as 'tire' for the US market? I bet they do.

The 06822 box was large, holding about only about 30% air and 70% parts. The pieces were packaged in many bags, although this was by type and not assembly order. Since there were over 700 pieces mostly of the same colour, a number of home-sourced boxes were used to separate them to stand some chance of finding parts. It would appear that to make the camo effect colour, Mega Bloks have had to re-mix their plastic as the pieces supplied were of excellent quality, passing the 'clink' test and almost indistinguishable from LEGO; this is very different from their usual rubbish bricks. The assembly of the kit was thought out maturely: most of the larger parts were used first, giving some hope of finding the fiddly bits later. The progress of building the tank also proceeded well, so that the entire assembly was enjoyable and not monotonous. Instructions were excellent. The tank itself took about 2 hours to make and was a fairly good representation of an M1 Abrams (mostly an A1 type with some A2 additions).



Heavy Armor Outpost (Montreal). Lots of pieces in lots of bags. Completed tank very impressive indeed. Figures need workshop to assemble.

The random colours in the camo bricks worked for and against the kit, depending on the approach. It was possible to roughly match bricks to each other if desired, with the alternative of deliberately contrasting adjoining panels. There were quite a few unique Mega Block pieces in this kit; the most useful was a 3x2.5 plate that moved the top half a stud sideways (effectively a large version of the LEGO 2x1 single stud on top plate). There were also detailed grills, a hatch, some differently angled slopes, holding bars, fuel cans, and a very impressive 50-cal machine gun. The tank wheels were of a decent size, and the tracks were good quality rubber. Scale-wise, the finished product was about 4 studs =1m; this actually meant that it was about 25% too big for LEGO minifigs, but oddly was a good match for LEGO Friends. This is probably due to Mega Bloks using new figures made to nearer the 5 bricks high scale; 4-brick high LEGO minifigs are smaller and also tend to inhabit a slightly sub-scale world (roughly 3 studs = 1m).

The figures were styled to be almost lifelike in scale, and had posable heads, arms and legs. There was a wide assortment of extras including body armour, backpacks, guns and knives. The figures were supplied completely unassembled in separate bags, which was annoying. More annoying was a suspicion that Call Of Duty figures are Canada's response to the Chinese Sluban-sponsored Immensely Strong Hands initiative. It was just about impossible to assemble the figures without the use of pliers and anger. I'm sure that with practice it is possible to fit these guys together in a few minutes, but assembly of the figures was, to be frank, a bloody nightmare. Maybe it's a covert US Government-sponsored plot to condition their teenagers with a mean attitude coupled with the ability to crush golf balls with their fingers. When finally assembled, the figures were actually quite good, although they were effectively soldier dolls for boys. Their feet were too wide to fit properly in the tank turret, which was also annoying.



Ironic use of China to ensure future soldiers. Annoyingly unmade figure. Comparison of heights of Mega and LEGO. Hasta La Vista, Brainy Smurf...

The Abrams tank is probably the Daddy of all military bricks kits currently available; good quality, good design, good size, although more suited to a non-minifig world. The bespoke figures are very well detailed but putting them together is a pain.

Summary: Figures exclusively designed to further the Superpower arms race by producing millions of militaristic angry American children with immensely strong hands, ironically using Chinese manufacturing knowhow. The tank is quite good, too.

Scores	Heavy Armor Outpost
Quality*	95
Value	80
Fit*	100
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	70
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	90



Mega Bloks – DJ Quack Moshi Monster (Spring 2014)



Car-boot, risk a pound

Small, horrid - I touch: enough

Perhaps a nice tank squash

Scores	DJ Quack
Quality*	50
Value	NA
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	70
Instructions	NA
Total	70



Mega Bloks – Schoolin’ Smurfs (Summer 2014)



Olivia is my Friend. Olivia talks to me in my head. Olivia told me she hates Smurfs. I hate Smurfs. Olivia told me to get some more Smurfs so hunting parties could be arranged. Olivia said this would be cheaper than months of psychoanalysis. Everyone else said this might all be related to reviewing too many appalling Chinese zombiefigs. But Olivia was very insistent, so I went Smurf kit hunting.

Chance searching revealed that a 2013 set with 4 Smurfs was being sold as a ‘buy 1 get 1 free’ offer. This seemed a golden opportunity to acquire a lot of Smurfs for not much outlay. As the purchase was to set up various dioramas featuring encirclement and capture techniques for the benefits of the Friends Neighbourhood Watch, the large amount would be great use. Two Schoolin’ Smurf kits arrived on the doorstep in under 18 hours. It was almost as if the vendor wanted to get rid of them.

The kit itself was a plastic bubble pack with most of the pieces and characters shown through the front. The package was OK to open, whereas extracting the parts and Smurfs from the plastic saw them being fired around the room, such was the tenacity of the bubble pack. The set was very sparse, with a small chalkboard, desk, book, satchel and apple, fence and plants. These were mainly of the Old School Mega Bloks materials (horrible) although the few connections seemed OK. What was not OK was the discovery of the perennial favourite of Chinese brick manufacture – the mysterious brown stain. This was on the underside of one of the leaves. In addition, the chalkboard piece was badly scratched and the white book was actually a blue piece that had been sprayed white on one side. The overall feel was of a shoddy product, so that the only redeeming feature was the large number of figures.



Mega Bloks Schoolin’ Smurfs, ready to learn about the letter ‘g’. 4 Smurfs in one pack seems good value. Few bricks, lots of figures.

The Smurfs bought a year before were of good quality. Baker Smurf seems to be an early version with a hexagonal head attachment, with the subsequently bought blind bag versions having a round lug for the head. This batch seemed to have another alteration. The four Schoolin’ Smurfs revealed a cost cutting measure of a right leg re-design, presumably to be cheaper. In total, the two sets showed 3 of the 8 Smurfs had broken right legs, making them prone to falling off if played with. The printing on the heads and torsos had also been subject to a quality cull.



Four targets ready to run. Which has a limp? Broken legs for 38% of the School. Organic substance under leaf, eww.... Scratched chalkboard.

Mega Bloks are as crap quality as ever. However, the closeness of the score to the earlier Baker Smurf shows that this worse quality is tempered by the better value. Marketing issues probably showed that expensive single figure kits should be replaced by higher quantity and not quality. This doesn’t cover the fact that Mega Bloks have joined the contamination club and sell broken toys. And they still can’t spell ‘colour’ on the instructions.

Summary. Tools required: net, tweezers, glue, duct tape, gloves, warm soapy water, H5N1 inoculation, LEGO Friend with ride-on lawnmower.

Olivia said that I had done well. Olivia was happy. I was happy. The doctor was happy.

Scores	Schoolin’ Smurfs
Quality*	50
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	60
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	70



Mega Bloks – Smurf's Celebration (Summer 2014)



I still hate Smurfs. I have probably mentioned this. Maybe it was guilt. Maybe it was a form of therapy. Anyway, the advertising on the back of the previously reviewed Schoolin' Smurfs showed another similarly-sized party set named Smurf's Celebration with four figures. It was decided that the clown Smurf would be the perfect ironic candidate for the LGIP audience, and the rest for swelling the Blue Army much detested by my Friend Olivia. Set number 10767 was ordered for full price of £9.99, and it dutifully arrived in perfect condition.

As with "Schoolin' Smurfs", "Smurf's Celebration" 10767 was a plastic bubble pack with the pieces and figures visible. Freeing the parts and Smurfs required some skill so that they did not ricochet off the ceiling. There were very few parts, consisting of a two-part cake (OK quality) with a red 1x1 round plate (horrible); a present with some poor printing on the top; a table for the cake with some awful brown 1x1 round bricks, and a rather well designed string of lanterns totally spoiled by the low grade plastic material. The balloon turned out to be hollow on one side; the lollipop was OK but proved hard for any Smurf to easily touch. Thankfully this set did not have any organic contamination.



The Smurf's Celebration Mega pack. Baker Smurf is advertised on the back. Don't buy that one. Finished party scene. Balloon guy unhappy.

This time none of the Smurfs had broken legs, although all were still quite loose and this made it hard to stand them upright with hand-held objects. The face printing was not high quality, with the whites of the eyes incomplete. Three of the four Smurfs had very loose hats that just fell off when the figures were handled. Bizarrely, the clown Smurf supplied was a mirror image of the pack and instruction art. Although this could be due to yet another case of the general incompetence apparently endemic across many of the cheaper toy manufacturers, my inner coulrophobic self is convinced that Clown Smurf has emerged out of a looking glass from the Dimension of Nightmares and will stalk me for ever and ever and ever.



Scary, Happy, Dipstick and ANGRY. No broken legs, but three have loose hats. Balloon is a fraud. Parcel printing is rubbish.

It is assumed that the Mega Smurf sets are aimed more at the younger buyer more than a high proportion of adult collectors. The switch to cheaper manufacturing methods to give 'better' value for money has resulted in a product that is bloody annoying. Any playing with this set immediately results in the hats falling off and stability problems with loose hips. The hats can at least be fixed by Blu-Tack or similar, but the loose legs would be much harder to solve without spoiling the figures. Of course, the adult collector will keep the kits in pristine unopened condition, although we now all know that the pack is holding a rubbish quality toy and has little to no real value. Then again, if the pack is opened, the evil mirror Clown Smurf will be unleashed, and lying awake at night victims will hear the tiny pat pat pat of the tiny feet drawing ever closer, ever closer, to suck their consciousness into the looking glass of horrors.

More evidence that quality is a secondary issue for Mega targeted figure marketing. A return to the Mega Bloks of old. Rubbish.

Summary. Tools required: net, tweezers, patience, glue, LEGO Friends with ride-on tank, major psychoanalytical assistance.

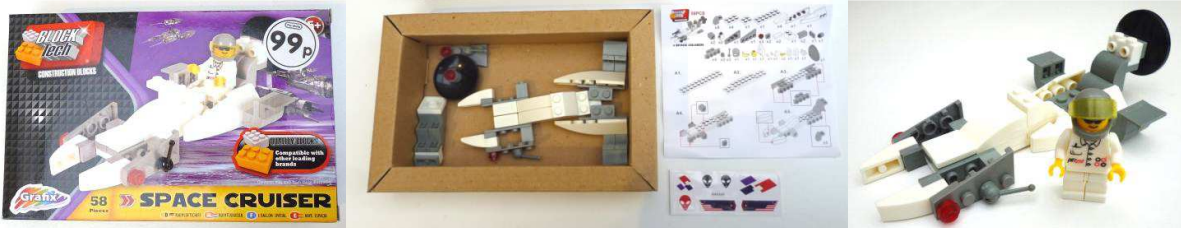
Scores	Schoolin' Smurfs
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	80
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	70
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	76



BLOCK Tech (PeiZhi) – Space Cruiser (Spring 2013)

BLOCK Tech kits are imported by Swinton-based RMS International under the name Grafix. It would seem that there are only a few sets in their range, and these change frequently as they switch suppliers. Three BLOCK Tech kits were sourced which came from different Chinese manufacturers.

‘Space Cruiser’ was found new in a bargain book store for 99p. The kit’s origins were PeiZhi, yet another Chinese LEGO clone brand based in Chenghai. The kit seemed to be a unique design of spaceship and came with a spaceman minifig. It would be typical of a £4-class LEGO kit. The box had an inner sturdy cardboard box and the pieces were in a single plastic bag. The instructions were small but easy to follow (with a loupe). The brick clink test and quality was close to Kazi (not good) with the grab OK but rather wobbly mouldings. There were no manufacturer marks on the lugs. The pieces were made slightly too small at the ends so that there were gaps between the bricks which looked very cheap. The white was a bit cream in colour (the worst of all kits tested, even Blox) and the light grey colour varied piece by piece and looked dirty. The kit also had a design flaw so that the back tended to fall off – this could have easily been fixed with one extra plate under the model. The 4x4 radar dish had a hole in the stud so that it could be mounted centrally under a plate – the one interesting part of the entire kit.



BLOCK Tech’s Space Cruiser made by PeiZhi, as supplied with stickers and miniscule instructions, and kit made up in rare ‘hasn’t fallen apart’ state.

The supplied minifig was completely disassembled and contributed significantly to the claim on the box of 58 pieces. It was easy to put together and the head and hands were well made and proper yellow, far better than the Enlighten or Kazi efforts. However, the arms had noticeable moulding dimples on the shoulders, and the legs had pinholes either side. The torso printing was of OK quality, although strangely had the PeiZhi company name and logo printed on it. The bare hands, open-top shirt and biro in pocket were, to be honest, probably not best suited to exo-atmospheric flight. It would pass for a LEGO minifig quite easily, and would not fall apart when played with.

Stickers were also supplied that were completely unnecessary, rather thick, and only served to underlie the cheapness of the kit.



PeiZhi ‘spaceman’ minifig with company logo, arm dimples and leg holes; ‘interesting’ 4x4 radar dish; and dirty-looking bricks with terrible fit.

This set was OK for the price but nothing special. The PeiZhi parts were of average quality, better than Best-Lock or Blox (of course), but worse than Ligao or even Little White Dragon and certainly not worth getting for spare parts. However, the minifig was of decent quality: although supplied unassembled and having a few dimples it worked very well and made the kit far better value than Ligao as it was roughly comparable with LEGO. In fact, even with dimples it was overall the best non-LEGO minifig (short of Star Diamond) of all tested Chinese clones.

Apparently, another PeiZhi racing car kit has a tile with the words ‘High Class’ printed on it very badly, which may be worth getting purely for ironic effect.

Summary

Keep the minifig, throw the rest in the bin. This still actually makes it quite good value.

Scores	Space Cruiser
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	50
Instructions	70
Total	73



BLOCK Tech (PeiZhi) – Space Craft (Winter 2013)

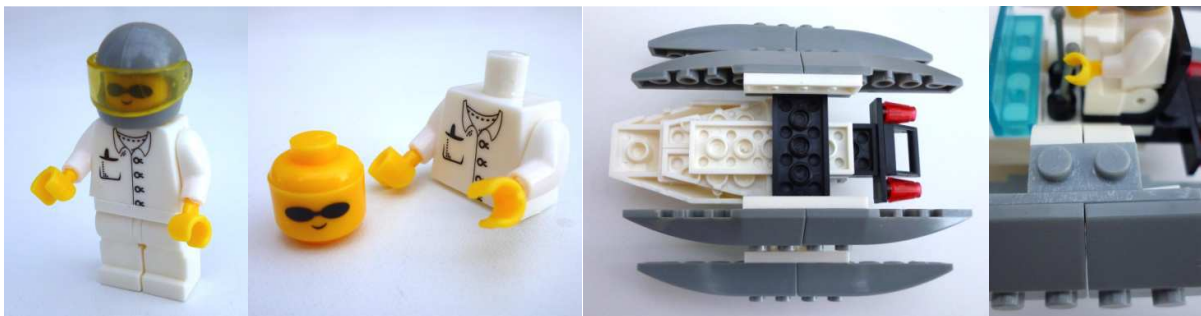
It was a rainy day. I bought another BLOCK Tech spaceship kit. Now being a diehard LEGO clone spotter, I saw some PeiZhi kits in the local 99p Store and thought I'd have a punt at getting another passable minifig for the Zombie Horde. Space Craft was one of three similar PeiZhi sets, and the only other along with Space Cruiser (see above) that had a minifig. This looked as if it had a number of more interesting parts than all the other PeiZhi kits tested and for 99p would at least supply a minifig. The chance of catching a serious disease was assessed as low to medium.

'Space Craft' was very similar in style to 'Space Cruiser', with a sticker set, miniscule instructions and some pieces in a bag. The design of this craft was both more stable and more stylish than 'Space Cruiser', with a number of curved pieces and less tendency to break. The windscreen (space screen?) was a bit flat, and there was a strange gap in the front (maybe for a spare taikonaut). The kit included a PeiZhi seat, which appeared passable and actually worked with the minifig. Inspection of all the parts revealed almost no contamination – only some hint of blue stains on the underside of a couple of the white(ish) plates which did not seem organic. The 'grey' angle plates had an odd speckled colour as if the dying process has failed. As with all other PeiZhi kits, the white colour appeared a bit dirty and the grey was a bit translucent. Grab was OK, although the side pods tended to fall off if knocked and were a pain to put back on. This might be an advantage in an epic space battle, which might be possible for a small outlay as there were a lot of these kits for sale. The box art and instructions gave differing views on which way up the side pods ought to go, but I disagreed with both and put them the way I wanted, risking the wrath of the PeiZhi set designer's parents.



Space Craft appears to be stuck on a rock; half-decent stickers and tiny instructions; kit assembled with side pods orientated half up, half down.

As always, the minifig was annoyingly unmade and had to be completely assembled, this time requiring almost immensely strong hands. The little taikonaut did not have the PeiZhi logo on his shirt, but still had a biro in his pocket and appeared to have some sort of lacy vest (and underwear?). The torso was slightly misprinted which gave the impression his shirt was well tucked into his trousers – which may be an advantage for space flight as true to form he had bare hands. The head print was a different design to 'Space Cruiser' man, with a smaller smile. The left arm had a large piece of flash still attached to the shoulder. The hands were quite tricky to inset into the arms, but eventually fitted and moved well enough. As assembled (and sanded down) the minifig was of decent enough quality with very little chance of limb loss. The separate hands and legs cannot be swapped for real LEGO, although the torso and legs assemblies can. Testing showed the arms could be swapped with an immensely strong hammer.



Filly-vested taikonaut, hard as nails with bare hands. Tiny smile – or is it a nose? Mostly clean bricks, washy colours, bad panel gaps, OK grab.

Space Craft was not a bad kit. OK, it had the common PeiZhi traits of tiny instructions and various inferior mouldings, but for 99p it was a good-sized set and the pieces would mix with real LEGO (if it was really old). PeiZhi themselves seem to be the least worst of the cheaper clone brands – appalling panel gaps, mediocre colour matches, questionable set design, and strange quality control, but overall the stuff works. PeiZhi kits tend to sell out of the bargain shops quicker than other brands. And they don't have as much chance of organic contamination.

Passable. For 99p.

Scores	Space Craft
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	60
Instructions	70
Total	74



BLOCK Tech (PeiZhi) – Military Car (Autumn 2013)

Poundland were found one week to be stocking small BLOCK Tech military kits. There were four in the range – a car, a boat, a “plane” and a helicopter. Of these, the car set had a soldier guy with a hat, and the boat had two minifigs. The helicopter had one pilot minifig and looked boring, and the “plane” was rubbish. Pictures suggested these were PeiZhi kits, so the minifigs had a chance of being passable.

‘Military Car’ box art was the same style as ‘Space Cruiser’ and showed the built model with a background photo and a bit of airbrushing. In this case the car was shown with two Russian Kamov Ka-52 attack helicopters behind it, which given the non-Russian markings of the car implied one brave little PeiZhi soldier. Previous reviewing had shown PeiZhi minifigs were tough critters as the spacemen had open-necked shirts and no gloves. This army minifig had PeiZhi written on his jacket, so he was probably part of a privately-funded militia. PeiZhi military green is the closest match to modern Russian armour green, so perhaps he would blend in without too much suspicion.

The poorly-made BLOCK Tech flimsy inner box came apart when pulled. Inside were one bag of parts, a small instruction sheet, and a sticker set (as promised on the box, although there was no indication where to apply them). The instructions were well laid out and printed, but were about half the normal size. The fifty pieces were all listed on the instruction sheet and included the annoyingly completely disassembled minifig. The kit itself went together relatively easily, with the grab a little too loose and noticeable panel gaps. There were a number of sprue marks on the bricks. The wheels turned out to be hard plastic.



BLOCK Tech Military Car sourced from PeiZhi; pieces, stickers, and instructions for pixies; and the finished product ready to mash the bad guys.

The minifig was of reasonable quality but required mandatory immensely strong hands to assemble. The legs and torso had flash moulding that needed a bit of sanding to give an acceptable fit. The yellow had an orange hue compared to real LEGO, and the head expression was not angry at all. The torso print was quite crude and not printed in line. The supplied sticker set included a front and back uniform, and a camouflage design for the torso which were surprisingly good. Once built, the minifig seemed robust enough with resistance in the arms and legs. The head had noticeable moulding lines and some marks. The cap was different to the standard LEGO design but worked well. The arms did not have dimples as per the spaceman, but the legs had holes in the side (so only one mould was needed) and were hollow at the back. A later purchase of more of these kits revealed a revised torso print with ‘PeiZhi’ removed, a sunglasses moderately angry head, and occasional missing hands or legs.



Completely un-angry PeiZhi ‘soldier’ minifig with company logo; flash moulding on torso; useful sticker set; cheap hard plastic wheel assembly.

The olive green colour shade was closest to Russian topside or armour green, different to Sluban (close to US Olive Drab #7 used in WWII), Jubilux (fairly close to US Olive Green 107), Star Diamond (roughly US medium green or UK dark green) or Kazi (not really anything, just badly made dark green). [LEGO sand green is approximately USSR ‘topside’ green, with their olive green a bit lighter than 107].

For the price, this kit was quite a good buy. The car did have moving wheels; the colour of the bricks was OK; the model actually held together; and the minifig was relatively decent and came with some very useful torso stickers. As a cheap source of useful military minifigs and bricks – with the proviso of patchy quality - this range seems OK.

Summary: Tools required: file, sandpaper, plastic filler, immensely strong hands, tolerance. Keep minifig and sticker set. PeiZhi are onside with the Russians.

Scores	Military Car
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	70
Instructions	70
Total	75



BLOCK Tech (PeiZhi) – Military Boat (Autumn 2013)

The 'Military Boat' BLOCK Tech kit looked to be a bargain, with the promise of two PeiZhi army minifigs and some green bricks to help build some Russian military hardware. The box art showed the boat surfing on a beach in front of a huge breaker, with some half-hearted airbrushing on the side. The set was probably trying to depict some sort of littoral speedboat, perfect for hassling any aircraft carrier battle group for which most Chinese clone brick manufacturers have at least one gigantic set.

This flimsy inner box did not fall apart when handled. Although enticingly promised 58 parts, inside there were actually 62: the two levers were supplied separately but were counted as one part with the base on the instruction leaflet; and there were two spares (a 1x1 "red" tile and a minifig hand). The set was simple enough to put together. The red parts had poor colour, and the trans-red were also quite weak in hue. The lever fit on the base was either excessively stiff or loose. The sticker sheet had the same torso prints as that found in the Military Car, but with a very odd top line consisting of vertical lines with green stars and a single compressed US Army logo.



Military Boat opened with pieces, stickers, and instructions sponsored by SpecSavers; completed 'boat' and two un-angry minifigs; spare parts.

The main selling point of this kit was the two minifigs. These turned out to be identical and only differed from the Military Car figure by having helmets instead of a cap. Each head had the same printing error with a vertical line left of the mouth. One Star Wars type blaster rifle was also included. Quality was patchy, with one helmet chin broken and a spare left arm having flash moulding and shape errors. The legs required some filing of sprue marks and considerable effort to fix them to the hips. The hand shanks just about fitted in the arms, but once made did actually hold things. As with the Military Car, the minifigs were completely un-angry and instead looked very happy, if mildly confused.



Sticker set with strange upper line; spare arm with moulding errors; PeiZhi minifigs with proper LEGO heads and kpis making passable soldiers.

This is probably one of the best value clone kits around with two passable military minifigs, a blaster rifle, and some Russian military green pieces all for £1. As hardened asymmetric marine strike units, these guys really had the wrong expressions and looked more like the Dalia Lama's bouncers. Addition of some BrickArms ushankas and some interesting heads would rapidly change them into a sizeable angry Russian attack squad. Locally these kits sold out within a week of being stocked, so perhaps someone is doing it already. Of course, the quality is crap, but maybe that'll add to the realism.

Summary

Tools required: file, sandpaper, plastic filler, scissors, immensely strong hands, adult supervision. Keep minifigs, sticker set, and Russian army bricks. Or buy 20 and make your own Republican Guard hippy flotilla.

Scores	Military Boat
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	60
Instructions	70
Total	74



BLOCK Tech (PeiZhi) – Military Plane (Winter 2013)

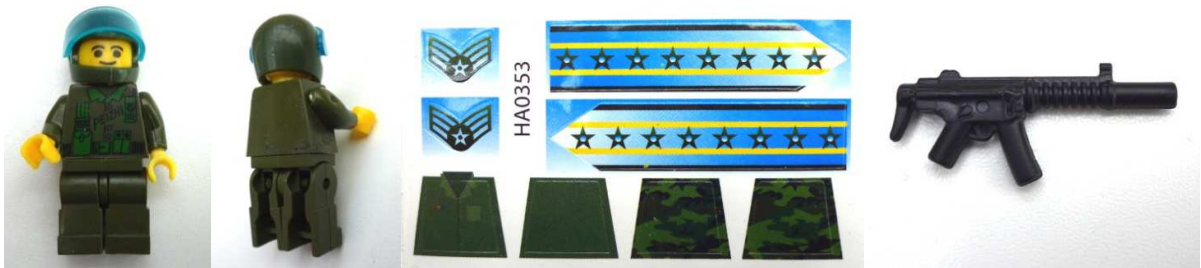
The 'Military Plane' BLOCK Tech kit was not high on my wish list. Even spotting 5 for sale for 99p each did not induce the slightest ambition to own it. Unsurprisingly, it did turn up at a local charity jumble sale, no doubt due to some unfortunate child having the bravery to defy his auntie's limited gift-buying skills and refusing to own it. The kit as bought had been opened and the parts were out of the bag; a control level was missing but this could have fallen out so will not count against this review. All other parts were present but appeared completely untouched, with the minifig in its annoyingly many unassembled pieces. The sticker set and Lilliputian instructions were also still in the box. As was a whiff of young disgust.

The military plane is a conundrum. It has to be the poorest design of any kit I have ever had the pleasure of owning. The 'plane' is basically a long bucket with tiny wings front and back, two oversized thin wheelsets which only just allow it to stand up on a very flat surface, and some random cones and stuff on the back. Now, I'm sure we all made 'planes' when we were younger out of simple 2x4 and 2x8 bricks, and let's face it, they **were** better. All of them. Conspiracy theorists would contend that PeiZhi are subtly manipulating future Chinese society by forcing the children to innovate through rebuilding and so stimulate an entire generation to become free thinkers. Far more plausible is that the PeiZhi design department are inexperienced lacklustre numpties. Or aged 7. Or both, in fact. The completed rubbish model was, of course, subject to the vagueness of PeiZhi quality control and was bent, sprouted various moulding sprue spots, and had panel gaps even British Leyland would have been embarrassed about. There was a spare arm and hand, spare lever base, and a free piece of black plastic that didn't really do anything. Plastic quality was just about acceptable, with slightly washed-out clear parts. At least the propeller went round freely... wheee! A MOC that looked something like a plane to Western eyes was built out of the same pieces within 10 minutes, just to try to prove I wasn't an inexperienced lacklustre numpty.



Military Plane in box. Yes, the model really is like the box art. Plane? Someone at PeiZhi signed this off as a kit. MOC on right took 10 minutes.

The minifig was of the slightly older design with 'PeiZhi' written on the torso front, and the mellow yellow face. The torso also had some strange sticky black goo on the back and side; it was not clear whether this was as supplied or the result of the angry child who didn't want it. Given the unassembled state of the kit and the many other examples of contamination of hooky kits, I won't blame the previous owner. The crowning glory of this kit, though, was the machine gun. Now, OK, it wasn't exceptionally good quality, but for a 99p-class kit this was a major selling point. I hadn't paid much attention to it on the box art, but as an addition to a military squad it is a viable alternative to BrickArms or similar weapons. The minifig was finished in the standard PeiZhi green shade resembling Russian colours, and the sticker sheet had the two different torso sticker sets.



Placid PeiZhi militia pilot with odd sticky black goo on the torso rear; sticker sheet with useful torso covers; minifig automatic assault rifle.

Satisfaction was quite high with this kit: it was humorously awful in design so I could give it a sarcastic review; it was cheap; and it had a useful minifig and gun that made it all worthwhile. The green pieces could be put in the spare parts bag with all the other PeiZhi parts to eventually make some Russian military vehicle. The chances of infection were classed as defensible, and some money was given to charity. Of course, to give the Military Plane set to a child would be punishment, not reward, but there are worse kits out there. And they might have a go and build a proper plane, to keep us on par with the burgeoning innovative Chinese Generation PeiZhi.

Summary: Tools required: file, sandpaper, plastic filler, immensely strong hands, adult supervision, sense of humour, latex gloves, warm soapy water, Dettol. Keep minifig, sticker set, gun, and Russian army colour bricks.

Scores	Military Plane
Quality*	50
Value	100
Fit*	60
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	10
Instructions	70
Total	65



Click 'n' Snap (PeiZhi) – Police Car (Winter 2013)

Poundland yet again produced another contender for 'worst set ever' in the form of the Click 'n' Snap Police Car. According to the rear of the box this was one in a series of 3. The kit did not appear to contain a minifig, although the general randomness of contents connected with BLOCK Tech did not make this certain. As vehicle sets go the box art suggested quite a poor design with symmetric front and rear, and large overhangs reminiscent of 1970s US budget cars. I decided to skip the mushy peas at the chippy that night and instead became the proud owner of Police Car.

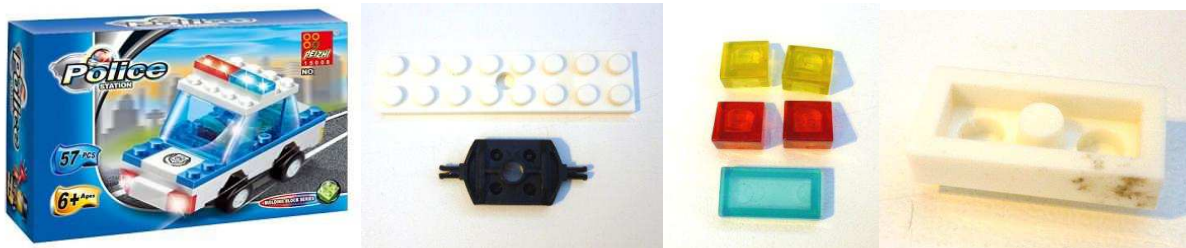
The rear box art showed one of the sets had a minifig; this looked fairly close to a PeiZhi design, and so a brief internet search was initiated to see if the hunch was correct. A match was indeed found for set 306. PeiZhi have a rather strange approach to kit design. I'm not entirely convinced it is based on careful market research, and it seems more plausible that a local Party official's mediocrely able child is employed to create new kits for the factory in return for favourable trading rights. I have not yet tracked down the PeiZhi home website and so can't tell if they actually have any competent designs. The vast array of PeiZhi kits available through export sites has not yet produced a single example to disprove this hypothesis.

Once opened, it was apparent that the kit only consisted of the car and did not have a minifig or even a sticker sheet. The instructions showed a picture of the car back to front, with the rear lights at the front and the headlights and grill at the back. PeiZhi actually marketed 306 with the photos showing the red lights at the front, although it also turned up in one of their police station sets with the lights in the correct place. Quite why the guys who had drawn up the instructions (including manipulating the picture with beams of light coming from the red front lights) had made this mistake is a mystery. Perhaps they had never seen a car before. Perhaps it was a joke on their lacklustre quality control and middle management. Perhaps they were just cataclysmically inept. Anyway, the car was quickly made up the right way round and finished in its bizarre proportions.



Uninspiring box art. Uninspiring contents. Uninspiring Instructions to make the hideous car back to front. Uninspiring completed hideous car.

The PeiZhi bricks were cheaply moulded, although the plastic itself was not too bad quality. The fit was just about right, although panel gaps were quite large. One plate had an unidentified brown goo that wiped off – yet another route for the Germ Warfare Division to initiate their Western Plague plot. The wheels were hard plastic but did go around smoothly. Clear parts were quite good with both fit and colour OK. As with other PeiZhi kits the white was white-ish, and appeared slightly dirty (except the 1x2 plate that really was). And there were two 2x2 tiles with police logo prints on them, the steering wheel was white and the 2x8 plate had a hole in the centre. Apart from that, everything was rather uninspiring.



Original PeiZhi police set back to front. Odd 2x8 plate with hole. Clear parts are OK quality. HSN1 helpfully included on 1x2 plate... euwwww...

Overall this kit was OK but nothing special, and without a minifig it was not exceptional value. It was obviously cheaply made, but worked as intended with only some chance of catching a horrible disease. Rather boring, but usable in a minifig environment. The car could certainly be improved in about a minute by rearranging the wheelbase and playing around with the front. As it stands, it is a monument to mediocrity and a loudspeaker on the state of Chinese business. Maybe it will inspire millions of Chinese children to become successful business tycoons, knowing they can do better. Expect excellent design to be a key feature of these new companies, driven by the shame of PeiZhi kit number 306.

Nowhere near the worst set ever, although infected. If there was a brick-based definition of the word "bland" in China, it would be this set.

Summary: Have mushy peas. Even if you don't like them.

Scores	Police Car
Quality*	60
Value	80
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	N/A
Design	30
Instructions	50
Total	66



Combat Force™ (Funtastic / PeiZhi) – Army Vehicle (Spring 2014)



Poundland's own Funtastic toy brand is constantly changing its products, and an addition found in April 2014 was 'Combat Force™', used for a variety of military-themed toys. One product line was standard £1 sized LEGO clone sized kits, consisting of one of four sets. In effect they were 'blind boxes' – the box was the same but with a random set inside. The four sets were a Jeep-type car, a Jeep-type car with a twin rocket launcher, an ugly Jeep-type car with twin side-mounted rockets, and a strange small armoured vehicle thing. All sets came with an army minifig – two with helmets, two with caps. Previous experience indicated these would be PeiZhi, which Funtastic have used extensively before, and research showed a match with PeiZhi 'Field Army' sets 0329-0332.

Funtastic had presumably reviewed their sales and noted that the PeiZhi military kits sold out very quickly. I'd suspect that 'Combat Force' (trademarked, natch) was a reaction to this by marketing their most lucrative products in a special line, separate from Click 'n' Snap. Two further retail decisions looked interesting – the first was the lack of a 'Contents may vary...' phrase (PeiZhi were probably trustworthy enough in this respect to not fill the sets with random junk); the second was 'ages 3+' on the box, which is quite keen for a LEGO-sized kit toy with very small parts. The 'choking hazard' warning was prominent on one side. The box art itself featured accurate photos of the PeiZhi sets, and for a £1 set looked remarkably professional.

Two sets were bought, and by chance the Jeep and rocket-launcher Jeep were inside. The pieces and minifigs were of standard PeiZhi military type: the parts were roughly Russian army colours, and the minifigs had 'PeiZhi' written on their torsos. Parts were of the normal PeiZhi quality – a bit bent here and there, with sprue marks, but this time having acceptable fit and quite good colour match. One round plate had a tiny brown mark on it (ewwww...). Both sets had larger plastic wheels not reviewed before. Quality control was quite poor – the clip in the Jeep set was missing its clips, whereas the rocket launcher Jeep had a yellow round plate missing (although there was a spare in the other kit). Instructions were miniscule and quite badly drawn, and it was obvious that whoever did them did not try to make the kits as they would not fit together as shown. The rocket Jeep was a bit fragile as the rear would fall off; this could be fixed by transferring the grill plates from front to rear. Once made, the larger wheels worked surprisingly well on both cars and they would happily whizz across the carpet.



Two of the Combat Force™ sets. Quite mediocre in design, but for PeiZhi this is a triumph. Docile soldier guys with PeiZhi logo on the torsos.

The minifigs were (of course) supplied annoyingly unassembled and required reasonably strong hands to make up. The helmet was of OK quality and was probably worth £1 in itself. The Jeep set looked to be amazing value, with the soldier minifig with helmet, large machine gun, radio, and car. The rocket Jeep minifig had a PeiZhi cap, a radio, and a Star Wars blaster. These sets did not have the useful torso sticker sheets seen in earlier kits. PeiZhi yellow was a bit orange compared to LEGO; the daft heads benefited from being swapped, but the hands looked OK enough and did hold tools well. Compatibility with standard LEGO minifigs was OK; the hands and arms did not fit well between PeiZhi and LEGO, and the legs assembly for PeiZhi had the cheap-looking holes in the legs. Once made, the figures did stay together, unlike almost all the other clone brands, and were certainly better and more compatible than Enlighten, Sluban, Kazi, Loongon, or Ausini.

PeiZhi seemed to have hired a kit designer with a vague idea of what vehicles look like, and this was confirmed by a discovery on-line of their current domestic and export set line up. Quality control for the Combat Force™ sets was still random, with a few badly moulded and missing parts and some wonkiness (although nothing like as bad as Weagle or Best-Lock). This would normally have consigned the kits to the nearest bin or furnace, but the cost, availability, colours and minifigs have made these sets actually quite desirable if army parts are needed. For this price, if the set has dodgy parts, just buy another. Combat Force™ may be patchy quality, but for military themed parts and minifigs they are an absolute bargain. As a standalone toy they would probably not cause disappointment in most children.

Summary:

Tools needed: file, garnet paper, latex gloves, warm soapy water, swine flu vaccine, patience.

And huge trolley to empty local shops of stock if any peninsulas need annexing.

Scores	Combat Force™
Quality*	50
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	70
Design	60
Instructions	50
Total	68



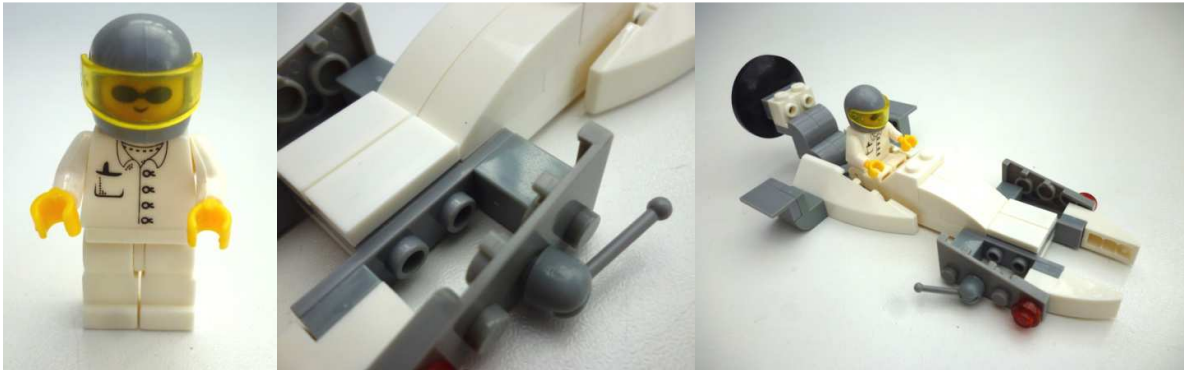
Funtastic were marketing two 'TOY FUN BAG' items – the girly fun 'MODEL' version with an atrocious Weagle-manufactured excuse for a kit, and this 'SPACE' themed bag with the old PeiZhi spaceship. Spaceship had previously turned up in both Poundland and 99p Store shops as a boxed kit. In addition in a bag with extra crayons, stickers and colouring book all for £1 seemed to underlie how cheaply these kits can be acquired. SPACE TOY FUN BAG was purchased to see whether quality control was up to scratch and to get another zombiefig, although PeiZhi figures are not the best for The Horde as they tend to be fairly boring.

The contents were, as with the other FUN BAG, a huge sticker sheet, a 12-page colouring book of mediocre quality, 4 crayons (this time with some not very useful colours), and the PeiZhi kit. All parts were present for the spaceship and minifig, with no real sign of organic contamination but the usual PeiZhi random flash moulding and colour matches. It must be said that this one had a fairly good white shade, although the grey parts were quite badly matched. Grab was adequate and was typical of the higher end of the cheap clone kits.



Space bag with old friend the PeiZhi spaceship. Contents include everything – only the stickers are different. Rock-hard PeiZhi taikonaut.

The minifig had to be completely assembled from its component parts. This one had a rather poorly moulded left arm which was loose in the torso and required immense strength to insert the hand. More annoying was a loose fit between the hips and the torso, which although easily fixed with Blu-Tack or similar had not been seen before with the 20 or so previously made PeiZhi characters. Maybe that's why they are so cheap. However, even with these annoying niggles the minifig was still streets ahead of any of the cheaper brands and was robust enough to endure many hours or play. Of course, being a PeiZhi taikonaut he had bare hands, an open-top shirt and a pen in his pocket.



Minifig has no logo, loose hip joint and arm. Grey colours do not match - as usual. Acceptable quality product and a happy spaceman.

The SPACE TOY FUN BAG is amazingly good value. PeiZhi are a cheap hooky brand but whilst there are a few quality issues, the bricks basically do the job they were made for. For a cost of £1 (or 95p in this sale) the kit itself is a bargain, but with the crayons and book it seems very cheap indeed.

Summary. Quite why UK companies source from any other cloner than PeiZhi is yet to be determined. Mediocre quality, but essentially does the job for a very cheap price and far less worse than similar priced brands.

Scores	Space Fun Bag
Quality*	40
Value	100
Fit*	50
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	40
Design	30
Instructions	50
Total	51



Funtastic (PeiZhi) – MILITARY SERIES (Summer 2014)



The military PeiZhi kits are difficult to source as they always sell out very quickly. Funtastic’s MILITARY SERIES was another method of selling old PeiZhi kits, this time with blind bags. The three kits were Attack Helicopter, Attack Boat and Assault Vehicle. The boat and vehicle thingy have been reviewed before in BLOCK Tech cardboard box guise, but the helicopter was new. All 9 Of the remaining Poundland stock was bought in the hope of recruiting more mercenaries to fight the Zombie Horde – noting that PeiZhi military figures are the only Chinese clone minifigs other than Star Diamond not to be part of the Zombie Horde.

The bags were opened carefully as the instructions were the same size as the bag and would tear easily. Each set had the torso sticker set included. Out of 9 sets, 4 were helicopter, 3 were boat and 2 were vehicle. Compared to earlier reviewed identical kits, PeiZhi quality had definitely taken a downhill path with colour matches noticeably ropey for the green, and a number of missing or extra parts randomly scattered throughout. It would appear that some new moulds had been commissioned somewhere along the manufacture of the sets as, for example, the two vehicle sets differed in quality and the minifig was either the older type of minifig (with daftly happy face and ‘PeiZhi’ written across the torso), or the newer type (angry face with no logo). The newer types had poorly fitting arms and worse legs, with one leg missing from new jeep guy. The boat windscreens were actually quite good quality.



Poundland rapidly cleared out of these kits. Attack helicopter quite good design and holds together. Each boat has two angry mercenaries.

Out of 12 minifigs, 3 were malformed – one with a very tight right arm (which subsequently broke), one with a loose left arm, and one with a missing leg. Combining these gave a total of 11 usable minifigs and 1 guy needing a long stay in the restorative sanatorium. The torso stickers allowed 9 new soldier recruits and two officers. Annoyingly only two caps were present, so BrickArms (or similar) headgear would be needed. However, the minifigs alone made the kit purchase price worthwhile. The 4 helicopters has two happy and two angry figs, the vehicles one each, and boats were all manned by the angry figs.



Happy minifig in good car, angry minifig in bad car and missing a leg. Some quality issues, but this entire force was bought for £8.40.

Compared to the Weagle bag kits, the PeiZhi kits are far better value with usable minifigs, although overall quality seems to have taken a tumble. I doubt many would be disappointed with the helicopter, which for 95p is astoundingly good value. The boat is a bit weird but the two figures make up for this. The vehicles are tolerable but since they have the military cap this is just about OK. PeiZhi are still the cheap end of the market, and their non-military kits are poor to mediocre. .

Summary. Very cheap method of getting military bricks and minifigs, but the cheapness is starting to show. Clear out the shops while you can.

Note: Only Attack Helicopter is reviewed as Attack Boat and Assault Vehicle sets almost identical to those already reviewed.

Scores	Attack Helicopter
Quality*	70
Value	100
Fit*	60
Compatibility	80
Minifig*	70
Design	70
Instructions	60
Total	71

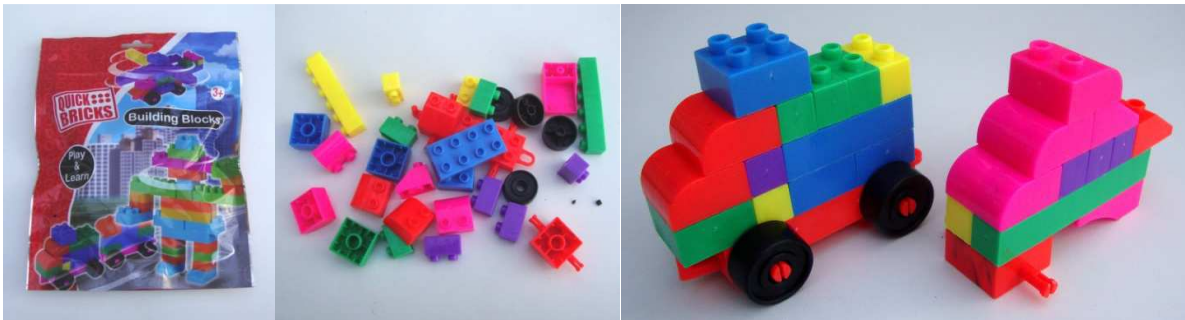


Quick Bricks (Funtastic) – Building Blocks (Spring 2014)



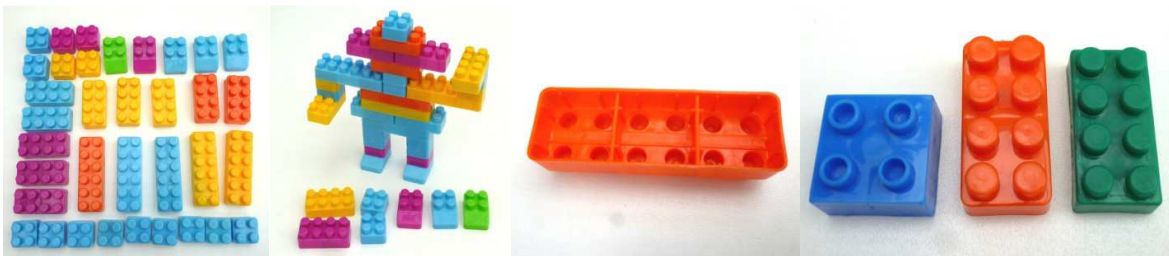
An extensive number of unsold “Quick Bricks” bags were spotted in Poundland. These were imported by Poundland’s Funtastic company, but gave no information on the manufacturer nor country of origin. The bag size and feeling of the contents suggested they would not be high quality DUPLO copies. Two bags were eventually bought, as it became obvious that the pictures on the front were built of different style bricks.

The bag itself seemed rather useful, being a handy size and re-sealable. To open it, the top was simply ripped off. This was a good start. Pouring out the first bag’s contents immediately reversed this trend by providing the following observations: the bricks were sized between LEGO and DUPLO and were totally incompatible with either; the plastic was soft but of appalling quality; there were nowhere near anything like the number of parts as shown on the bag; free plastic debris was included; a few of the bricks were moulded with black or white streaks; and the number of wheels did not match the number of axles. On the plus side there was no organic infection, although given the contents this may have made the set more interesting. A search of the 124 companies based in Chenghai producing or sourcing building blocks on the ‘toysgu’ website produced various possible matches, with the most plausible being the bizarrely named ‘Everlasting Bioer Plastic Factory’. Attempting to make the train thingy shown on the front showed that the four wheels did actually go round on the axles which was unexpectedly competent. The swoosh lines on the bag suggest some sort of rotating piece is included to move heads or rotor blades. This is an utter lie. It is however assured that the models would not fall apart as the grab is best described as excessive. A big hammer is certainly desirable for assembly, and perhaps a vice for disassembly before the inevitable and rapid disposal of the Quick Bricks in the appropriate recycling orifice. Given the hammer, I’d probably just keep on going until everything was flat.



Quick Bricks supplied in convenient re-sealable bag. Bag 1 contents supplied were an inconvenient subset of bag art with free plastic shards.

The second bag revealed a different style of bricks, completely incompatible with LEGO, DUPLO, the other Quick Bricks, Brick Blocks, or anything. They were just as awful as the first Quick Bricks, except a different size and rounded at the edges. On the plus side, there were enough bricks to make the robot thingy with a few parts left over, albeit in different colours. On the minus side, they were shite.



Bag 2 has a useful number of bricks. Shame they’re appallingly made and don’t fit the other Quick Bricks or anything else. Utterly useless.

Two big boxes of Quick Bricks might conceivably be useful, but since they do not fit each other or anything else you’d need quite a few bags to make anything of note. There’s a good chance that a single bag of Quick Bricks would give quite high levels of disappointment to any child recipient, probably encouraging the buyer never to go to Poundland again. This product is thus immensely more rubbish than any of the usual crap clone brands, which can at least be malletted on to each other and genuine LEGO if really necessary.

Summary: For - useful bags. Against - absolutely everything else.

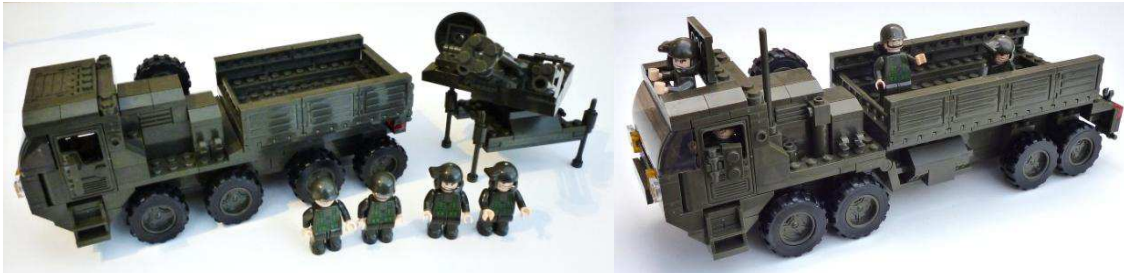
Scores	Quick Bricks 1	Quick Bricks 2
Quality*	20	20
Value	50	50
Fit*	10	10
Compatibility	0	0
Minifig*	NA	NA
Design	30	20
Instructions	NA	NA
Total	19	18



Sluban – Land Forces 2 Heavy Transporter (Spring 2013)

Sluban make many military kits, and the 'Land Forces 2 Heavy Transporter' was found from a UK supplier on eBay for a grand total of £14.35 including postage. This set was an 8x8 army truck (either a US HEMTT or Chinese Sanjiang clone) with an anti-aircraft Gatling gun payload. The box had an internal tray and all parts were in a rather forlorn-looking clear plastic bag. There were 6 separate bags inside it with parts and minifigs. The 5 minifigs pictured on the outside of box turned out to be 4 minifigs inside the box – the leader guy was missing - although there were flesh hands and heads supplied as well as the yellow ones shown. The instructions were OK, albeit small and complicated enough to reduce the steps to less than 50.

The clink test was worse than Enlighten. The pieces had no name on the studs and were noticeably shiny, as if they had been dipped in gloss paint. There were no mis-shaped parts but the overall feel was cheap and one of the clips broke immediately. The windscreen had got scratched in transit. The tyres were nasty - hard and glossy and with lumpy mould marks. The fit was generally OK, defaulting to 'hammer required' over 'loose'. The sides of the bricks were not very smooth but better than Kazi. The set did have all the pieces to build the model with many extras. Almost every piece was in a dark green olive, which was very effective and consistent for all bricks, but did make the kit rather dull to make. The clear parts were fairly decent, but the minifig yellow had a cheap orange tint. There were a few interesting unique parts, including 5x8 plates, 1x1 double-thickness plates, 4x1 bar bricks, vehicle doors, and steps. The supplied weapons sprue was very impressive with 4 massive assault rifles.



Sluban HEMTT truck with gigantic gun. Looks good, but don't be fooled. Hammer useful for assembly. MOC from same bricks on right.

The minifigs (4 soldiers, two with army helmets and two with crash helmets) were of a slightly different design to LEGO figures with unique legs. The torsos were supplied with "yellow" hands and arms already attached as best they could be. Swapping over the flesh-coloured hands showed the appalling torso-arm fit with some falling off just by moving them. The legs fitted and moved OK, but standing or sitting the figures on the truck proved difficult without a mallet. The torso print designs were also quite bland. The hands did at least fit in the arms, but did not hold the guns (or anything else) tightly. They cannot be swapped for LEGO hands, which is very annoying, but then, why would you want to?

The model itself was quite well designed, and there were enough pieces left over to have a good go at improving it (longer wheelbase, hatch hole and side fuel tanks were possible). The biggest problem was the terrible tyre and wheel fit, which stopped most of the wheels from moving. As a static kit this was not bad, but was spoiled by poor quality pieces. The minifigs looked quite good but were really, really awful quality. Perhaps the heads, helmets and rifles could be salvaged. It was apparent that anyone playing with this would be a) interested in the military, b) develop immensely strong hands, and c) get angry. Maybe that's Chinese social engineering at its best.

It is interesting to compare this with the far better made BLOCK Tech Jubilux Woma 'Military Justice' truck.



Which are better – Kazi or Sluban soldier minifigs? Neither, they're both rubbish. Sluban arm fit is appalling, torsos don't fit on studs, legs dire.

Sluban have a professional website, well designed sets and cheap prices. Don't be fooled – they are bad quality and best avoided.

Scores	Heavy Transporter
Quality*	60
Value	90
Fit*	60
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	30
Design	90
Instructions	80
Total	65



M.Y Toys (Star Diamond) – City Bus (Summer 2013)

M.Y are a product name of part of UK-based KandyToys who import various Chinese clone sets and rebrand them. Careful cross-referencing spotted that the M.Y City Bus was the Star Diamond 82102 kit of the same name. It was found on Amazon for £9.23 including postage. The supplier had shown two different box pictures of a lime green or yellow bus. The ones that arrived were lime green.

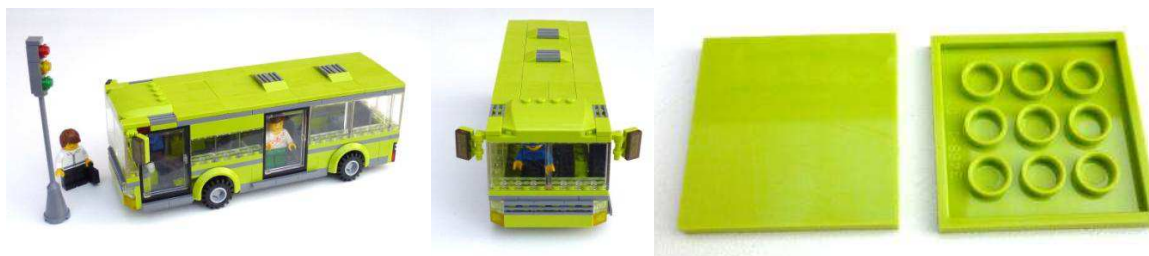
M.Y have their own sturdy boxes with an outer and inner box. There was no mention of the manufacturer, or, in fact, even that the kit was made in China. Presentation was extremely good with the Star Diamond parts inside 4 bags. These bags were not numbered so all 4 had to be opened together. Instructions were basically the same as Star Diamond, but in this case the bus wheels looked slightly out of perspective. The three minifigs were supplied completely disassembled, but once made appeared of good quality. The male passenger had a newer style hairpiece than the older type shown on the box. Close inspection showed the brown hair colour looked a little washed out when compared to genuine LEGO, although the minifig quality was streets ahead of all other Chinese clone brands. The suitcase was hollow on one side. A single set of traffic lights was also included in the kit.



M.Y City Bus – parts as supplied; annoyingly unmade minifigs; wistful driver, whimsical gal and weaslapophobic suitcase guy.

The model itself was relatively easy to build, although the tiled roof required immensely strong hands. The 8-stud wide design meant the seats were placed either side of an aisle which in theory allowed two rows of minifigs to sit in the bus. Unfortunately the designers hadn't tested their product very well as the seats were too low compared to the windows to let the minifig arms take advantage of the thin glass, and so would not fit properly. The roof as built was firmly studded to the windows making it rather hard to put the passengers inside anyway. Both could be easily fixed by raising the seats and adding some tiles between the windows and roof. It is surprising that the designers did not notice the seat problem; perhaps there was a parts limit. No Star Diamond kits tested had removable roofs.

Comparison with genuine LEGO showed a fairly good match for lime green, but a slightly lighter hue for the dark bluish-grey colour. Some of the parts had LEGO-style part and mould numbers on the reverse side. The wheels and tyres were excellent quality; the tyres had 'Star Diamond' around the sidewalls, and in some aspects were better than the LEGO ones. This kit had 4x4 tiles, which are not (yet) a LEGO part. Overall fit of the parts was very consistent, feeling marginally tighter than real LEGO. This meant the rear view mirrors stayed on the clips better than LEGO itself.



Good value and well made – but at 8 studs wide not really compatible with anything else in Town. 4x4 tile – note moulding number

Overall this kit was quite good, although the low seats and immovable roof made it tricky to play with. The 8-stud wide design is becoming a common feature of quite a few recent Chinese clone kits, although is a bit big for the normal LEGO town theme. Using the parts supplied and few extras with 6x3 windscreens it is possible to make a good 6-stud wide version. There are two Star Diamond double-decker buses that are 6 studs wide, but they proved impractical to source.

Star Diamond are way, way ahead of any of the other Chinese manufacturers tested in quality, although kit design is not quite up to LEGO standards in this case. The very slight difference between the lime green colour and real LEGO would be noticeable under certain lights (although this is true of genuine LEGO too) so it is not a straight swap. This is one of only a few identified Star Diamond kits under the M.Y brand.

Scores	City Bus
Quality*	100
Value	100
Fit*	100
Compatibility	95
Minifig*	100
Design	90
Instructions	100
Total	98.5



M.Y Toys (Star Diamond) – Military Tank (Autumn 2013)

M.Y Toys market a military range of clone LEGO kits. Most are sourced from the cheaper Chinese companies, but Military Tank was found to be the Star Diamond set 80031. The M.Y kit was readily available from various online stockists in the UK – this one was found for under £15 including postage. The design itself was not based on any real vehicle and featured rather small wheels, a windscreen at the front, and a twin-barrelled gun turret. The kit is the largest single vehicle in the Star Diamond military range. Images of the 80031 box only show it with Chinese writing, which has been translated in internetland as ‘Type 99 Tank’, although it doesn’t look much a real Chinese Type 99 at all.

The M.Y box was very well made with an inner box to hold the parts. The larger components – large plate, tracks, and guns – were supplied loose, with the other parts in 4 bags and a separate bag for the annoyingly unmade minifigs. All bags had to be opened to allow construction of the model as they were not in stages. The studs had ‘STAR’ written on them. All parts were indistinguishable from genuine LEGO in quality, although they felt marginally sharper around the edges and the grab was a little tighter. The green colour was not a standard LEGO shade and also did not match any of the other reviewed clone military colours. It was closest to a UK or US military dark green and probably based on some kind of Chinese army colour. There was a sticker sheet supplied, which seemed to be identical for every Star Diamond military kit and featured, amongst various numbers and logos, a big Red Cross sign. Assembly was straightforward; rebuilding as a MOC was a pleasure, not a chore - unlike all other clone kits.



M.Y Military Tank, repackaged Star Diamond set 80031. Contents as out of the box, bags are numbered ‘80031’. Finished tank with minifigs.

The minifigs were supplied unmade which was annoying. Assembly was straightforward and required strong hands, but not immensely so. The white printing on the torsos was only complete on one out the three supplied figures, showing Star Diamond quality control is not 100%. The three minifig heads had different expressions: none were angry, with one slightly annoyed, one smug behind sunglasses, and the serene guy seen as a driver for other Star Diamond kits. The helmets were very good quality, as were the two guns and the field glasses. The two jerry cans were excellent but too big for a minifig to carry with the arm down. The grenade fitted in a minifig hand and looked quite similar to the BrickArms item. It is worth noting that Star Diamond minifig hands are the only clone tested fully compatible with LEGO – not that you’d ever need to swap them.



Minifig bag as supplied. Two torsos had printing errors – Star Diamond are not perfect. Thinner single-barrelled MOC tank on the right.

When complete the tank was very useable, if a little unrealistic in design and disproportionately wide at 14 studs. There was a hatch in the turret for a commander, the guns could move up and down and the turret could rotate, and the tracks went round... brmmm.... There was a large opening hatch in the rear and a small hatch in the front. In theory this could allow minifigs and equipment to be placed inside, although getting them out would be a problem. Similarly, a driver could be placed near the front, but would probably require the hull to be dismantled to place the minifig correctly. The tank itself was reasonably well proportioned and large, and would probably be a good addition to a military theme if there was no worry about not being based on actual hardware. A MOC was made using this and some other Star Diamond parts from smaller military kits: deleting the windscreen; resizing the hull to 10 studs wide; and giving the turret a single main gun. Bigger wheels would be a huge improvement.

Summary: Good sized kit, amazing value, mostly very well made but a few printing errors. Better design could improve playability a bit.

Scores	Military Tank
Quality*	100
Value	100
Fit*	100
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	90
Design	90
Instructions	100
Total	97



Star Diamond – 24H Express Truck (Spring 2013)

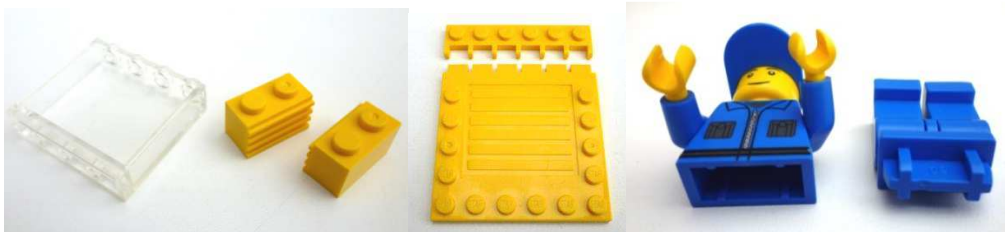
Original Star Diamond kits are very hard to source for the UK, but a single supplier based in Hong Kong was found on eBay, and 2 weeks later the '24H Express Truck' arrived. The cost was AUS \$25 + AUS \$10 postage (about £23.50 in total) which made it about 30% more expensive than a comparable LEGO set.

Presentation was excellent. The box was well made and sturdy, with a smattering of good and amusing English translations amongst the Chinese. The pieces were supplied in very well made bags. The instructions were well laid out and easy to follow. There was a sticker sheet, but these were good and were easy to apply. The pieces had the 'Star' writing on the lugs, and were of top quality and indistinguishable from LEGO in feel and fit (quite hard for yellow and black). There were a few different pieces – a 6x6 hinge roof (not quite same design as the Jubilux Woma version), the grill 2x1 bricks were only grilled on one side, and the 4x3 clear panel had side stiffeners. Interestingly, the 6x6 panels had both left- and right-handed versions, judging from the moulding button. The trans-black windscreen was excellent. The kit was easy to make and was well designed, with study cross-joining and SNOT used for the front and rear. The lorry itself had a well-proportioned shape. It was a pleasure to build. Overall, it was very hard indeed to find any differences in quality between this and a genuine LEGO kit of a few years ago.



Star Diamond 24H Express Truck as supplied and made up. There's a driver and a loader guy. Are those counterfeit iPods?

The minifigs were supplied with separate arms, hands and torsos in true Chinese fashion. Unlike all other Chinese manufacturers, these were of excellent quality, and the hands appeared to be *better* than those used the current batch of LEGO collectable minifigs. Torso printing was fine in detail. The whites of the eyes were a bit large for European tastes. The torso-legs assembly joint was different to a real minifig and marginally less stiff. One minifig was identical to the Click Brick Tow Truck driver.



Some different pieces including useful 6x6 roof hinge, and a close-up of the driver minifig showing different torso stiffening and leg assembly.

Was there anything wrong with this kit at all? Well... on the back of the box is that awful phrase 'Contents may vary from photos and illustrations on packaging' which is not exactly inspiring. The instructions had a couple of small joins at the top where they hadn't been cut (seen this in LEGO kits too, though). The minifigs had to be assembled and the heads were a tad boring. The truck design was a bit annoying as the cab had no easily removable roof or doors, making the minifig driver rather a prisoner. The driver's seat was yellow just like the truck – perhaps a different colour would be better? And maybe the stickers hark back to the 1990s (although no more than the current Star Wars kits). But that's about it, really. I positively liked the 'BLH' rip-off of 'DHL', and the computer / Apple thing on the boxes (there's a banana too, which I suspect might just be genuine humour).

Many of the newer Star Diamond kits seem to be of good design and comparable with, but sufficiently different from, genuine LEGO themes. It must be said that the older sets do however show a lack of imagination. If the newer sets are ever imported into the UK and sold at a competitive price (say at £10 as for the M.Y City Bus) they would form a proper alternative to LEGO, and in fact if this kit was cheaper it would outscore the LEGO cement mixer. Star Diamond are the only manufacturer with which I have had hand-on experience that are anywhere near capable of this.

I would buy another Star Diamond kit!

Scores	24H Express Truck
Quality*	100
Value	60
Fit*	100
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	105
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	97



Star Diamond – Ice Cream Truck (Spring 2013)

Looking around for an ice-cream van revealed no new LEGO model, and being a bit lazy I used the supplier based in Hong Kong to buy the “Ice Cream Truck”. The cost was still AUS \$25 + AUS \$10 postage; changing economics made it £22 in total, less than the DHL truck but still about 30% more than a comparable LEGO set. Previous experience with the 24H express truck did not discourage me from buying it.

This set was from the same new series of Star Diamond (number 82108 with the DHL truck 82105 and the city bus 82102). This box had only badly translated English whereas the DHL truck at least had some sense. The significance of “520” is still a mystery to me. Presentation was again excellent, with pieces supplied in very well made bags. The instructions were well laid out and easy to follow. There was a sheet with stickers that were easy to apply. The pieces were of top quality and indistinguishable from LEGO in feel and fit; the wheels especially were very good indeed. Most of the medium lavender and pink colour pieces are not yet made by LEGO (e.g. wheel arches and slopes), and the colours were all but identical.

The set design was extremely good with detailing inside for the ice cream dispenser. The kit was not perfect – the rear wheels seemed too far forward in proportion to the van length; the wheels were too high up the wheel arches, and the roof didn’t come off so it was tricky to play well with the guy inside. These were relatively minor niggles and quite simple to change (as it would be with any set LEGO make). It was a pleasure to build and again it was very hard indeed to find any differences between this and a genuine LEGO kit of a few years ago.



Pastel colours table and chairs, no real ice creams, tubby girl in racy outfit and Harry Potter bloke. Lights are Photoshopped on the box pictures.

Three minifigs were supplied with this kit – an ice-cream guy (who looked a lot like the director), and a male and female customer. The male guy was a Harry Potter copy with big hair; the female looked something like a character from the Town beach theme and appeared to have ripped her blouse through eating too much ice cream. One of Harry Potter’s arms was slightly loose (a bit like an old LEGO torso). Not full marks there, then. The supplied hair, although OK, was not identical to LEGO. And there were no ice creams or lollipops to hold.

Was there anything wrong with this kit at all? Not really. The only gripe is not being able to buy it cheaply in the UK.

*** Update: The newly released 2014 LEGO Ice Cream Truck trounces this one.

Scores	Ice Cream Truck
Quality*	100
Value	60
Fit*	100
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	95
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	95



Top Toys – Metalix Build Your Own Car Kit (Spring 2014)

NEW!

The Metalix name is used for a variety of toy products, generally related to small Meccano-type kits available in various budget shops in the UK. One spin-off is the 'Build Your Own Car Kit' set, which features a toy car sized model which is assembled from pieces with LEGO-style fixings. The car has a large separate key (roughly the size of a real car key) with a built-in spring. The finished car can then be fired across the carpet / table / doctors waiting room with others for a race. The current product line appears to consist of 3 sets, each featuring an (unbranded) Audi R8 in red, silver or white. The kit comes unmade, with the launch key, chassis, 4 tyres, front, top, sunroof, back, sides, and two LEGO-style angle plates.

Interestingly the kit was marketed as suitable for ages 3+, which given the small size of the pieces was quite brave but at least commendable in this day and age. On the rear was the mandatory 'unsuitable for ages 0-3 years' and the terrible phrase 'Due to constant product improvement specifications, colours and contents may vary from those illustrated'. The last was fairly irrelevant for this range as the entire contents were visible at the front through the transparent box. Maybe BLOCK Tech should put this on their boxes to cover their ~~uses~~ variable contents portfolio.

The pieces were in a moulded plastic pack and were pushed out from behind. The car panels were made of a cheap-feeling plastic with washed-out colours and half-decent printing. The tyres were a tight fit but OK in quality. The sunroof was already fitted into the roof and was only removable by pushing with a small implement from the inside. It has an extra protrusion underneath so that it could only fit one way in the roof; this made it useless for any other LEGO-style fit. The car itself went together quite easily as long as the panels were attached in a certain order; there were no instructions, so the set did assume at least some form of intelligence from the child involved. When made the car itself looked much the same as any toy plastic car. Quite a few tests of the key launcher and car were carried out to make sure it ran as described.



Vaguely LEGO pieces, simple cheap toy. Loads available, probably limited panel life. Chassis great for consigning MOCs to certain destruction.

On its own, the 'Build Your Own Car Kit' contains a few pieces of compatible LEGO and so only just about qualifies for review here. However, the side plate connectors are of use, as is the chassis which can be the basis for any number of powered LEGO-type vehicles. For maximum playability a slightly loose fit would probably be preferable to complete LEGO quality grab to ensure crashability, but the fit turned out to be quite good. As it was, the chassis was decent enough, and the car kit was OK too.

Summary: Looks and feels cheap quality, but it works and the chassis can be used for LEGO cars. Nothing really special, but surprisingly not bad.

Scores	Build Your Own Car
Quality*	40
Value	90
Fit*	60
Compatibility	50
Minifig*	NA
Design	60
Instructions	NA
Total	65

BLOCK Tech (Weagle) – Construction Digger (Winter 2013)

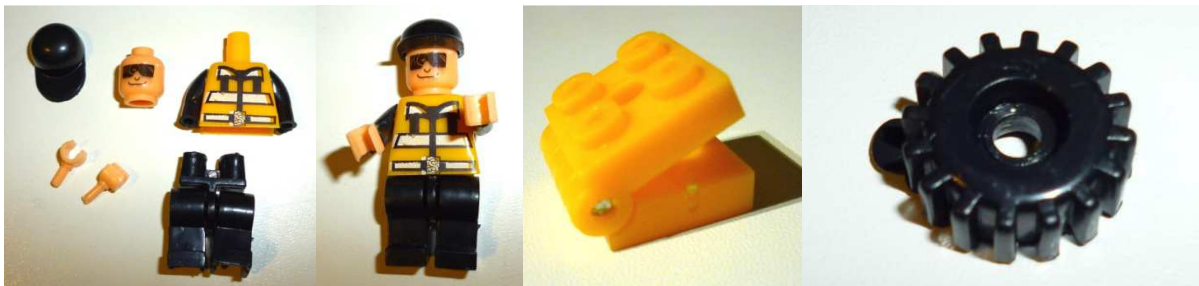
This BLOCK Tech kit turned up in a charity shop in Surrey, although quite why anyone in Surrey had ever considered buying it in the first place is a mystery. Maybe it had been a present from a hateful relative. Anyway, unsurprisingly it had been given away unopened. The box art photo immediately suggested a rubbish clone set, with the combination of the Oxford Toys style windscreen and completely uninspiring design indicating some unknown brand. The box stated there were 36 pieces, a sticker sheet and instructions included; no minifig was evident. It also stated “QUALITY BLOCKS”, which judging by past experience had a high chance of being a lie. The set was acquired with a generous donation to the charity. Anticipation was high that this could take the honour of being the most terrible kit in the UK.

Opening the box revealed no sticker sheet, but a minifig instead (first box untruth, although not a bad thing). There were no obvious markings on any of the bricks to indicate the manufacturer, although ‘OKER brand’ was written on the minifig bag. It looked like a much cheaper rip-off of Ausini. The dire bricks and minifig were of atrocious quality, worse even than Best-Lock and Blox which took some beating (second box untruth). The fact that the factory had managed to source worse materials than Blox is a glowing testament to the power of economics over any sense of decency in the supposed communist state. The plastic felt as if it was going to shatter at any moment into semi-lethal shards, either to exact revenge for centuries of European colonialism or because the makers really hate BLOCK Tech. 36 pieces were actually present, although the colours and types were not quite the same as on the box or instructions (third box untruth). The set itself did at least fit together without the need for a mallet. There was a design flaw as the steering wheel (different to the box art – fourth untruth) could not fit as depicted. The ‘digger’ used a plate on a hinge at the front, so was best described as a grader (fifth box untruth). The overall effect when built hovered between an overwhelming feeling of blandness or pent-up anger at having part of your life wasted. No tetanus booster was required as mercifully there were no infectious organic substances on the pieces.



Box art suggests shite kit. Not a lie. Minifig included, no sticker sheet. Finished model ugly and abysmal quality. Minifig skin is flesh coloured.

The minifig was quite similar to the Best-Lock design, but had a normal smooth head. The torso arms came attached, but the hands were not. The minifig legs were supplied assembled, but were wonky and became unassembled if moved. All parts had flash moulding errors, and the head was a loose fit on the torso. The flesh colour was actually skin, not zombie which was marginally disappointing. To compensate, the genuinely creepy grin was scarier than meeting Worzel Gummidge in the Brookwood Necropolis cemetery on Halloween – and that is mightily scary.



Crap minifig comes partially assembled. Head is a loose fit; parts are terrible quality. Hinge plate has metal hinge. Awful plastic wheels.

The photos do not do justice to how utterly shite this kit was. Everything about it was bad, with the only good point being that it was NOT infectious like so many of the other clone brands, which isn't really saying much. There were at least 5 lies on the box, suggesting debatable BLOCK Tech morals or competency. Totting up the scoring showed that at 16.5% it did indeed beat the Blox 'Construction Truck' to be crowned the crappiest set in the UK. For completeness, I really, really couldn't be arsed to find out the manufacturer. Eventually it turned out to be Weagle.

Worst clone kit. For a while.

Scores	Construction Digger
Quality*	Can I give -10?
Value	10
Fit*	20
Compatibility	40
Minifig*	20
Design	5
Instructions	30
Total	16.5

BLOCK Tech (Weagle) – Fire Tender (Spring 2014)

This BLOCK Tech kit is made by the same company, Weagle, that made the Construction Digger. It was bought for £1 in a sale, as the previously reviewed Weagle set had an unadvertised minifig inside.

This one did not. It was just as rubbish as the Digger, and with worse stickers. The pieces were again vaguely similar to Ausini, except with tolerances about 100 times more lax and a lingering “can’t be arsed” attitude attached to them.

Pants. Just pants.



Left to right: Pants, pants, pants, pants, pants.

The box art suggests fire in close proximity. This is something that may well be tested in the future.

Summary: Pants.

Scores	Fire Tender
Quality*	Pants
Value	Pants
Fit*	Pants
Compatibility	Pants
Minifig*	None supplied as set is pants
Design	Pants
Instructions	Pants
Total	Pants

An explanation.

The UK uses the word “pants” in a variety of forms, almost all in completely different ways to the US. Here, “pants” as a noun is applied to underwear, generally the old-fashioned male type in style, although it can be used as a more generic term. The fact that American English uses it as a word for “trousers” has been a source of mild amusement for generations, causing many British to quietly giggle like 8-year olds when listening to supposedly serious conversations from across The Pond. In the past few years, however, language has evolved and, perhaps due to US influence, the word “pants” in English has acquired a new use as an adjective – a derogatory descriptor that is rather hard to define exactly. Whilst many of us Brits understand this relatively recent addition, it may still be lost on the wider world and could contribute to linguistic barriers and confusion.

BLOCK Tech must then be congratulated on producing a kit that allows the new use of this word to be so aptly demonstrated to the global community.

Behold, a pants set.

I’m not sure whether the word “pants” in this context translates well into Chinese. Someone really ought to try.

These BLOCK Tech kits had been on special offer unsold in a local shop for 3 months before I bothered to buy one. The unnamed manufacturer was Weagle, who were at the time of purchase the holders of the newly bestowed CACK award for their truly abysmal Construction Digger. The Fire Truck from the same range had no minifig and was reviewed as “pants”. This Police SWAT Vehicle was thus seen as a gamble – would it have a minifig or not? A recruit for the Zombie Army would make the purchase worthwhile, whereas an unaccompanied pile of shite Weagle bricks would serve only to increase blood pressure, reduce hope, incite arson, and unnecessarily add to pollution in the South East of England. £1 was paid for the quantum of crapness.

The 39 pieces came in two bags, with a minifig evident in one. The instructions also showed a minifig – OK, a bit different from that supplied, but quite why this major (only?) selling point was not on the BLOCK Tech box was a bit odd. Anyway, once out of the bags the pieces showed the major *non*-selling point - the atrocious quality of Weagle. The strange-looking vehicle was put together with mostly mediocre grab. The black aerial was actually quite a good looking piece; of course, this was completely spoiled by a dreadfully loose fit. The single stud length seat was probably meant to fit with the steering wheel to let the minifig have a snug fit. Naturally the Weagle minifig was too big, so it didn't fit at all. Moving the seat back one stud meant the figure just moved about without any locating studs, which was stupid. The very, very cheap and nasty wheels had fit varying from tight to worrying loose. The bracket for the front lights and grill was so low and the wheels so small that it touched the ground. All pieces felt fragile and were shoddily moulded. The side stickers went on OK but the front one was too big. The whole set was just rubbish.



Weagle kit looks rubbish. Let's play contents roulette... behold – a free minifig! Oh dear, model is like box art, with crap quality to boot. You lose.

The minifig was supplied mostly unassembled, which was not only annoying but challenging as it was a gamble to see if it could be made without anything snapping. Amazingly, it survived assembly. The minifig had a different head print from that shown on the instructions (a good thing) and a helmet instead of a cap (a bad thing). The helmet was a very loose fit indeed. The legs assembly was supplied complete but was wobbly. All pieces had flash moulding. The torso pattern had gaps in the printing and was wonky. The legs vaguely fitted to baseplate studs. On the plus side, the skin colour was a healthy shade of pink. Policefig appeared blissfully happy with his lot - definitely a Good Cop – but his effectiveness in the Cloneville City slums had to be questionable as he would probably disintegrate on his first patrol.



Minifig meant to have cap, and head like Construction Digger guy. Minifig as supplied. Aerial and grill bricks. Short seat does not let fig sit in car.

Police SWAT Vehicle is disappointing on so many levels. On the surface, the vehicle is a rubbish design in rubbish bricks with a rubbish minifig. This is disappointing. The only redeeming feature, the aerial, is permanently loose and so totally useless. This is also disappointing. Annoyingly, the minifig is terrible quality but not scary enough to work as a true zombie, making it almost unusable. This is really disappointing. Early expectations of Police SWAT Vehicle being the winner of the most rubbish kit were dashed by tolerable value and instructions scores, and a minifig with a Nightmare Alert Status of close to zero - so even on an ironic level the kit was rubbish. This is more than disappointing. I did not get immensely strong hands making it, nor immunity from swine flu. This is, naturally, disappointing. I could post the kit to BLOCK Tech explaining why I'm “not totally satisfied”, but I'll most likely be at the back of a sizable queue and I'd also hate to have the insanity of yet another of their complaints department staff on my hands. It would of course be morally wrong to give the kit to a charity shop as some poor child might actually get it as a present, so I'm now stuck with the sodding thing until a clean-burn incinerator or industrial-sized thermobaric firework can be found to aid in disposal. This is monumentally disappointing.

Summary: Weagle are crap. Really, really crap.

Scores	Police SWAT Vehicle
Quality*	20
Value	50
Fit*	10
Compatibility	50
Minifig*	10
Design	40
Instructions	50
Total	27



Yet another BLOCK Tech abomination was found skulking in a QD store, although at the time it seemed so promising. This example was 'Tipper Truck Roadworks Crew' and showed a large tipper truck with two good-quality looking minifigs and various tools on the outside. The set was bought for an exorbitant price of £2.99 on the premise that this could be a new unknown cloner that might be half decent.

Naturally the BLOCK Tech box art was a lie. According to the box, the set was suitable for 6+, an age typically only reserved for Ausini in the UK. With BLOCK Tech, it would appear that this age value was just applied randomly. Inspection soon revealed a pile of shite Weagle bits with one crappy minifig the same as that found in 'Construction Digger'. The sticker sheet was completely different to that suggested by the box art. The bits themselves were the shockingly poor quality Weagle rubbish consisting of mostly horrid orange-yellow parts with multiple moulding errors. The instructions were hard to follow and near the end were just plain incorrect. It became apparent that the tipper as depicted would not tip up without stud interference. The roof was wrong; not that this mattered as the terrible Weagle minifig had a massive helmet that prevented the roof going on anyway. The supplied sprue with implements had lots of flash moulding. The barrel came in two pieces that would not stay together. The huge grey traffic cone - with a scale height of about 5 feet - had a curved sticker that did not fit by a substantial margin. The overall shape of the truck was surprisingly quite good; it was however spoilt by plain sloppy design which was, in a way, more annoying than if it had been bad in the first place.



It's Weagle, stupid. Box art truck is different on the front and back. Minifig completely different. Do BLOCK Tech know, or care? Rubbish cone.

This set is obviously rubbish, but of more interest is how the box is really pushing the bounds of what might be acceptable in selling toys or any other product, in fact. Nowhere is there the phrase 'Contents may differ from illustration' or its equivalent. The title 'Roadworks Crew' and the picture of the two different minifigs does suggest two minifigs should be included, although the rear does state 'workman'. There are two cones shown when only one is included. It's almost as if the entire point of the set is not to sell a toy, but is an exercise in trying to get away with as much as possible without making Trading Standards take action. Maybe there are 96 pieces included. Maybe there is a workman, barrel, cone, shovel and instruction booklet. But yet again, BLOCK Tech have produced a product almost guaranteed to induce disappointment in a sizeable percentage of the purchasers. With very few tweaks, even with the same actual product, this might not be the case. Why is this being done? Logically, one reason stands out above all others.

The BLOCK Tech marketing department formally worked in cosmetics.

Scores	Tipper Truck
Quality*	10
Value	30
Fit*	20
Compatibility	50
Minifig*	10
Design	50
Instructions	30
Total	24

Click 'n' Snap are a sub-brand of the Funtastic toy division of Poundland, and as with BLOCK Tech they use Chinese manufacturers to make their products. Fire Engine and Police Car were two of three in a 'new' series. Click 'n' Snap had previously used PeiZhi and Ausini sets for the brand; this time for some unfathomable reason it was Weagle's turn. Fire Engine and Police Car were very different to the BLOCK Tech equivalents reviewed earlier, but photos showed similar Weagle minifigs and the same stickers for the Fire Engine with the strange phrase 'Rescue Floor'. BLOCK Tech kits have a recommended retail price of £1.99 (generally optimistic), but it's a good bet that Poundland's target price was... £1. The Click 'n' Snap kits were also slightly bigger than the BLOCK Tech equivalents, so presumably either they negotiated a better deal or BLOCK Tech had more margin.

Understandably, the Weagle parts were dire in the extreme, with the expected terrible quality throughout and the familiar wobbly wheels, badly fitting bricks and plates, and questionable design. Fire Engine (Weagle 69001) was hard to put together, had an infected piece, was quite ugly and plainly was not an 'Engine'. The Police Car – Weagle set 69008 - was a convertible with wheelarches, had mistakes in the instructions, and (badly) resembled a 1940s US drop-head. Both were different to the BLOCK Tech rubbish small kits: they were rubbish bigger kits. Value was a bit difficult to score, as although the sets had a lot more parts, this didn't really improve them much. Still, at least there were more pieces to attempt to build stuff before everything broke. The fireman was disappointingly nowhere near as angry as the box photo.



Click 'n' Snap now using Weagle – this was no 69001. Bizarre stickers. Finished item like box art except for fireman who is certainly not angry.

The extras in both sets included a sticker sheet and a very badly moulded tools sprue. Fire Engine got the same sprue as the BLOCK Tech Tipper Truck, with a spade, power drill, hammer and bolt cutters. This paled into insignificance with the mighty arsenal given to Police Car. It was obvious that, unlike the Blox policeman, this cop was not going into the ghetto unarmed. There was a pair of handcuffs, an ammo box, some sort of handheld implement either to open doors or detonate mines, a 2ft-long long-slide handgun that could take down charging rhinos, an automatic assault rifle, and a frankly massive 8ft-long 50-cal sniper rifle. The Weagle minifig had the evil grin and sunglasses head-print, and a mis-moulded helmet with a nasty-looking chin guard. He would probably fall apart just holding any of the weaponry, but whilst in one piece could probably hold out against an entire army of PeiZhi mercenaries or very angry Mega Blok Halo Brutes.



Police Car is for 6+. Cop is scary without helmet, terrifying with supplied arsenal. Colours and parts different to box photo, but don't mess...

Testing showed that although very poorly moulded, the guns did fit standard LEGO minifigs. A few minutes with a bit of wet and dry would tool up an entire attack squad. This sprue alone is easily worth the entire cost of the Police Car kit.

Although repeated often, it is hard to convey how terrible these Weagle kits were. The feel, fit, manufacture and overall disappointment of these kits was bad, bad, bad. Quite why Funtastic decided to source from Weagle is a mystery, as they also have access to PeiZhi and had used Ausini kits which were half decent. Perhaps they want LEGO to do well; after seeing the disappointment caused by this rubbish most parents will probably abandon Click 'n' Snap and spend the extra for the genuine product. At least the minifigs were weird enough to join The Horde.

Summary: Fire Engine is very very crap. Police Car is very very crap but with guns.

Buy the Police Car kit and immediately incinerate everything except for the weapons sprue. Get filing, and arm your minifigs to the hilt to prepare for the Zombie Apocalypse.

Scores	Fire Engine	Police Car
Quality*	0	0
Value	40	100
Fit*	10	20
Compatibility	30	50
Minifig*	10	10
Design	30	20
Instructions	40	20
Total	18	25



The local Poundland threw up a number of new products next to the thousands of unsold Quick Bricks bags. The new bags were identical in size to the Quick Bricks packages, and were themed around various toys. Two had hooky LEGO kits included – a space bag (with a PeiZhi kit) and a girl bag. The bag described a colouring book, stickers, crayons, and a block kit. The picture showed a quite poor kit with a hint of Weagle, but without investigation this was not certain. What was certain was a guaranteed addition to the Zombie Horde. As a bonus, the local discount stores were having a price war, so MODEL TOY FUN BAG was bought for the princely sum of 95p.

Extrication of the contents revealed a huge sticker sheet, 12-page colouring book of mediocre quality, 4 crayons of decent enough colours, and a frankly terrible Weagle kit. The car itself was very basic, although it did at least have all of the pieces which were mostly not covered with mysterious brown substances. Mostly. The separate figure bag was obviously missing the torso. This was very annoying, as, of course, the one reason for getting the appalling kit in the first place was put in jeopardy. Although a zombiefig could be made up from combining the assortment of Weagle rubbish with an old chewed LEGO torso, the principle of the thing required another purchase to see if the quality control was just abysmal and not criminally inept.



Contents may differ. Such as 'Fun'. Best parts of this are the crayons and stickers. Pisspoor quality comes as standard. Unhappy girl guaranteed!

The second Fun Bag did have the torso included, so the zombiefig was assembled in all her glory. This was hard to do as the Weagle parts were utterly pants in quality requiring both delicacy and considerable force to join parts together. The finished zombiefig was awful, even taking into account the relatively normal coloured skin tone and benign expression. The 'hair' looked like a badly moulded helmet, the arms were loose, the legs did not fit, everything had flash moulding, and the plastic felt (truthfully) as if it would break at any time. The torso was a mirror image of the bag art, suggesting the minifig came from the Looking Glass Of Horrors and would take any opportunity to suck victims into a parallel universe.

The bag photos suggested that the car could be decorated with the stickers supplied. These turned out to be 3-4 times bigger than shown on the front, which although a good idea for sticking elsewhere did drown the model somewhat.



Minifig on bag and in reality. Less scary, more rubbish. Stickers slightly oversized for model as supplied. Slopes are different sizes. Shite indeed.

Yet again a UK company has made the interesting decision to source from Weagle. Whether the factory has 'premier' products which it shows to the reps before switching to 'production' products is unknown. It must be assumed that someone somewhere in the UK checks these products as they arrive on the shelves. Quite why any sane importer would choose Weagle over, say, PeiZhi, is a mystery, as PeiZhi's quality is respectably mediocre compared to Weagle's guaranteed crap. PeiZhi could be a tolerable cheap alternative to LEGO. Weagle is not. It is utter rubbish.

Summary. Another case of wilful commercial suicide. An advert for buying more LEGO. Shockingly poor bricks and minifig. Crayons are quite good...

Scores	Girly Fun Bag
Quality*	20
Value	50
Fit*	10
Compatibility	30
Minifig*	0
Design	20
Instructions	50
Total	21



Excitement reigned in late May as Funtastic had been busy with Fun Bags. Not content with supplying mystery bags of Quick Bricks, Poundland were now stocking three blind bag set series – CONSTRUCTION, MILITARY, and GIRLS DISCO – each having 3 sets to collect. The MILITARY series were PeiZhi, with the CONSTRUCTION and GIRLS DISCO being Weagle. CONSTRUCTION was so crap I couldn't be bothered to review them. The GIRLS DISCO series was randomly a 'car' (seen in the MODEL TOY FUN BAG), a 'disco', and a 'piano and stage'. The car showed the same minifig as on the FUN BAG, whereas the other two were seemingly devoid of figures. The tag line for the new series was 'SO EASY TO STORE TOYS'. Two bags were bought in the hope of not getting the 'car', which was rubbish. GIRLS had no apostrophe, so was a bit vague on whether GIRL was on her own or was meant to own it with others, but presumably the capitals would shout it loud enough to force any number of GIRLS to participate. As it was made by Weagle this did not seem like a bad idea.

Opening the first bag revealed two immediate flaws with the promise of 'EASY TO STORE TOYS'. The first was that the instructions and sticker sheet were as big as the bag, so opening it at the designated tear line would rip them. This was a pain. Secondly, unlike Quick Bricks, the bag was not re-sealable. This made it less than easy to store in the bag. Anyway, inside was a bag of pieces, two loose 1x4 black plates, and the appalling girl minifig seen in the FUN BAG. When examined, the purple and light blue parts were remarkably good quality, feeling almost the same as genuine LEGO and being a very close colour match. It was only the terrible trans parts that suggested the pieces were indeed Weagle. Assembly of the kit was a little complicated but produced a really rather good piano and a performance stage with a yellow microphone. The 1x4 plates were needed instead of two 1x3 plates, indicating (astoundingly for Weagle) that a last-minute parts check had shown errors in automated packing and this had been put right. Unfortunately, this initial optimism was totally spoiled by the previously reviewed girl minifig from The Mirror Universe Of Nightmares.



Patronising pink colours promise a mystery set. Unexpected minifig is a downside. Weagle's Victoria Wood, Katie Melua or Barry Manilow?

By chance the second DISCO bag has the disco. Again, a GIRL anti-minifig was included (this turned out to have an even worse fit than the piano girl) which was supposed to be a bonus but wasn't. As with the PIANO AND STAGE, DISCO had special colours – light pink and light blue – which were made of good quality plastic and almost matched LEGO for colour. However, this set used more of the standard Weagle colours so that assembly was crap, hindered by incorrect instructions. When finished, the DISCO could be best described as 'balanced' together, with any serious play probably requiring a good glue or Blu-Tack session beforehand. The GIRL anti-minifig had a hideous hairstyle, ungrippy hands, terrible clothing, wonky legs, and would not stand on the DISCO floor without a significant lean and would randomly fall over. Maybe this was meant to be realistic.



Second bag produced DISCO. Light pink and blue pieces quite good, other pieces not. Finished item is crap and needs work to stop disintegration.

Although both these sets scored relatively badly, the design of the PIANO was remarkably good, giving a Weagle product its first excellent score in any category (other than value for the heavily-armed police guy). Interestingly, if the minifig had not been included it would have scored over 60% overall. PIANO AND STAGE is therefore probably the biggest shock of this entire report: a tolerably good Weagle kit. DISCO reins back on this news and gives the standard Weagle shite. Then there is the lie about the minifig inside, but judging by the photos it is likely that the picture was taken from the earlier MODEL TOY FUN BAG and couldn't be pasted onto the other sets - probably by the same guy who couldn't use apostrophes.

Summary. Unbelievable. Weagle can produce a good kit. Incinerate the minifig to be on the safe side.

Scores	PIANO AND STAGE	DISCO
Quality*	60	30
Value	80	60
Fit*	50	30
Compatibility	70	60
Minifig*	0	0
Design	90	50
Instructions	50	30
Total	51	32



M.Y Toys (Xing Qi Le) – Combat Mission (Spring 2014)



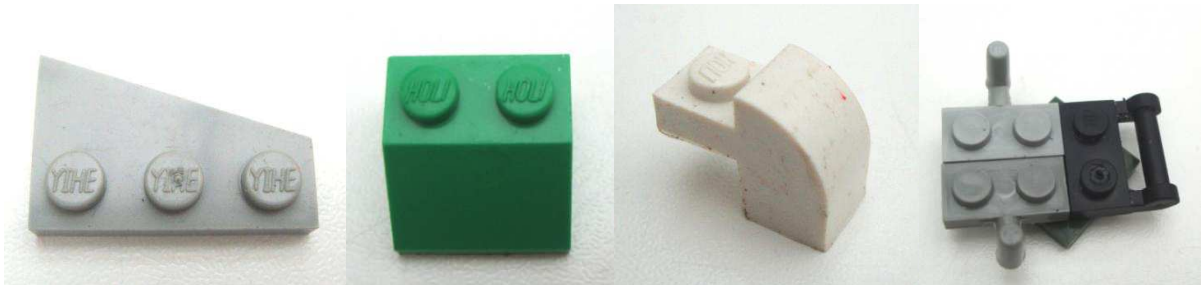
In a half-hearted attempt to find a really shite Weagle beater, random searches of online suppliers revealed a sale of 4 ‘Combat Mission’ boxes for a total of £2.50 including postage. Suspicion that these were bad quality rip-offs was high, and so a few days later M.Y Toys finest small kit selection arrived. It appeared postage cost £2.80; the supplier REALLY wanted to get rid of these. Inspection revealed that the boxes all had the same barcode. Kandy Toys were the parent importer. Stud markings were mostly ‘Yihe’, which is the current name of the utterly crap IQ Brick / Xing Qi Le / Zephyr Knight company. The 4 sets were tracked down as XQL kits 11001-11004. The Chinese boxes had different colour parts to those on the M.Y cartons. Excitement grew, as I had never had first-hand experience of possibly the worst LEGO cloner in the world. Could they beat Weagle?

Oh yes. Opening the sets showed that the sets were indeed repackaged XQL, with the M.Y colours in the pictures being utter lies. Most of the pieces had “Yihe” on the studs, some had “Holi”, and some had nothing at all. All were appalling quality. Assembly involved some skill. The instructions were fairly random in where they placed each step, and were not always clear. The parts were mostly present; some were dirty. Moulding was atrocious, grab was excessively random, some bits broke when being put together; and an immensely strong hammer was a necessity, as was glue. There were numerous sprue tags and errors in shape. Never had assembly been so horrid.



All four boxes as supplied. Barcodes are identical. Instructions and rubbish bricks – this is the tank. Completed models in rare coherent state.

The 4 completed models were a tank, a rocket launcher, some sort of shooting car thingy with a rocket, and what was probably meant to be a minesweeper but resembled a remote controlled toilet plunger. The use of pieces was vaguely competent, with the tank half decent although the designer cheated a bit by having a sawn-off aerial for the gun. The quality of materials was so bad that every model had at least one broken part after assembly, and very few wheels actually went round. There would be no way that any child would be happy with these kits as the chance of the models staying in one piece for more than 30 seconds of play was remote. I doubt many parents would have the patience or inclination to work out which of M.Y Toys’ other products would be worthwhile buying after experiencing this, and would most likely never buy from them again. Combat Mission would thus appear to be deliberate commercial suicide, fraud, or plain old incompetence. I wonder which...



Yihe on studs. Or Holi. Both designate shite is present. “White” piece is meant to be new; its life has been eventful already. Colour match is crap.

These sets can still be ordered from Yihe in separate shipping crates holding 960 kits each. This would be an evil thing to do, not least for the effect on the recipient. It would be less sinful to mail septic tank contents to the local vicar. Business students could use Yihe as a case study to show how quality and customer service can be totally ignored. Quite how XQL have continued trading with such shockingly rubbish products is a mystery, but covert state aid to continue a plan to degrade the decadent West must be amongst the most plausible explanations.

Summary: The score table showed (of course) that XQL were the worst LEGO cloner yet reviewed, easily taking the CACK award off Weagle. It would be hard to imagine how the score of 14% can be beaten. Hint... imagine harder than that.

Definite proof that Chinese hooky LEGO exists solely to bring down Western society – that bloke down the pub told me, so it must be true.

Scores	Combat Mission
Quality*	0
Value	20
Fit*	0
Compatibility	30
Minifig*	NA
Design	40
Instructions	20
Total	14



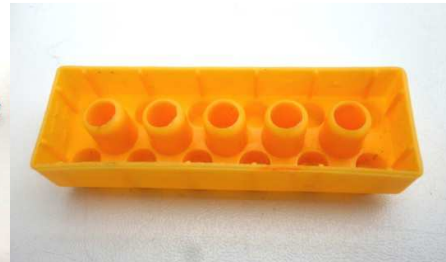
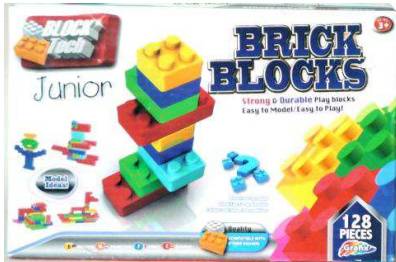
BLOCK Tech Junior (Yixing?) – Brick Blocks (Spring 2014)

NEW!

CAK
AWARD
WINNER!

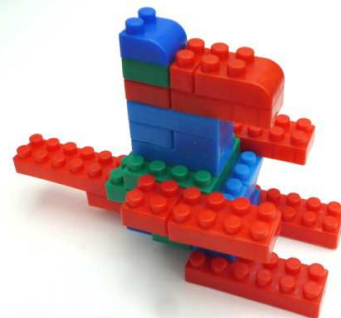
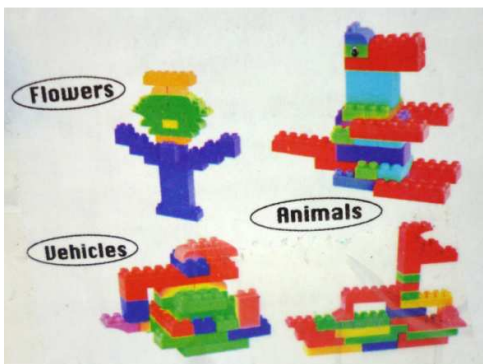
This previously unknown BLOCK Tech sub-brand was found in a charity shop. There was no date on the box, but judging from wear it was probably at most a few years old. The set was a big set of bricks for those aged 3+ to create basic models. 'Brick Blocks' were advertised to be 'Strong & Durable Play blocks Easy to Model/Easy to Play!' which seemed optimistic judging from BLOCK Tech's usual stretches of reality. More intriguing was the promise of 128 pieces coupled with the phrase 'Quality COMPATIBLE WITH OTHER BRANDS'. It was obvious from the size of the box that the pieces could not be DUPLO size, so they were either standard bricks (unlikely) or something in between. A lawyer would argue that the phrase should be read as 'Quality compatible with other brands', which with BLOCK Tech's other offerings would probably be true enough.

The contents turned out to be fairly similar to the previously reviewed Funtastic Quick Bricks, although a bit smaller so completely incompatible with anything. Unbelievably Brick Blocks were of even worse quality than Quick Bricks, with very muted colours, a horrid nasty feel, thin, and bendable. Counting showed 124 pieces (the others were probably lost by the previous unhappy owner), of which only a few matched the types shown on the box. Grab was almost non-existent, making any chance of assembling something of note impossible. This was, in essence, a totally useless, horrible, nasty product with dubious box claims.



Do not try to find another of these sets unless you deliberately collect rubbish for a hobby. Box is stronger and more durable than bricks inside.

The manufacturer is still a mystery. Searches showed there are over 30 separate Chenghai-based companies producing Duplo-style building blocks. Of those found, the 'Yixing Trading Company' were the closest match, although there were a few other contenders. I have no willingness to spend any more effort finding out, so it's listed under Yixing for the purposes of completeness.



No idea what the bottom left is. Strange bird-type thing can be made with the supplied pieces. The correct storage method for Brick Blocks.

Strong? No. Durable? I doubt it. Vivid colours? Nope. COMPATIBLE WITH OTHER BRANDS? Mmm... none that I know of. There was not a hint on how much these cost new, but unless they were free it would have been far too much. Even for the charity shop price this was poor value. This was a bad thing because as there were no instructions, set designs or minifigs, there were only four categories that could be fairly scored. Unfortunately for Brick Blocks, the appalling quality, fit and lack of compatibility gave it an overall score of 30 out of 600, or an almost unbelievably bad 5%.

This was, without a shadow of a doubt, the worst clone set ever – or ever likely to be - reviewed. However, as it had no minifig and no 'real' bricks, it doesn't really count as a full kit. The CACK award is thus honorary.

It's still shite, though.

Summary: Useless lousy drab terrible hopeless atrocious dire pitiful vile nauseating ghastly dreary wilfully awful box of misery.

Utterly pointless toy.

Scores	Brick Blocks
Quality*	0
Value	30
Fit*	0
Compatibility	0
Minifig*	NA
Design	NA
Instructions	NA
Total	5

Review Summary

LEGO

Some parts made in China, so is communist. Fantastic kits, great quality, and good to superb designs. Instructions verge towards the daftly easy for each step, and stickers hark back to the 1990s. Fairly good value, sensible sized boxes and look brilliant. Excellent to play with, too. Friends kits are very well thought out, but Friendfigs do not have movable hands and separate legs which is annoying.

Airfix Quick Build

Made wholly in the UK, so is not communist. Uses LEGO-style fittings to make a scale model. Plastic is like an Airfix kit on the outside, plates are like Mega Bloks on the inside. Have a double 'H' printed on one stud for each piece. Parts are unique for each model with the exception of a few internal plates. Does require strong hands but not immensely so. Some panel gaps. Stickers are very, very rubbish indeed. Finished model is OK.

Ausini

Half-decent kit design, OK quality. Excellent flowers. Blatant LEGO minifig copies with disturbing undead hue and traumatic expressions. Good value but only applicable to playtime after sundown as the minifigs scream and turn to dust. Burns with a bright yellow toxic flame. Plausible rival if minifigs are ever made with yellow heads.

BanBao

Incompatible brick height, rubbish quality, daft legal minifigs and lamentably poor illegal minifigs. Never ever buy it.

Best-Lock

Laughably bad, consistently among the worst LEGO copies on sale by some margin. Minifigs have creepy moulded heads, sometimes disquietingly so, and are very, very angry. Atrocious design and atrocious quality. Bought for comic effect only, so you won't have to. Don't. No, really. **Don't.**

Block Bricks

BLOCK Tech's answer to DUPLO. Most pointless LEGO clone in the UK. Epic fail.

Click Brick

Mundane set design, high quality bricks. Very good minifigs or deviant gorillafigs. Designed in UK, which is frankly rather embarrassing. Possible job opportunity for militant Brickish member.

COGO

Lacklustre quality, gut-twistingly horrid zombie minifigs. Separate route for the Loongon company to inflict misery on a whole generation of the world's children. Less dire than Little White Dragon. But still dire.

Cobi

Polish bricks, Chinese figures. Character Building Armed Forces sets licenced by the UK Secretary of State for Defence. Bricks great source for desert camouflage colour and number one choice for kit with 62 tonnes of destructive firepower or for remotely patrolling the skies. Ensures that future British generations will not necessarily have immensely strong hands, but will be used to having military kit that actually works.

Enlighten

Good kit design, mediocre quality. Nice windows. Blatant LEGO minifigs copies with legs that keep falling off. Colours not quite right and clink test sounds bad. Hinges rubbish which is very, very annoying. Random missing pieces. Cheap, but not cheap enough.

HuiMei

Abhorrent clone brand with patchy design and truly disastrous minifig quality. Importing these kits seems like retail suicide. Tragic.

IQ Blook

Unique but pointless brick locking design that doesn't really work with anyone else's. Set is OK but not really what's on the box. Minifig is OK for the price but odd. Requires immensely strong hands to assemble. Very cheap but trounced by Ausini and PeiZhi. This is not good. Bin fodder.

Jubilux Woma

Amusingly a blatant Chinese copy of a Chinese Sluban copy of a South Korean Oxford Toy copy of proper LEGO. Quite good quality pieces, but has bottom-clenchingly creepy minifigs. Nice military olive green bricks, big Gatling guns and real firing darts. Potentially dangerous both physically and mentally.

Kazi

Excellent kit design, abysmal quality. Blatant LEGO minifig copies with arms that keep falling off. Terrible brick fit, no quality control, unidentified organic substances. Brand name is strangely but satisfyingly apt. Avoid like the plague, which it probably has.

Ligao

Mediocre quality building bricks, unearthly malformed figures, not cheap enough by a long, long way. A bit like Woking.

Little White Dragon

Characterless kit design, mediocre quality. Minifigs a bit like Sluban but with ghastly undead hue. Equivalent of piped musak that turns children's brains to mush whilst inducing nightmares of re-animated builders. Dire.

LOZ

Could be good. Not. Grubby incompatible half-scale bricks with the quality of Best-Lock and odd-looking full-scale minifigs. Lying box art. Minifigs will suck out your soul. Different, cheap, irrelevant and infectious. Yuk.

Mega Bloks

Character minifigs reasonable quality, poor quality bricks unless new camouflage colours. Occasionally infected. Mega Bloks think they are now an equal rival to LEGO and can charge the same price. Seemingly tasked with matching the evil Sluban and ensuring future US generations will be angry, militaristic and possess immensely strong hands.

Oxford Toys / Kre-O

OK quality, densely packaged, rather basic and expensive. It is difficult to source Oxford Toys stuff in the UK. Don't bust a gut doing so. Not enthused.

PeiZhi

Poor quality bricks that look dirty when new, kit design for almost the entire range laughably poor. Sets without minifigs are worthless. Quality control is not going up and occasionally diseased. OK minifigs with arms and legs that mostly stay on. Cheapest kits in the UK. Military sets very useful for Russian colours and minifigs, but nothing else.

Quick Bricks

Poundland's wrong answer to DUPLO. Two types randomly in bags, both as bad as each other. Almost the most pointless LEGO clone in the UK. Terrible in every way.

Sluban

Nice website, sets look professional, don't be fooled. Minifigs weird and rubbish quality with arms falling off, poor leg fit and un-grippy hands. Need mallet to assemble sets. Sluban will be solely responsible for 100 million militaristic angry Chinese children with immensely strong hands. Horrible.

Star Diamond

Good to excellent set design, very high quality bricks and good minifigs, can be found occasionally for a competitive price. Apart from a few minor niggles virtually identical to the genuine article and have parts and colours not yet available from Denmark. A competitor to LEGO if kits ever get exported in numbers, which currently they don't.

Weagle

Worse than Best-Lock, which is some feat. Appalling in every way, mostly not riddled with disease. A lesson that there is a limit to cheap manufacture. Shockingly poor. Note to UK importers: PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE STOP.

XQL

Astoundingly shite. It beggars belief how this company stays in business. Requires hammer, immensely strong hands, glue, anger, and ultimately a bin.

Conclusions

GOOD POINTS ABOUT CHINESE CLONE LEGO

- Star Diamond
- Cobi Character Building pieces for military stuff
- Cheap PeiZhi military minifigs and parts with amusingly bad quality control
- Mega Bloks camouflage-colour pieces
- Ausini flowers
- Sluban, Jubilux and Weagle firearms
- The design of the Kazi heavy lift helicopter set
- BanBao's spelling of 'Defence'

BAD POINTS ABOUT CHINESE CLONE LEGO

- Absolutely everything else

EPILOGUE

"The Smurf lays on its back, its belly baking in the hot sun, beating its legs, trying to turn itself over – but it can't, not without your help. But you're not helping."

"What do you mean, I'm not helping?"

"I mean you're not helping. Why is that, Olivia?"

Some related websites

Chinese Brick (shop based in Thailand – stocks most of the Chinese clone brands)

http://www.chinesebricks.com/index.php?lang_page=e

AliExpress (import site for Chinese goods – search engine reveals the vast array of clone brands available)

<http://www.aliexpress.com>

'Legoland Toys' based in HongKong is a good place to view a large number of Chinese clone brands and makes

<http://www.aliexpress.com/store/516520>

'Bluding block' companies in the 'Toy Valley' – an incomplete but still vast list of Chinese LEGO cloner factories and suppliers in the Guangdong area

http://en.tovsgu.com/company/list_4_77_p1.html

Highly amusing US blog reviews of rubbish clone LEGO from a few years back, including some early Kazi and Little White Dragon

<http://www.reasonablyclever.com/boots/lego/index.html>

Online UK reviewer of clone kits, duplicating some in this report. And I thought I was scathing about the PeiZhi plane...

<http://commandercottontail.com/index.php/blog/archive>

Excellent list of many clone bricks, unfortunately with many broken links

<http://www.freewebs.com/orrex/constructionclones.htm>

Airfix Quick Build

<http://www.airfix.com/shop/quick-build/>

Ausini building blocks (redirected from www.ausini.com)

<http://ausini.en.alibaba.com/>

BanBao

<http://banbaoworld.com/>

Best-Lock

<http://www.best-lock.com/>

Blox (Wilkinson website)

<http://www.wilko.com/>

Character Building

<http://www.character-online.com/products/Character-Building/>

Click Brick

<http://www.fiattoys.com/Default.aspx>

Cobi

<http://cobi.pl/en/toys/> (Poland); <http://www.bricblok.co.uk/> (UK)

Enlighten

<http://enlighten-brick.com/eng.html>

Kazi

<http://www.kaiutoys.com/products3.asp>

Kimboli Toys

<http://www.kimboli.cn>

K'nex

<http://www.knex.com/products/>

Kre-O

http://www.hasbro.com/kre-o/en_GB/

Little White Dragon and COGO

http://www.loongon.com/index_en.asp

Ligao / Wange / Dr Luck

<http://www.wangetoys.com>

LOZ / Diamond Blocks

http://www.loztoys.com/profile_en.asp

Leyi (or whatever Shantou Megafun Toys Industrial Ltd are branding their bricks)

http://www.megafuntoys.com/productlist_30.html

Mega Bloks

<http://www.megabloks.com/en-gb/>

Oxford Toys (South Korean, not Chinese)

<http://oxfordtoy.co.kr/eng/index/index.asp>

PeiZhi

<http://pztoys.en.tovsgu.com/index.html>

Sluban

<http://www.sluban.co.uk/>

Star Diamond

<http://www.lhtoys.com/en/aboutus.asp>

Review Tables

Company	LEGO	LEGO	Airfix	Mega Bloks	Mega Bloks	Mega Bloks	Kre-o	Cobi	Enlighten	Enlighten	Kazi	Sluban	Ligao	Little White Dragon	LOZ	LOZ	KIDDIE LAND	Best-Lock	Best-Lock	Blox	Blox	Blox	Blox
Model	Cement Mixer	Olivia's Beach Buggy	Quick Build F-22 Repbr	Baker Smurf	Brute Prowler	Heavy Armor Outpost	Basic Optimus Prime	Challenger II Tank	Diesel	Carriage	Chinook	HEMTT	Speed Car	Crane Truck	Fire and Police Car	Helicopter and Boat	Farm Set	Racing Car	SWAT	Fire Engine	Combine Harvester	SWAT Cruiser	Construction Truck
Quality*	100	100	80	60	95	95	80	95	80	80	50	60	70	60	40	30	70	Nope	10	None	Still none	Erm...	Missing
Value	100	80	70	40	70	80	50	90	80	90	50	90	40	50	100	100	100	40	50	30	70	30	20
Fit*	100	100	80	70	100	100	90	90	90	60	70	60	60	60	70	50	60	20	20	15	20	15	15
Compatibility	100	100	70	70	90	90	90	90	100	100	100	90	90	60	20	20	70	60	60	65	60	50	40
Minifig*	100	100	N/A	100	95	70	NA	90	70	70	60	30	20	40	40	30	70	25	30	30	30	20	20
Design	110	90	100	80	100	100	70	90	100	90	100	90	50	40	40	30	70	40	30	20	80	30	10
Instructions	95	100	100	90	100	100	100	70	90	90	80	80	90	70	50	40	NA	30	60	35	50	35	35
Total	100.5	97	82.5	74	94	90	81	89	85	79	69	65	57	54	49	41	71	26	32	24	36	21.5	17.5

Company	Ausini	Ausini	Ausini	Ausini	Weagle	Weagle	IQ Block	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	Jubilux Woma	Jubilux Woma	Click Brick	M.Y / Star Diamond	Star Diamond	Star Diamond	M.Y / Star Diamond
Model	Pizza Van	Ice Cream Truck	Construction Multi-Crane	Garden Cottage	Construction Digger	Fire Tender	UrbanX Sport	Space Cruiser	Space Craft	Military Car	Military Boat	Military Plane	Police Car	Attack Helicopter	Military Justice	Star Fighter	Tow Truck	City Bus	Delivery Truck	Ice-Cream Truck	Military Tank	
Quality*	60	70	70	70	0	Pants	60	60	60	60	60	50	60	70	90	90	95	100	100	100	100	100
Value	100	100	80	100	10	Pants	100	100	100	100	100	100	80	100	80	70	70	100	60	60	100	100
Fit*	80	80	70	90	20	Pants	70	70	70	70	70	60	80	60	80	70	95	100	100	100	100	100
Compatibility	90	80	80	90	40	Pants	60	90	90	90	90	90	90	80	90	80	95	95	100	100	100	100
Minifig*	60	70	70	60	20	N/A	70	80	80	80	80	80	N/A	70	40	40	100	100	105	95	90	90
Design	70	60	60	90	5	Pants	80	50	60	70	60	10	30	70	80	80	80	90	100	100	100	90
Instructions	70	70	70	90	30	Pants	50	70	70	70	70	70	50	60	70	90	90	100	100	100	100	100
Total	73	75	71	81	16.5	Pants	69	73	74	75	74	65	66	71	74	72	92.5	98.5	97	95	97	97

Company	BabBao	Best-Lock	Blox	Cobi	Click Brick	COGO	HuiMei	Mega Bloks	Mega Bloks	Mega Bloks	PeiZhi	PeiZhi	Quick Bricks	Top Toys	Weagle	Weagle	Weagle	Weagle	Weagle	Weagle	Weagle	Xing Qi Le	Yixing (?)
Model	KFOR Tank	Fire Station	Police Cruiser	RAF Reaper and Remote Pilot	Mini Digger	Princess Playroom	Forklift	DJ Quack Mosh Monster	Schoolin' Smurfs	Smurfs Celebration	Army Vehicle	SPACE TOY FUN BAG	Bag of bricks	Metalix Build Your Own Car	Police SWAT Vehicle	Tipper Truck Roadworks Crew	Fire Engine	Police Car	MODEL TOY FUN BAG	PIANO AND STAGE	DISCO	Combat Mission	Brick Blocks
Quality*	40	0	40	80	90	60	20	50	50	60	50	40	20	40	20	10	0	0	20	60	30	0	0
Value	50	40	40	100	90	60	70	N/A	100	100	100	100	50	90	50	30	40	100	50	80	60	20	30
Fit*	20	10	40	80	90	60	30	70	70	80	70	50	10	60	10	20	10	20	10	50	30	0	0
Compatibility	10	20	50	90	90	70	50	90	70	70	90	70	0	50	50	50	30	50	30	70	60	30	0
Minifig*	20	10	20	80	80	50	20	80	60	70	70	40	N/A	N/A	10	10	10	10	0	0	0	N/A	N/A
Design	40	0	20	90	70	70	60	70	80	80	60	30	30	60	40	50	30	20	20	90	50	40	N/A
Instructions	30	70	50	80	90	90	70	N/A	90	90	60	50	N/A	N/A	60	30	40	20	50	50	30	20	N/A
Total	29	17	36	84	86	63	39	70	70	76	68	51	19	65	27	24	18	26	21	51	32	14	5

Ranking	Company	Average Score
1	LEGO	99
2	Star Diamond	97
3	Cobi / Character Building	87
4	Airfix	83
5	Enlighten	82
6	Oxford Toys / Kre-o	81
7	Mega Bloks	79
8	Ausini	75
9	Jubilux Woma	73
10	PeiZhi	72
11	KIDDIELAND	71
12	Kazi	69
13	IQ Blook	69
14	Top Toys	65
15	Sluban	65
16	COGO	63
17	Ligao	57
18	Little White Dragon	54
19	LOZ	46
20	HuiMei	39
21	Blox	36
DNF	BanBao	29
DNF	Best-Lock	25
DNF	Weagle	24
DNF	Quick Bricks	19
DNF	Xing Qi Le	14
DNF	Yixing (?)	5



Scored from 7 categories, 3 of which are double the importance (quality, fit and minifigs), to make 10 overall and thus scored out of 100.

CAMOUFLAGE

One area where LEGO does not have a presence is the armed forces. This is due to a conscious decision by the company to not market military toys, although there have been a plethora of historical and film-based LEGO kits that can be used to partially fill this gap. There are a number of companies, the most notable being BrickArms, that service this area for AFOLs by either modifying existing LEGO pieces or by making new compatible parts. Many of the Chinese clone companies market quite large military series, so potentially they are a very good source of unobtainable parts and colours. This short article concentrates on military ground forces.



PeiZhi minifigs, BrickArms ushankas and AK47s, LEGO heads and kepi. Good colour, cheap, and available in the UK, but PeiZhi quality is patchy.

Reviewed clone military kits all had different colours, and the suitability of these for use in army dioramas depends on what country and era needs to be modelled. It would appear that each clone company has chosen one or two shades to make their army sets, and that they are all different to LEGO and each other's colours. Military shades are very difficult to get right; model paints, for example, have a huge range of colours covering this area and the correct shade will not only rely on the country and era modelled, but also a combination of fading and the size of the model itself. For the Chinese clone companies the box art does not always represent the true brick colour; the Kazi kit in particular has a very different shade on the front to that inside.

The Polish company Cobi have specialised in military kits for some years now, and also make the UK Armed Forces sets under the Character Building name. Best-Lock produce US Army licenced kits in the US. Mega Bloks began making Call Of Duty sets in 2013 which include various modern US military sets. The Chinese manufacturers have produced a lot of aircraft carrier ship sets recently, most based around the real Chinese carrier.



Left to right: Enlighten train; Kazi helicopter; Lego dark green tender; Jubilux missile truck; PeiZhi plane; Sluban truck; Star Diamond tank. Figures: Lego dark tan (Prof Jones Senior); Lego tan (Africa Corps); Lego sand green (Russian soldiers); PeiZhi army green (Russian soldiers).

For AFOLs (AFOBs?) the actual kit from which the bricks are sourced may of less importance as MOCs will be more prevalent. However, if the kit actually resembles the model it is obviously an advantage. A scan of the many available military clone kits shows that some have very poor design, whereas others closely resemble their intended subject. Good examples here are a few excellent HUMVEE kits, the Kazi Chinook, the Mega Bloks M1 and the Cobi T-34.



Comparison of LEGO and Chinese clone colours.



Cobi dark green baseplate, and left to right, Peizhi, Star Diamond, Kazi and Sluban. LEGO dark tan and tan figures in Cobi tan tank.

The interested builder can scan the kits available to make the best choice. The following is an attempt to compare and describe the colours tested. This is not comprehensive nor particularly scientific, but coupled with some photos should give an idea of the shades possible.

ARMY COLOURS LIST

LEGO

Best quality, availability and minifigs, but only few military-based kits. Parts can be sourced off the LEGO shop, BrickLink and other sites.

Minifigs

A few official soldiers; large unofficial industry supplying bespoke figures and equipment.

Green:

A bit bright for anything realistically military.

Dark Green:

Vaguely suitable for military models, but has a bluish hint.

Sand Green:

Used for 1950s Russian army from Indiana Jones kits; close to Russian 'topside green' from the same era.

Olive Green:

Relatively new (and still rare) colour; quite light for European scenarios.

Dark Tan:

Used for film-based sets and quite good for desert camouflage or mixing with dark green and grey.

Tan:

Can be used for desert-based kits and has a wide selection of available parts.

Oxford Toys

South Korean company. Enormous selection of good military kits, but very hard to source in the UK. Bricks OK. Military kits not tested in this review.

Minifigs

Vaguely similar to LEGO, need replacement legs at least.

Dark Green:

Unknown shade.

Cobi and Character Building (CB)

Cobi can be sources in UK at a price. Large selection of historical and modern military kits of OK design. CB HM Armed Forces obvious choice for UK modern military kits; bricks good quality, some large purpose-made pieces (e.g. aircraft and helicopters).

Minifigs

Vaguely similar to LEGO, stick legs, may be source of equipment more than figures themselves. Guns not very good.

CB Minifigs

Bespoke cartoon-style, completely different to LEGO minifigs and more like Friends on steroids. Guns not very good.

Dark Green:

Quite close to typical modern military green, a little lighter and less brown than Star Diamond green.

Tan: Darker than LEGO tan and represents UK desert camouflage.

Best-Lock

US Army franchise kits fairly hard to source in the UK, but not impossible. WWII tanks available on-line. Some bricks have camouflage effect prints. Blocky design. Utterly atrocious quality. Military sets not tested in this review.

Minifigs Similar to LEGO but very poor quality. May be able to salvage equipment and torsos at a push.

Dark Green: Unknown shade. Some pieces have camouflage print.

Tan: Unknown shade – looks close to LEGO tan – and some have a camouflage print.

Mega Bloks

Call Of Duty kits have realistic modern US military sets. Desert camouflage effect bricks. OK quality, available in the UK but quite expensive.

Minifigs Call Of Duty completely different to LEGO minifigs – more like miniature dolls. Weapons very realistic.

Green tan / camo: Shade mix found mostly in Call of Duty sets; could be used for temperate camouflage; new mouldings quite good quality.

Desert tan / camo: This shade mix is rarer than the green tan.

Metallic tan / camo: Used in Halo kits.

Ausini

Hard to source in the UK; a few childish military kits; quality OK. Military sets not tested in this review.

Minifigs Similar to LEGO, need replacement heads and hands (with help from tools). Weapons unknown.

Dark Green: Unknown shade.

BanBao

Can be sourced in the UK; quite a few military kits; quality awful and incompatible heights.

Minifigs Some are similar to LEGO but are appalling quality. Weapons nothing special.

Dark Green: Fairly similar to Kazi army green, but bricks and plates higher and bad quality.

Enlighten

Fairly hard to source in the UK; wide variety of military kits but rather blocky. Military sets not tested in this review.

Minifigs Very similar to LEGO, but mediocre quality. Weapons will probably be OK.

Dark Green: Quite similar to LEGO dark green, slightly less blue shade, strange speckle finish.

Kazi

Can be sourced in the UK with effort; lots of military kits, only a few are realistic. Awful quality.

Minifigs Look similar to LEGO, but hands don't fit. Very poor quality, only marginally suitable for static display. Weapons rubbery.

Army Green: Fairly similar to LEGO dark green; a bit more brown and blue than Enlighten dark green, but terrible quality.

Star Diamond:

A few mediocre military kits, can be sourced occasionally. Excellent quality bricks and minifigs.

Minifigs Identical to LEGO, good quality, excellent weaponry.

Dark Green: This has some brown hints, is excellent quality and is passable for modern NATO (and Chinese) army colouring.

Sluban

Readily available in UK, occasionally quite cheaply. Large selection of military kits. Impressive carrier battle group. Poor quality, needs hammer to assemble, atrocious minifigs.

Minifigs: Similar to LEGO, terrible quality. Might be able to use equipment and headgear. Weapons quite good.

Olive Green: A very dark olive green, darker and browner than Star Diamond; good colour but awful quality.

Jubilux Woma

Some military kits, vaguely modern style. Weird minifigs, random sourcing issues.

Minifigs: Odd design, mostly incompatible with LEGO figures, might be able to use torsos. Weapons excellent.

Olive Green: Very different shade to any other clone army green, significantly light brown shade; OK quality.

PeiZhi

Cheap small kits available via 3rd parties; mediocre quality; minifigs OK; laughably poor design but plausible source of bricks and figures.

Minifigs: Random quality, cheap but passable. Weapons sparse but OK.

Army Green: Darker shade to LEGO olive green and quite close to modern Russian army green, quality is patchy but available and cheap.



Star Diamond MOC tank on LEGO low-loader - note dark green-brown shade. Cobi Character Building Challenger II with desert tan shade.

SUMMARY

The choice of which manufacturer to use is left to the reader, as there are a vast number of military sets available in China. Colours are specific to each company, and each will have their own applications. Some clones are quite hard to source in the UK, and some of the military kits that are available are not cheap.

CAMOUFLAGE: TANK GIRLS



You know how you've always wanted a LEGO tank, but can't get the right colour parts? This is one area where the cloners might actually be useful, and to this end some main battle tanks were made from existing reviewed kits. The Mega Bloks US M1 Abrams and the Character Building / Cobi British Challenger II were two obvious choices, and the creation of a Chinese Type 99 from Star Diamond pieces was attempted. A BanBao kit was also sourced. Original pieces were kept and not mixed up unless absolutely necessary, although for the Call Of Duty Mega Bloks, Character Building Cobi and Star Diamond, compatibility was not a major issue as they were the most competent of the cloners.

Scale was an interesting choice. This was mainly based on the existing kit sizes, with the Challenger II width taken to be the standard, and the M1 reduced in width to match. Main Battle Tanks are generally all the same size: about 3.6m wide, 2.5m high and 9-10m long. In LEGO minifig world, with about 3 studs to the metre or 1:40, an MBT to scale would be 11 studs wide. The MOC MBTs come out to be about 13-14 studs wide, putting them at a scale of about 1:32. Some LEGO kits also share this over-scaling (for example, the Lego Movie Ice Cream Van has a 1:40 scale height of 5m, and the 2003 Williams F1 car was 1:27 and it came with a minifig with a scale height of 4ft) so that this isn't as huge an issue as it could be. However, 1:32 is a very close match for the older Jack Stone figures – or, more interestingly, the LEGO Friends range...

Olivia, Emma, Mia, Theresa, Andrea, Stephanie, Anna and Lily have paired up to review four MBTs, modified from standard kits. Although mindful that the original brief was to see if hooky bricks could be used to *augment* LEGO in military kit building, the *actual* method was to source the bricks from only the original supplier and not use LEGO wherever possible. For the first three kits, this was a self-enforced barrier. For the fourth, it was more a compatibility issue. The Friends donned their helmets and fired up the engines...



M1A2 ABRAMS (MEGA BLOKS)

Olivia and Emma teamed up to test the Call Of Duty Abrams. The Mega Bloks M1 is a good kit as it stands, but was scaled slightly too large for 1:32. For this MOC, the main body was kept the same, but the side armour width was reduced by decreasing the overhang and thinning the armour itself. The front glacis and driver compartment were reworked, and the turret area reshaped to make it more minifig (and Friends) compatible. The large top-mounted machine gun was removed. The rear engine bay was remodelled to better match the new width. The style was mainly based on the M1A2 although not slavishly copied, and some aspects were ignored. The turret front as modelled by Mega Bloks was not sloped enough, but there were no extra pieces to fix this, and the turret sides were left mostly as originally built for the same reason.



Emma and Olivia on the reworked M1. Some changes to the turret, rear engine bay and side armour, but mostly left as supplied in the kit.

Olivia really likes the M1A2. "The camouflage effect of the bricks gives it a menacing presence best suited to juxtapose Heartlake City's pastel shades. And 1500 horsepower allows smooth pursuit of troublesome Smurf escapees." Emma adds, "I'd like, use the Abrams in a deterrence mode, as it's, like, a highly visible armoured asset of authority that can shepherd errant clones to the appropriate detention centre for sympathetic rehousing." Olivia smiles. "The use of a Mega Bloks product to pursue Smurfs made by the same company is satisfyingly ironic." Emma says, "I find the turret hatch, like, brill, like, for protection against The Horde, and to hide Tiger when he has a feral fit in the school again." Both agree improvements could be made to the Abrams. Olivia has a list. "These could include using real LEGO trans lights to replace the rubbish Mega Bloks versions, the reworking of the turret front armour angle, a modification of the main gun to target below the horizontal for close-quarter zombie slaughter, and the addition of temporary supplies on the rear, including fuel barrels. Where do we store the Smurf heads?" Emma looks a little uneasy.



Olivia and Emma test 'Abe' in a number of scenarios. The gas turbine takes a lot of fuel, so filling up is frequent without the extra fuel barrels.

Olivia liked 'Abe' and traded in the beach buggy to buy 'him'. It is suspected that Anna encouraged this...

TYPE 99A2 (STAR DIAMOND)

Mia and Theresa tested the Star Diamond-sourced 99A2. The Chinese Type 99 MBT comes in various versions, but photos of the newest ZTZ-99A2 model with squarer side armour was used as a baseline for the Star Diamond conversion. The original M.Y tank kit had thin tracks and small wheels that were not suitable for this model. The tracks from the spare Cobi Challenger II were used along with some black LEGO wheels and technic connectors. All other pieces were taken from the Star Diamond spare parts box which had had the green piece count bolstered by some small military sets found cheaply on the internet. The 99A2 was built up by only using the Star Diamond parts available (where possible), and because of this it was not a perfect representation nor was it fully robust. However, the general shape and most visual cues were made with some success. The turret could not be made hollow, so that minifigs had to lose legs to appear out of the hatches. Rear fuel barrels were missed off, although at a push the Cobi desert colour barrels could be attached. Star stickers were printed to mimic the Chinese markings.



Theresa and Mia in the 99A2. Turret is passable; rear is 'best that could be done'; side plates inexact due to lack of suitable parts. Great colour.

Mia and Theresa are attracted to the Type 99. "The angular shape and lighter weight is more suited to urban zombie warfare. The Star Diamond dark olive green is far more representative of the traditional temperate zone land forces camouflage and allows concealment options in the City's many parks and the surrounding countryside," says Mia. Theresa adds, "The quality of the Star Diamond parts is not quite as good as LEGO, but the best of any clone manufacturer." Mia has been reading up on her military hardware. "The 99A2's targeting upgrades for 24 hour offensive capabilities against the Zombie Horde are great, and the carousel-fed 125mm smoothbore main gun means we can sustain a high rate of fire against hefty crowds of the undead". Theresa is just as knowledgeable. "We sensibly selected the non-ERA package for urban operations as the full explosive option can generate a lot of paperwork if it detonates accidentally outside the pet salon." As for upgrades, Theresa is mindful of sourcing issues when commenting that there could be a number of improvements to the model. "It could include a realistically-styled gun, more representative size plates, a more robust and hollow turret, better hatches, and extra rear temporary stores including fuel barrels." Mia likes the well-moulded 50-calibre machine gun for effective zombie defence at close quarters. "I'd like to see extra detailing on the turret to more accurately portray the newer equipment found on the 99A2." Both would like to see slightly bigger main wheels. "The 99A2 as made has very little ground clearance," explains Theresa, "This could be a problem in undead urban combat scenarios, especially when the destruction gets high." Mia giggles. "Guaranteed when I'm at the helm."



Mia and Theresa with 'Whippy'. Turret layout is functional but detail limited by lack of parts. Friends meeting up on the way to the beach party.

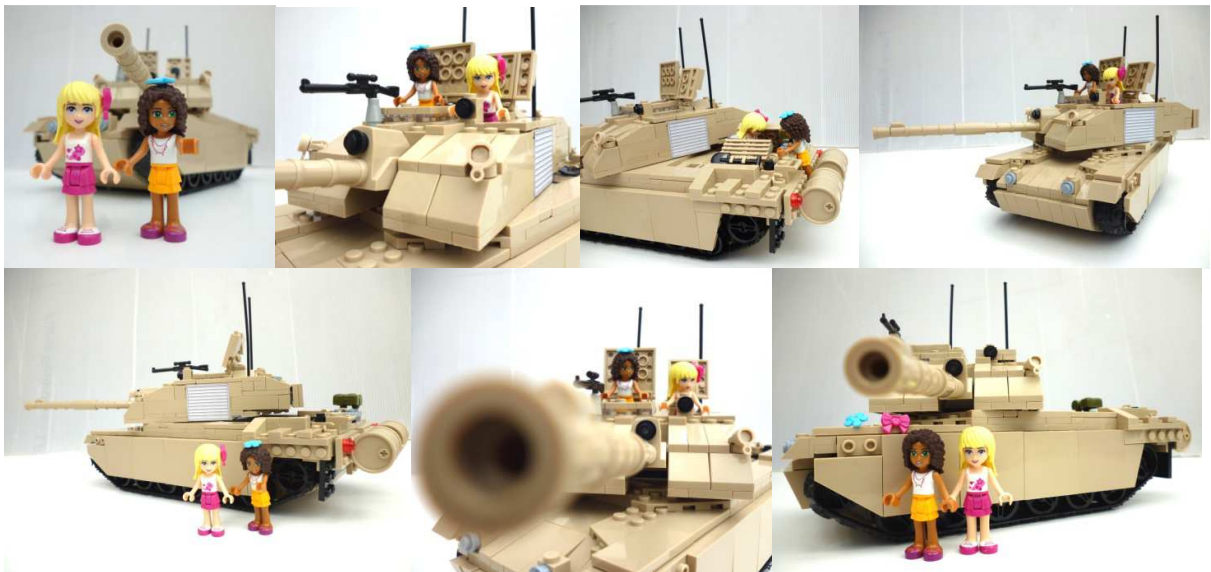
CHALLENGER II (COBI)

The Challenger II is Andrea and Stephanie's number one choice for seaside fun. The Character Building Challenger II was short in comparison to its width, so the first exercise was to increase the length by adding another wheel set to 6 instead of 5 per side. The tracks were found to stretch to allow this, although whether the rubber can last indefinitely is unknown. Another Challenger II kit was sourced to provide the extra pieces. The Cobi technic axles were found to be incompatible with LEGO, which was annoying but luckily irrelevant for this exercise. The entire tank chassis was rebuilt for the extra length, with each section of the front glacis, main hull, and engine bay proportionally stretched. The turret was completely rebuilt to be almost twice the original length to match the real item. The source photos used were of the latest Challenger II Theatre Entry Standard with desert fixings, but without the extra super-wide Rafael side armour. This still required substantial reworking of the rear engine compartment and side pods for the model. The rear overhang was increased to try to give the proportions of the actual tank and to bring the Challenger II model to the same length as the Mega Bloks M1A2. Some stickers were printed to mimic the cooling vents on the turret.



Andrea and Stephanie in the reworked Challenger II. Enlarged turret, stretched hull with extra wheel, remodelled engine bay and side armour.

"The combination of mobility, protection and firepower are coupled with a sweet sun-bleached tone and air conditioning best suited to the sandy coast," boasts Andrea. "The angular visual outline and black wheels are in sharp contrast to the rounded dunes of the Heartlake shoreline, giving an unparalleled 62-tonne 1200-horsepower entrance to any beach party." Stephanie is more concerned with offensive hardware. "The combination of the rifled main gun and 24 hour sight can accurately target a gathering of zombiefigs at a range of over 20000 studs." She further suggests: "Further improvements could include more stores on the rear, the addition of extra kit on the turret, replacement of the rubbish Cobi light studs with proper LEGO pieces, and an option of the reactive side armour plates." Andrea concludes, "The turret hatches should have better hinges. I broke a nail."



Stephanie and Andrea review 'Chal' thoroughly. Engine maintenance important to keep mobility up to scratch. Rifled gun gives superb range.

M1A2 ABRAMS (BANBAO)



Anna and Lily are unhappy. We meet up at the juice bar. They are annoyed at their allocation of the BanBao Abrams. "It's not fair," says Lily. "I thought we were going to get a Leopard 2A5. Just because Olivia and Emma are in more sets, *they* got first dibs on the Mega Bloks Abrams and we get lumbered with this BanBao rubbish. I'm not only an Advent girl, you know." Anna is a bit more reflective. "I suppose it has got a better turret," she sighs. "And we can both stand inside it with the hatches open. Emma had to remove her legs to fit inside her M1. Ha. But this BanBao gun barrel is terrible. What were they thinking? It looks like a sewer pipe and doesn't even stay in right position without Blu-Tack. The hatches are the wrong colour, and the treasure chest on the back just looks silly. To be honest, I'd feel terminally embarrassed to be part of the Neighbourhood Watch defending humanity against a ravenous pack of the undead in this pile of junk."

Lily agrees. "The quality of the BanBao bricks is awful," she continues. "The only good part is the 50 calibre machine gun, and even this has an undersized central pin so that it doesn't fit snugly on the turret carrier. And why 'KFOR'? It's not exactly if we're in Eastern Europe peacekeeping 15 years ago. We're meant to be defending Heartlake City against the Zombie Horde."

Anna is equally scathing. "A bit of extra detailing might not come amiss. The engine bay and rear modelling is very basic. With a little more effort this could have been a good tank. As it is, the plastic is cheap, parts don't fit, it's mostly incompatible with other brands, and the colour isn't quite right. I can't even kick it - LEGO made me without opposable legs. Yeah. Great. Thanks a lot. Anyway, I say we take the wheels, turret and machine gun, and use other brands to build a proper tank."



Olivia's mum has a secret hobby. What's in the chest? BanBao quality. Oh look, it's empty. Turret is a good vantage point to survey rubbish tank.

Both Anna and Lily are in full agreement on their conclusions. Anna looks cross. "The BanBao tank is terrible. It may be cheap but I'd be sporting more effective firepower in my Olivia's beach buggy. Frankly this test has been a complete waste of time." Lily smiles. "I'm hoping Andrea leaves the Challenger unlocked so we can go and mash some sand dunes after dark. And target a rubbish BanBao tank."

At this point, both look at each other, make brief excuses, and hurry out of the juice bar. A few minutes later, the windows shake and 'Chal' roars past with Lily and Anna whooping loudly on top. As it thunders away Andrea runs up, shouting oaths and angrily waving her flattened skateboard. "That's the last time you can come to my parties! Count yourselves out of the flower-planting club! I'll never talk to Olivia again! Come baaaaaaack!" Just then, the windows shake again and 'Abe' lurches to a halt. Emma helps Andrea climb up to join a mortified Stephanie. Mia looks rather cross. Olivia looks somewhat more committed. She lifts off her goggles, narrows her eyes and waves the katana. "Cry havoc and let loose the Dogs of War! Forwards!"

CONCLUSIONS

Erm... I think that means the Cobi Challenger II is best, closely followed by the Mega Bloks Abrams. The Star Diamond 99A2 probably needs a bit more work but could be an equally good tank. All three clone manufacturers give a good basis for MBT models, with decent enough quality, many useful parts, and realistic colours. Adding in real LEGO would complete the effect.

But the BanBao tank is rubbish. Period.

Zombie Nation

Zombies are mentioned frequently in the description of these Chinese clone reviews, and with good reason. For whatever causes, be it cultural, poor design or cheapness, many of the clone minifigs bear an uncanny resemblance to the undead. This section uses ~~blatant prejudice and cheap laughs~~ rigorous scientific measurement and review processes to down-select the most promising candidates for a brain-seeking shambling horde.



Disturbingly grotesque zombie army from clone minifigs. Months of screaming. Even Victorian children never had nightmares as bad as this.

Mega Bloks' Call Of Duty zombie minifigs are not included in this review, as first of all they are actually meant to look like zombies (which is cheating), secondly they are not real minifigs, thirdly they are quite expensive, and lastly they are unlikely to come close to winning anyway – as can be seen in the scoring tables. Smurfs were also ignored.



Feisty PeiZhi mercenaries hold back The Horde behind Mega Bloks sandbags with Weagle firepower. Some hooky LEGO can be put to good use.

The scoring table was split into 10 areas to give a full analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each clone minifig. These areas were scored and added with equal importance to give a final percentage score. The categories were:

Weird Skin Tone	- the hue of the minifig head and hands, with the closest to a typical zombie scoring highest.
Undead Expression	- printing on the head. High marks reflect the scariness of the face in conjunction with the overall look of the minifig.
Limb Loss	- this scores how likely it is that arms or legs will fall off when moved. De-limbing should not need immensely strong hands.
Unsettling Shape	- a high score for this reflects the overall shape of the minifig, with marks given for unsettling torso, arm and leg design.
Cheapness	- the cost of buying the clone figures.
Non-Compatibility	- higher marks are scored if the minifig does not quite fit on real LEGO, or if it is different to the standard minifig.
Printing Mismatches	- badly printed torsos and heads score highly as the effect is to produce more terror.
Shabbiness	- the minifig gets higher marks if it looks used even if new, as every zombie should be in some state of decay.
Infectiousness	- how dirty the parts are as supplied from the factory, with higher scorers giving a chance of catching a real disease.
Random Errors	- variety is useful in a zombie army, so poor quality control gets bigger scores.

Naturally, the good quality minifigs that resembled LEGO scored badly in this test. In this respect, two clone manufactures had low marks, with boring goody-two-shoes Star Diamond getting only 3%, and dull-as-ditchwater Enlighten 20%. The odd Click Brick APT and Cobi Character Building figures were generally OK and got a boring 26% and 31%. Kazi and PeiZhi got under 40%, as although they were poor quality they were fairly innocuous. The weird Blox character was around 45%, mainly because it was scary but not awful quality. Sluban, Ligao, BanBao, COGO and IQ Blook scored high 40s to mid 50s (surprisingly good for the terrible Ligao and COGO figures). The dreadful Weagle minifigs came in at 59%. Moving up a notch, Loongon, Jubilux and Ausini all had very similar levels of awfulness at 62-63%. The disturbing LOZ minifigs scored 68%, but Best-Lock were the clear winner scoring 74%. Their appalling quality control meant that they were the overall zombie favourite, although they were still some way off perfect as they weren't particularly grotty nor did they have a convincingly deathly pallor.



Nothing to see here, citizen. Imperial business. Just be on your way.

The score table on the next page suggests that theoretically the best zombies could be made by using Loongon, Jubilux or Ausini heads with Blox bodies. Hands-on mix-and-match experimentation showed that a Jubilux head and hands with a Ligao body produced the scariest combination overall. LOZ may also be a good choice as they are very cheap, possibly infected, and some have heads with no expressions at all which can imprison people in photographs... well, probably... Certainly the wide variety of clone figures gives ample opportunities for truly terrifying nightmare-inducing zombie collections at a down-to-earth price. And, with no flame retardants, they burn easily too.

ZOMBIEFIG TABLE																			
Attribute	Enlighten	Kazi	Sluban	Ligao	Loongon	Jubilux	IQ Block	LOZ	PeiZhi	Best-Lock	Blox	Ausini	Weagle	COGO	APT	BanBao	HuiMei	Cobi (CB)	Star Diamond
Weird Skin Tone	10	20	40	20	90	70	40	50	20	60	30	90	10	90	20	20	0	20	0
Undead Expression	0	10	30	50	60	70	30	80	0	50	60	80	60	80	40	60	80	30	0
Limb Loss	40	50	90	40	40	30	40	30	20	60	10	40	90	40	0	70	100	0	0
Unsettling Shape	0	0	30	100	90	100	40	70	10	50	70	50	40	20	60	40	40	40	0
Cheapness	40	30	40	60	40	50	80	100	90	90	80	80	70	50	70	30	80	50	0
Non-compatibility	10	20	50	100	60	70	40	80	30	70	100	40	70	40	90	60	40	70	0
Printing Mismatches	30	40	50	50	40	50	70	20	30	100	40	50	80	50	0	70	70	10	10
Shabbiness	30	60	60	40	80	70	80	70	60	100	40	60	100	60	0	60	90	20	0
Infectiousness	10	70	20	30	70	50	50	100	70	60	0	70	10	20	0	20	40	0	10
Random Errors	30	40	60	40	60	60	70	80	40	100	20	60	60	40	30	50	80	20	10
% Perfect Zombiefig	20	34	47	53	63	62	54	68	37	74	45	62	59	49	31	48	62	26	3

Zombie Ranking	Company	Zombie Score
1	Best-Lock	74
2	LOZ	68
3	Loongon	63
4	Ausini	62
5	Jubilux	62
6	HuiMei	62
7	Weagle	59
8	IQ Block	54
9	Ligao	53
10	COGO	49
11	BanBao	48
12	Sluban	47
13	Blox	45
14	PeiZhi	37
15	Kazi	34
16	APT	31
17	Character Building	26
18	Enlighten	20
19	Star Diamond	3

