

'New' System: REX

by Jacques Pitrat

Meccanico Italiano REX is an Italian system named for an ocean liner, whose image occupies most of the picture on the lid (right). The liner was no doubt named in honour of the King of Italy (Rex means King in Latin of course) who christened her in 1931. She was extremely popular in Italy, and deserved it because she was large, beautiful, and very fast: in 1933 she won the blue riband given to the passenger liner crossing the Atlantic Ocean in regular service with the highest speed. For Italian boys, she was the symbol of the marvels of engineering, and it would have been natural to call a construction system after her.

There is no indication of the maker, either on the box, or in the manual. There is also no indication of date, but the seller said that REX was made in 1934. This is likely, at that time the Rex was at the peak of her glory, she lost the blue riband in 1935. This system was certainly not made after her destruction during WW2.

The lid label displays only one model made with the system: a plane diving toward the Rex. Little did the artist imagine that the liner would be sunk by rockets fired from planes 10 years later.

My SET is a No.5, packed in a cardboard box, 40.5*31.5*2cm with 17 compartments (Fig.2). The lid label measures 23*15cm. Nowhere is another set explicitly mentioned but it is likely that there was at least a very small set: most of the models in the manual are devised for such a set, similar to a MECCANO No.0. Also, although all the manual models can be made with my set, I cannot exclude the possibility of larger outfits because the manual is made with sheets stapled together and it would have been easy to add more pages.

The PARTS The diameter of the holes is 3.5mm and the pitch is 12.0mm, so the system is not compatible with MECCANO although many of the parts look rather similar. The thread is 3.4mm diameter. Most of the parts are nickelled steel. The Pulleys & Wheels have no boss: they are fastened with Nuts to Screwed Rods.

The parts are shown in Figs.2 & 3 and are listed below. As



Fig.1

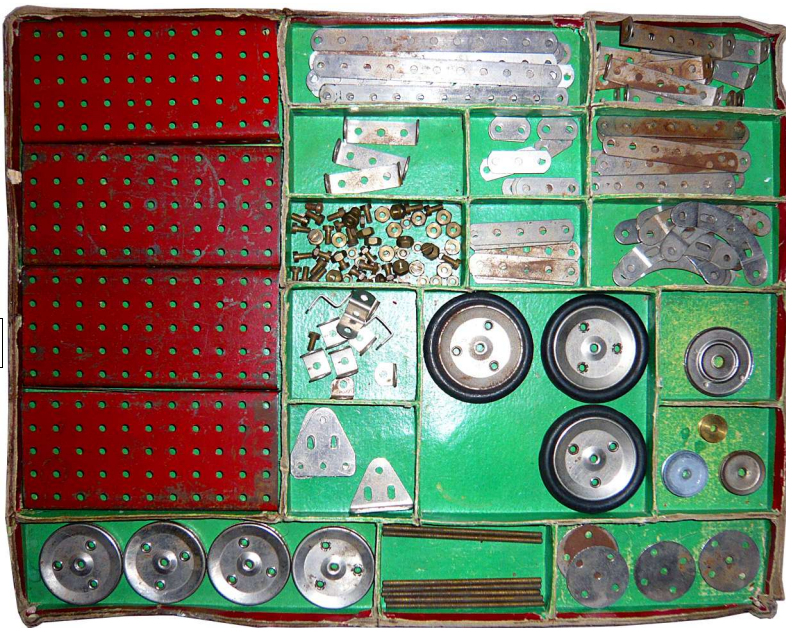


Fig.2

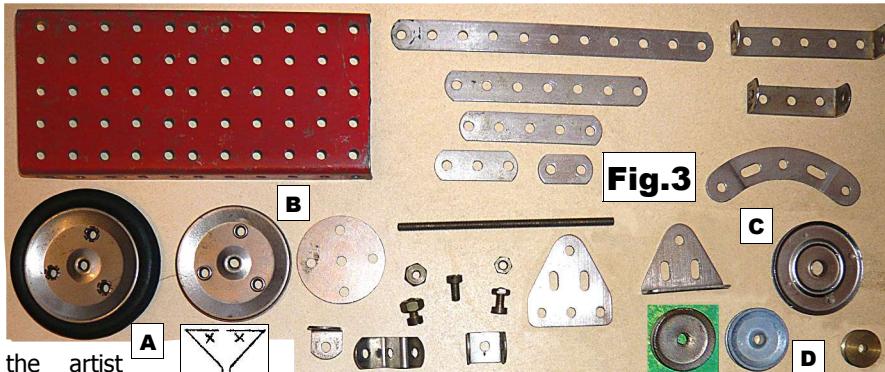


Fig.3

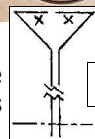


Fig.4

some of those in the Set are missing, I have not indicated their quantities.

- **Strips:** 11h, 7h, 5h, 3h, 2h. They are 12mm wide and both holes of the 2h are round.
- **DAS:** 1*3*1 & 1*5*1h.
- **Curved Strips, Stepped,** like the #90a MECCANO part.
- **Brackets: Double, Angle, Reversed Angle.** All their holes are circular.
- **Trunnions & Flat Trunnions** with 3 holes in the base, one at the top, & two oval intermediary holes.

- **Flanged Plate, 11x5h,** painted red.

- **Road Wheel (Fig.3 'B'), 44mm** diameter. The discs are formed as in the sketch (Fig.4) below the part in Fig.3. The 3 face holes are too small for the Bolts; they are used only to fasten both discs together.

- **Road Wheel (Fig.3 'A') 44mm** diameter. The discs are as above but without the outer 'tread' ('x' in Fig.4). This leaves a 'V' for the tyre to sit in but the part without the tyre cannot be used as a pulley because there is a gap between the 2 discs. The

Tyres are still in excellent condition, and unlike most of those made at the time it is possible to remove them.

- **Pulley ('C'), 37mm** diameter. It is slightly suspect because its centre hole is oversize (it is large enough to take a MECCANO Rod).

- **Pulley, 25mm** diameter. Two of this dia-

meter were in the Set. The steel one is inset in Fig.3; to its right ('D') is one made of aluminium, and probably not original.

- **Pulley, 15mm** diameter, made of brass.
- **Wheel Disc, 34mm** diameter, with 4 circumferential holes.
- **Screwed Rod, 85 mm** long.

• **Nuts & Bolts** Brass cheesehead Bolts & hexagonal Nuts. The diameter of the Bolts is 3.4mm with a shank length of 7mm. Curiously enough there are two kinds of Nut, almost half of them are large while those of the other half are small (in my set 20 large & 27 small Nuts remain). All of them mesh perfectly well with the Bolts, and both types can be seen in one of the manual models. Their width & thickness are in mm: 8.0 & 4.0 for the large ones, 6.2 & 2.0 for the small ones. The reason for this diversity is not clear: perhaps there were two makers, or they thought that for some situations it was easier to have large nuts while in others it was better that the Nuts were less noticeable.

- **Tools,** none remained in the box.

- **Quality** Not too bad, and most of the parts are not rusty.

The **MANUAL**, right, is in Italian, and is made from 6 sheets, 245*165mm, stapled together on one side. It does not include the set contents or a description of the parts, nor the parts necessary to build the models.



Fig.5

The manual seems to have two sections. The first four sheets have 79 very simple, unnamed models, including the 26 letters & the 10 numerals. The last two sheets show 11 more complicated models (including the Plane on the lid), with names but without instructions. All of them can be made with the contents of my set; they use at least two flanged plates, when at most one was used in the models on the first four sheets. At the bottom of the eighth page, three lines seem to conclude the manual: they indicate that it is possible to build many other models from the many parts & Bolts in the Set.

Figs.6a & b are 2 of the larger models; 3 more (the named ones) are shown on the p9 of the manual in Fig.7, with 6 of the smaller ones inset around its edges. Fig.6c is another small one. All are about 75% of their original size and have had their fawn (as in Fig.5) background changed to white.

The representation of the parts in the models is not very good. As examples, on the Plane, the Wheel Discs have 8 holes, the number of holes of some Strips & Flanged Plates is incorrect, all the holes of the Flat Trunnions are round, and one hole is missing from one Trunnion.

The only mechanical feature in any of the models is a cord drive as in Fig.6c, but even then the cord itself isn't shown, nor a crank handle, though one could have been easily made with a Wheel Disc nutted to a Screwed Rod. The larger Fig.6b Windmill has no means of driving the blades at all.

It would certainly be possible to build more interesting models, for example although there are many Pulleys, there is

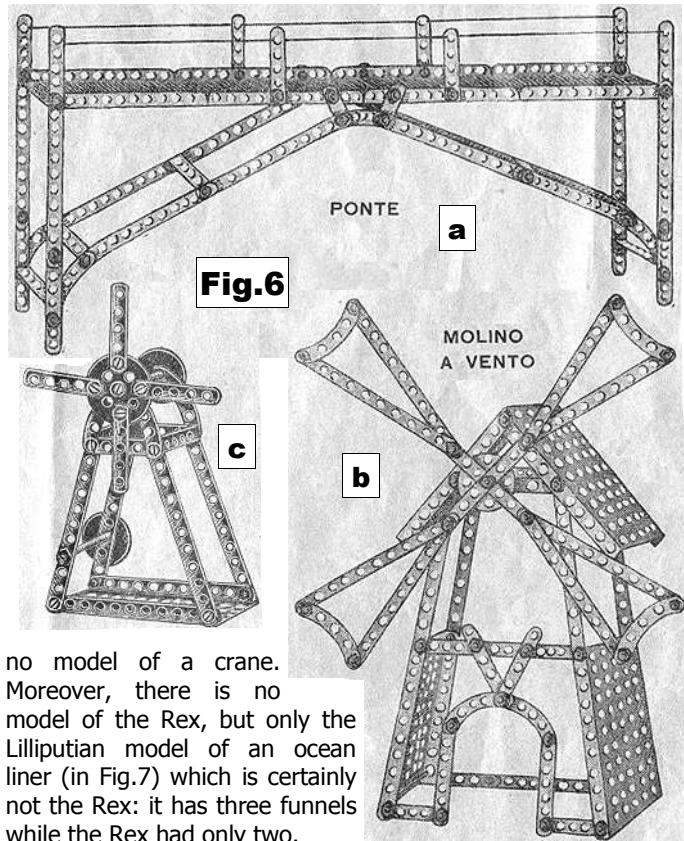


Fig.6

no model of a crane. Moreover, there is no model of the Rex, but only the Lilliputian model of an ocean liner (in Fig.7) which is certainly not the Rex: it has three funnels while the Rex had only two.

REMARKS This system is not a good copy of MECCANO, it lacks too many useful parts. The contents of the Set are rather limited. For instance, there is no A/G & the longest part has only 11 holes. We can also wonder why 4 Flanged Plates were put in such a small set, even if they are used in some of the models, in Figs.6a & b for example. The models are not very interesting. No wonder that it is very rare to find REX sets.

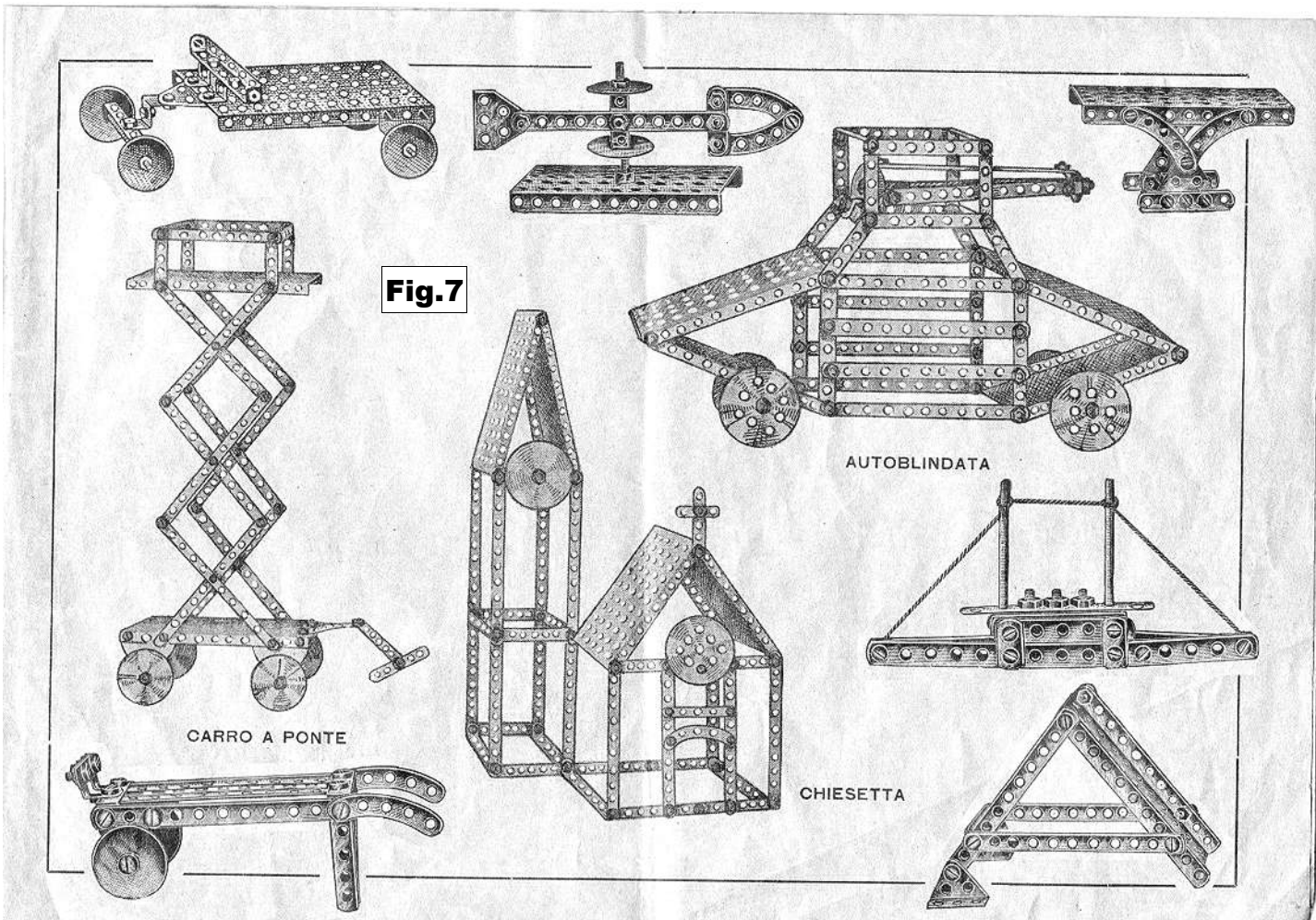


Fig.7