

*This cable transporter truck was a popular post-war 'Minic' model from Tri-ang.*



*The novelty friction-drive car on the left is from Japan. The Traction Engine is a post-war British-made Tri-ang 'Minic' toy. 'Minics' were introduced before the war.*

## The 'Baby Boomer' Playthings by Jack Tempest



*An American 'jalopy' is evocative of the Baby Boom era!*



*A large Japanese battery-toy is this 'Hi-Que' monkey who covers his ears, eyes, and mouth in turn to shun evil.*

'Baby Boomer' is an Americanism recalling the new families springing up once the struggles of the Second World War ended in the mid 1940s. Industrial production gradually returned to some kind of normality as materials steadily became available after years of rationing. German industry had suffered badly through bombing but that country's famous toy producing industry was being steadily revived. The most prolific issue of toys came from the Nuremberg area of Bavaria, a part of Germany that was captured by American troops as the Allies made their successful penetration of enemy territory.

The tin toys, for which the Nuremberg district had long been internationally renowned, and now were produced again, but marked 'Made in the US Zone of Germany'. Collectors of the toys that came from Germany at this time now tend to attach special collectable importance to the examples so marked. Germany was then divided into West and East, the East being the Russian-occupied area. When the Allies left the Russians did not and East Germany continued under Communist rule and did so until the Berlin Wall came down.

The collectable German toys are the very early examples and the ones that also carried the 'Made in Germany' marking of the years leading to the Second World War. The 'Made in Germany' mark only returned long after the US Zone period when the Communists could no longer afford to hold on to East Germany. The only toys to be produced in the British Zone were the wonderful Prämata die-cast metal model cars marked 'Made in Germany Brit. Zone'. These self-steering novelty cars, made in Cologne, were fitted with high-quality clockwork mechanisms amongst their many gadgets that included three forward, neutral, and reverse gears, a jointed cross-shaft axle, and automatic direction indicators. Their very first model issued was of a VW Beetle that had no mechanism and is really desirable simply because of its rarity. The five other models produced in the 1950s included the Opel Kapitän, a Mercedes 300, the Jaguar XK 120 and the Buick 405.

Now German toys are again marked 'Made in Germany', though times have changed for the German toy industry. Competition from Japan proved too much, not solely for the German toy industry but for Western toy companies in general. The Japanese flooded the world with many brilliantly designed novelty toys, many of which replaced friction and clockwork animation by ingenious electrical systems powered from easily obtainable dry-batteries. Many German firms, Prämata included, closed for good.

These were the real 'Baby Boomer' playthings. The post-war years saw a steady return to family life as the men were demobilised and settled down to look forward to a peaceful future. The baby industry began to boom and the boomtime was passed on to the toy manufacturers. Whilst British toy makers tried to supply the market to the best of their ability they found it very difficult to compete with the flood of toys that began pouring in from liberated Japan. Most of these were tin-plate toys of quality construction and fitted with ingenious mechanisms, ranging from simple friction drive flywheel systems to clockwork motors and a host of wonderful toys powered from easily available torch batteries.

The colourful range of toys were of quality construction in general and of wide appeal. Toy makers like toys with such wide appeal because they do tend to impress parents, who have the money to buy the toys for their offspring. The result was that the West, America

included, spent their money on the splendid range of novelties with which Japan was flooding the world markets, taking over from the Germans who, up to the Second World War, had dominated the international toy markets ever since mass-production was evolved during the long-gone days of the Industrial Revolution.

In this period of time the American Dollar was described as 'Almighty' and collectors realise this by the Americanisation of many of the Japanese 'Boomer' toys, specially designed to sell in the USA. Toy police cars were obviously American and so were fire-engines and railroad toys. There were quaint battery toys obviously designed for zany American tastes that were rarely, if ever, seen in British shops. Probably the commonest Japanese battery toy to be found in the UK was the animated figure of a gentleman alcoholic known as 'Charlie Weaver'. Curiously, unknown to the British, it turns out that Charlie was a 100% American vaudeville star who enjoyed a wider audience when he eventually made regular appearances on 1950s American TV in his 'Charley Weaver Show'. Charley's real name was Cliff Arquette whose four Arquette grandchildren are now well-known film stars. Charlie is featured as an alcoholic knocking back drink after drink, swaying about as his face turns red and smoke comes out of his ears!

The wonder of these new battery-operated Japanese toys was that a larger variety of novelty effects could be electrically created. Railway

locomotive carpet toys could now provide 'chuff-chuff' and typical American railway siren sounds. Smoke could be generated within the toys, such as that emitted from car exhausts and Charley Weaver's ears. The smoke was caused by electrically heating oil in a sealed capsule within the heart of the toy. Police cars could sound sirens, parrots could talk and so could robots that staggered along with flashing lights. Before the war headlamp lighting was a novelty and prior to the Japanese toy revolution battery toys could only supply movement to some parts of the toy at a time. The Japanese toy revolution came to an end when tin-plate toys were deemed to be too dangerous for children and moulded plastic toys were encouraged. Some countries still continue to make tin toys but these are only permitted to be imported into Britain for collectors only, not for children!

The value of these toys varies considerably, depending as ever on condition and rarity. The 'Charley Weaver' battery toy in original box still sells at around £60 because it is a common product. Rarer examples should go for around an average of £100-150 in today's uncertain market. There is a great interest in battery toy robots from the 'Baby Boomer' days and scarce examples can go for several hundreds of pounds, though again, values are currently rather volatile.



*'This tipper-lorry came from GAMA in Germany. Batteries gave it the power only to move.*



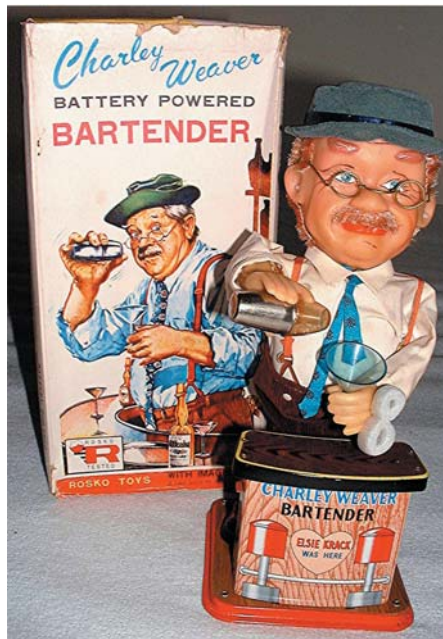
*Very popular internationally were the model motor vehicles produced as 'Matchbox Toys' and 'Models of Yesteryear'.*



*Another GAMA US-Zone product was this ingenious acrobatic motor-cycling chimp!*



*The battery operated 'Circus Lion' will stand or sit, growling realistically, when threatened with a stick! (Provided he is switched on first!)*



*'Charley Weaver' depicted as an American vaudeville and TV star. Generally unknown in the UK he was still a popular 'bartender', figure who drank strong spirits, so powerful that smoke came out of his ears!*



*The Japanese introduced a variety of amusing battery-operated tin toys in the 1950-60s. This example, the 'Teddy Artist' could actually draw simple pictures!*