

**Notes on the different AMI & AMI-LAC Sets, and a COSTRUZIONI MECCANICHE Puzzle.** COSTRUZIONI MECCANICHE [Mechanical Engineering] appears on the lid label & manual cover of all known sets of the AMI & AMI-LAC brands (see 15/401 & 38/1153) until the last small sets noted in 48/1452. It also appears on a 'mystery' set, maker unknown, and perhaps a reader knows its story.

To start with, a recap of AMI/AMI-LAC history from 38/1152. AMI (Articoli Metallici Ingegnerosi [Ingenious Metal Articles]) sets were produced from the early 1930s by a company owned by Fratelli Comerio. In 1954-55 it was acquired by Leonida Alemanni and at that point the sets were renamed AMI-LAC (Leonida Alemanni Casalpusterlengo). Casalpusterlengo is a town near Milan in which the Alemanni factory was/is? situated.

In looking for clues to the mystery sets the AMI & AMI-LAC material to hand, mainly Ebay photos, was examined and the combinations of lid labels & manual covers used are set out below in their probable date order.

1. Two boys with a Lorry-mounted Crane for both the label and cover (Fig.1). The parts in the sets were black.

2. The label had the same boys but posed differently with a Lifting Bridge (Fig.2). The manual cover was unchanged. The parts in most sets seen are coloured (in the mix of colours typical of AMI/-LAC sets) but a few are still all black.

3. The Lifting Bridge label continued but the cover (Fig.3) has the boys in full colour with a Tower Crane. The parts are all coloured. Note. The largest set seen in Phase 2 above is a No.4; the smallest in this phase a No.5. So it's possible that Phases 2 & 3 are one period with different manuals for the smaller & larger sets. However 3-5 manuals are shown in some of the Ebay photos from each phase.

4. The Tower Crane design in Fig.3 is used on both the label and the cover. 3 sets have been seen, two No.2's, each with a 1-2 manual, and a slightly larger set with two manuals a 3-4 and a 3-5. One No.2 and the larger set have coloured parts but, unexpectedly, most of the parts in the other No.2 are black.

5. At this point the ownership had changed and both the label and cover were the familiar type in Fig.4 with a boy & a girl by a simpler Crane.

6. The revisions to the standard sets after 1996 and their packaging are covered in earlier Issues. It seems that the existing Fig.4 manuals were never changed. The various other sets which appeared were also covered but one not mentioned previously is an Energia Solare set. It has a lid in the style of the La Bici & Il Ciclista sets in 38/1151 but it is a multi-model set with 4 models shown on the lid. One other point, all the examples seen of Sets 101-105 have the AMI-LAC logo top right on their lids and most have LAC in an oval bottom right. But in two cases where there are several photos of the same set one at least does not have the LAC marking. Would that indicate a change in the company's ownership towards the end? The AMI-LAC website disappeared in 2017.

Now for the puzzle. Three mystery items have been seen (very few compared with, say, those from Phase 1). Two are No.1 sets with a No.1 manual, the third just a No.1 manual. All labels & covers are the same (Figs.5,6). One set has, apart from some small Wheels, black parts (Fig.6). The second is in an identical wooden box with some black parts as in the first set but also numerous red & green parts, which look like MECCANO. They include a 3" Pulley not listed in the AMI manual to hand. Almost certainly these red & green parts are not original. A page from the manual is shown in Fig.7, and the inventory for Set 1 is on another.

Beyond the black parts, no similarities could be seen between the mystery and AMI/AMI-LAC sets. From the parts the inspiration for the mystery set seems to have been MÄRKLIN and the Fig.7 page of models is in a 1939 MÄRKLIN manual, arranged in the same way. Some, perhaps all, the models are in earlier editions, and also in the AMI manual, but scattered among the pages.

So a copy of late 1930s

MÄRKLIN seems likely, probably from soon after, rather than before WW2. That would seem to rule out the mystery outfit having been an early AMI set but it's just possible that it was another line from Comerio (or less likely, even later by Alemanni). But this seems unlikely and pro tem the Set is seen as being from a different system. Perhaps by an ex-AMI employee?

