

Teddy Bear and other Automata

With Price Guide

by Jill Byron



1918 Bing Tumbling bear. *Old Bears 4 U.*

We tend to think of automata as being relatively new but in fact the ancient Greeks made partially animated statues which were worked by levers. In the fifteenth century BC, a statue and a bird were made which produced a melodious sound when they were struck by the rays of the rising sun. In 500 BC, King Shu of China made a flying magpie and a wooden horse which were worked by springs. Water and pulleys activated many early automata but as far back as 280 BC, Ctesibius experimented with natural air pressure and the pneumatic principle. For 2,000 years not much changed but in the fifteenth century, Johannes Muller made a fantastic eagle, which flew and also bowed to the Emperor Maximilian on his entry into Nuremberg. Many more incredible inventions appeared and by 1731, cogs and wheels were used to produce automata of horses, which were worked by turning a handle. By the nineteenth century, the mechanisms existed to enable toys to be made easily and cheaply and in the early twentieth century, in addition to tinplate toys, some teddy bears were made, using clockwork movements.

Automata have always fascinated me. When I see a bear drinking, reading or just walking on all fours, whether powered by clockwork or battery, they never fail to engender a feeling of wonder in me. The mechanism is so simple but it enables an inanimate object to come alive. There are many different automata on the market and one of the most beautiful and desirable is the singing bird box. Usually made of silver, gold or tortoiseshell, the little bird inside the box pops up and sings sweetly when a button is pressed. In Victorian times, singing birds were also made in cages and a button pulled to start the bird singing. These birds have become very expensive nowadays and can fetch from £2,000-£10,000 depending on the composition of the box and the country from which they are bought. American singing bird boxes fetch far more than their counterparts in Britain, with a tortoiseshell box fetching up to \$19,000. Probably the best known of the American battery powered teddy bears is the 'Electric Bright Eye' bear, whose eyes light up when his right paw is shaken. These are rare and were made as far back as 1917.

Bing, who were well known for their tinplate mechanised cars and toys, cashed in on the teddy bear craze and made cuddly bears which could turn their heads from side to side, rollerskate or kick a football. In 1910, they made a bear which hung from a wooden frame and turned somersaults. They also made a bear which walked realistically on all fours. In 1909, Steiff made a freestanding somersaulting bear, the 'Purzel Bar' which was activated by winding his left arm and in 1910, they produced a 'marionette series,' which, although not strictly mechanised toys, certainly qualified for the description of moving bears. A very early and unusual wind-up bear by an unknown German maker is depicted on page 87 of Sue Pearson's *Collectors Guide to Teddy Bears*. He is made from papier mache covered with silk plush. He has a muzzle with a chain attached and plays the accordion. Schuco are also well known for their bear automata. Their bears performed many different actions and their 'Scooter Bear,' made in 1931, is a delightful little character riding on a tinplate scooter, operated by clockwork. They also produced a 'Dancer Bear' with black metal feet and a red felt cap and trousers, who dances when wound up. Schuco's 'Rolly,' the roller skating bear made in 1954, skates along holding a walking stick to help balance him and is

very similar in appearance to the Bing skater bear. The company also made a rather jolly looking tumbling bear in the 20s and 30s, who had a gold mohair head and a metal frame body covered with a blue felt jacket with black felt buttons and red trousers. The French company Pintel started making mechanical bears in 1913. They also made a somersaulting bear and from 1915 to 1940, they made a mechanical bear on a metal tricycle, which was very popular. Another French firm, Descamps, were making mechanical bears from 1890 and there was a superb example of one of their polar bears drinking, using a bottle and a glass, in the Teddy Bear Museum at Stratford on Avon, before its closure. This museum had a number of teddy bear automata, including the Balalaika Bear, two Ice Cream Bears who are licking lollies with evident enjoyment, and a Violin Bear, a delightful chap who serenades visitors with an imaginary tune on his instrument.

Japan was represented in the museum by a clockwork Reading Bear who is holding a book, whilst tiny magnets on his paws allow him to turn the pages. The Russian Drinking Bear is another well known and popular toy and is relatively easy to find. More modern clockwork bears may be found and I discovered a clockwork polar bear, which walks on all fours and turns his head from side to side, which I bought in Tenerife whilst on my honeymoon almost thirty-nine years ago. Sadly, I do not know his maker but he is a gorgeous little chap and I still have him.

From the mid 1940s, battery operated bears began to appear. Some of these are incredibly ingenious and include a bear making a phone call, a Mummy Bear feeding her baby, another walking and playing the drums, and still others performing everyday actions such as riding a bike, knitting, carrying a suitcase, and so on. Bears like these were seen in the Vienna Teddy Bear Museum from 1996-2001 and Toys of Youth always have a selection of clockwork and battery bears and other automata for sale. Pedigree made a battery operated talking bear in the 1960s in addition to Simon the Walking Bear and one of our best loved English companies, Chiltern, made a Yes/No bear in 1937. Later they introduced the clockwork musical Bruin Bear, which turns its head as the music plays. Many companies made the Yes/No bears which, although not operated by battery or by clockwork, are still moving bears and can be made to look remarkably lifelike as they nod or shake their heads.

Nowadays we take for granted the bears who tell stories, play tunes or sing and I have quite a few of these, including a Millennium Bear who leaves you in no doubt as to which century you are in as he shouts 'Happy 2000' amidst the sound of whistling fireworks! Teddy bear automata are a fascinating and, in my opinion, a necessary part of a hug and we should all have one or two, even if it is only so that they can entertain our other bears whilst we are not looking!



Early 20thC tinplate clock-work bi-plane toy. *Gorrings, Lewes. Apr 01. HP: £65. ABP: £76.*



German Mickey & Minnie Mouse organ grinder, lithographed tinplate, clockwork mechanism, as Mickey plays Minnie dances on top, probably by Distler, c1931, 15cm long. *Bristol Auction Rooms, Bristol. Apr 02. HP: £3,200. ABP: £3,764.*



Early 20thC automata, pretty young female, blonde hair, blue glass eyes, bisque hands holding a fan and a pair of longettes, her actions include: moving head, opening and closing eyes, raising of arms and rotation of wrist, key marked LB, 21in high overall. *Fellows & Sons, Birmingham. Oct 03. HP: £2,300. ABP: £2,705.*



Lehmann EPL 470 clockwork painted tinplate lithographed Anxious Bride Nanni (woman's hat with brim), 220mm, with top of box lid and tinplate tag. *Special Auction Services, Reading. Jul 10. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.*



1930s Hoge MFG, Co. Inc. No. 268 'Popeye the Sailor', clockwork, painted tinplate model boat and figure, 15in long, boxed. *Amersham Auction Rooms, Bucks. Nov 03. HP: £1,000. ABP: £1,176.*



Boxed clockwork model of Charlie Chaplin. (thought to be by Schuco, dating from 1930s) *Richard Winterton, Burton on Trent, Staffs. Mar 02. HP: £780. ABP: £917.*



Pair of black dancing figures carved and painted wood construction, clockwork motor housed in tall polished wood base with transfer, figures 6in high, toy overall 10.5in high, 6.5in wide, poss. Ives, USA, late 19thC. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Apr 05. HP: £600. ABP: £705.*

The prices quoted are actual Hammer Prices (HP) followed by the Approximate Buyer's Price (ABP) which includes an average buyer's premium of 15% + VAT.



German tinplate clockwork 'fighting couple' toy, 8in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 01. HP: £500. ABP: £588.*



German tinplate 'Jacko the Merry Organ Grinder and Monkey' probably by Distler c1923, clockwork movement operates small musical movement, lithographed decoration, 6.25in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 00. HP: £480. ABP: £564.*



Roullet et Descamps automaton, Little Lord Fontleroy on horseback, bisque head doll, articulated at arms and legs, skin covered horse, clockwork mechanism, fitted key, 8.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Feb 07. HP: £360. ABP: £423.*



Lehmann clockwork tinplate toy No 500 'Paddy and the Pig', Paddy wearing green outfit, pig with skirts concealing clockwork action causing pig to move & Paddy to rock, German. *Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Oct 05. HP: £330. ABP: £388.*



Early 20thC French tinplate clockwork toy as an articulated negro boy pulling a cart of fruit, printed marks and monogrammed FM, 6.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 00. HP: £320. ABP: £376.*



Lehmann tinplate clockwork Dare Devil with rider and two wheel cart pulled by a zebra, 7in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 01. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



Schuco novelty pig band, late 1930s, tinplate with felt attire, trio of drummer, flutist and violinist, each with clockwork mechanism. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 04. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



Early gymnast automaton, painted head, tinplate hands and painted wood feet, clockwork mechanism with lead counter-balance, gymnast somersaults about tubular A-shaped frame, lithographed mark, 'Patented July 15th, 1873', on walnut plinth, *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 05. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



Pair late Victorian animated dancing dolls by Milliken & Lawley, 18 Strand, London, two male and female china head dolls, 6in high, suspended on vertical wires above clockwork motor; stained beech box base, 6.5in wide. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Oct 09. HP: £280. ABP: £329.*



Patent automata doll, bisque head, clockwork mechanism, 30cm high. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Jul 05. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*



Fernand Martin, Paris violin playing clockwork figure, mark F.M. Depose, replacement jacket, c1900. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Mar 02. HP: £250. ABP: £294.*



Rare tinplate clockwork powered German Railway Porter, c1910, by Walter Stock of Solingen, hand cart light grey with red line detailing, simple wire clockwork mechanism, porter in a traditional railway uniform. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Oct 08. HP: £240. ABP: £282.*



Louis Marx & Co, clockwork 'Mickey the Musician'. *Ambrose, Loughton. Sep 99. HP: £220. ABP: £258.*



German lithographed tinplate clockwork frog, marked 'Cko 314 MADE IN GERMANY', standing frog swaying to each side, fly attached to the mouth, 11cm high. *Cheffins, Cambridge. Sep 01. HP: £210. ABP: £247.*



Lehmann clockwork tinplate clown in two wheeled donkey cart, early 20thC, 5.5in. *Louis Taylor, Stoke on Trent. Mar 06. HP: £200. ABP: £235.*



T.P.S Japanese tinplate clockwork novelty toy 'Clown on Roller Skates', original box *Fellows & Sons, Brimingham. Oct 03. HP: £190. ABP: £223.*



Greppert and Kelch tinplate clockwork horse drawn cart, circling & reversing motion, lithographed decoration, 7in, c1920. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 00. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Lehmann 520 tinplate clockwork Hansom cab, driver with red jacket (one arm missing and other detached), two figures seated and a dog on the running board, purple body with gilt highlights, some repairs/corrosion damage. 15cm high. *Charterhouse Auctioneers, Sherborne. Dec 09. HP: £150. ABP: £176.*



Early 20thC carved hardwood African drummer automata, 3.75in high. *Tring Market Auctions, Herts. Jan 03. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



Triang plastic clockwork Indian elephant with walking action, upon his back a Howdah with Indian figures. *Fellows & Sons, Brimingham. Oct 03. HP: £65. ABP: £76.*



The Black Hole Clockwork V.I.N.C.E.N.T. Walking toy by Marx Toys GB, complete and working, good condition, box fair. *Aston's, Dudley. Aug 10. HP: £35. ABP: £41.*



Lehmann tinplate clockwork railway porter, (Adam 689), 7.5in high. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Oct 06. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Two Schuco clockwork pig musicians. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 01. HP: £130. ABP: £152.*



Rare Charbens clockwork diecast 'Walking Barrow Boy', blue coaster style cart, yellow wheels, packing case load covering clockwork motor; barrow boy housing rotating spindle with 4 feet cast on (2 detached but present), original card box, minor wear; with key. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Nov 04. HP: £95. ABP: £111.*



Schuco (Germany) Solisto Clown Violin Player; clockwork, some corrosion, overall good condition, 11cm high. *Aston's Auctioneers, Dudley. Jul 10. HP: £55. ABP: £64.*



Louis Marx 'Popeye the Pilot', tin plate plane with novelty clockwork action, 8.5in long, propeller missing. *F. Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 08. HP: £34. ABP: £39.*



Arnold 'Boy on a Sledge' boy, lying forward on clockwork driven tinplate sledge, dressed in blue, red and yellow with bobble hat, approx 4in long. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Nov 05. HP: £160. ABP: £188.*

Images are in descending hammer price order. The price range is indicated at the start of each section.



Lehmann 'Stubborn Donkey' toy, novelty clockwork action (AF) with articulated clown driver; 7.5in long. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Feb 10. HP: £90. ABP: £105.*



Schuco (Germany) Mouse Dancer with baby toy, clockwork, some corrosion/wear, generally good condition, 10cm high. *Aston's, Dudley. Jul 10. HP: £45. ABP: £52.*



Clockwork novelty toy, a bear seated on a crate drinking from a bottle of milk. *Fellows & Sons, Brimingham. Oct 03. HP: £30. ABP: £35.*



1950s/60s Japanese tinplate clockwork robot, movable arms and legs, 8.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 00. HP: £160. ABP: £188.*



Limited issue late 1980s Billiken The Joker from the latest Batman films, clockwork mechanism, tinplate body, plastic grinning face, large feet with wheels beneath, boxed, mint condition. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Mar 05. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



Shuco tinplate and clockwork toper, pre war, with ale stein, 5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Jan 03. HP: £75. ABP: £88.*



Unusual French tinplate clockwork flapping penguin. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Oct 05. HP: £40. ABP: £47.*



Tin plate clockwork duck on a tricycle, whirling hat. *Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Driffield. Jul 04. HP: £25. ABP: £29.*



Lehmann 'Oh My' clockwork tinplate tap dancer, 11in high. *Kivell & Sons, Bude. Sep 05. HP: £160. ABP: £188.*



Schuco Solisto clockwork clown playing a violin, late example made post WW11 in the U.S.-Zone Germany No.986/2. *Wallis & Wallis, Lewes. Jan 10. HP: £112. ABP: £131.*



Mr Smash clockwork walking Smash Martian by Marx Toys GB, complete with aerials, VGC, box good, with tape. *Aston's Auctioneers, Dudley. Aug 10. HP: £75. ABP: £88.*



Clockwork King Kong gorilla, tin/plastic construction, unknown maker, probably Japanese, height 19cm. *Aston's Auctioneers, Dudley. Aug 10. HP: £40. ABP: £47.*



Plush covered, clockwork novelty toy as a monkey wearing a pointed felt hat and playing a drum, 8.5in high. (21.5cm). *Fellows & Sons, Brimingham. Oct 03. HP: £12. ABP: £14.*