

Modelling the Hong Kong “Post-War” Car

John Prentice provides a practical guide for the OO-scale Majestic kit
With models and photographs by the author



The post war series of trams in Hong Kong were probably the most popular type with British visitors, resembling as they did British trams of an earlier era, with wooden body frames, metal panelling and wooden seats. They ran on 4-wheel pendulum Peckham, Maley and Taunton or similar locally made trucks, some dating from 1925, and driven by Dick Kerr controllers. Some equipment from previous generations of trams was re-used and indeed passed on to subsequent types, with the trucks still in use even today, albeit heavily renovated.

Fortunately for us, Majestic Trams have re-introduced the former Tramalan white metal kit in OO scale so we can easily model them (see Fig 1, next page). As they ran for over forty years, from the prototype in 1949 until the with-

drawal of the last car in 1991, many changes took place. These changes were done at routine maintenance times so they did not apply to all the fleet at a single date. Sometimes, new ideas were pursued before the previous changes had all been completed and all trams modified. Here I will give some notes to help build an accurate model, but I must stress the importance of consulting photographs to ensure the correct combination of features is chosen.

The Phases

The kit comes complete with three staircases to enable you to build various versions of the tram, which are described in the kit instructions as phases (Note: the instructions are available in Chinese and English). There is a single straight

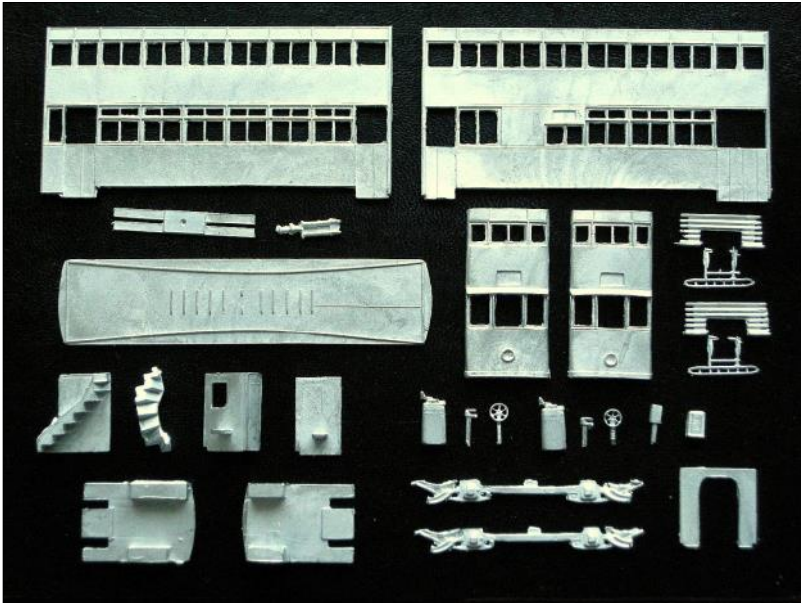


Fig. 1 (Left)
The different white metal components in the Majestic 00-scale kit.

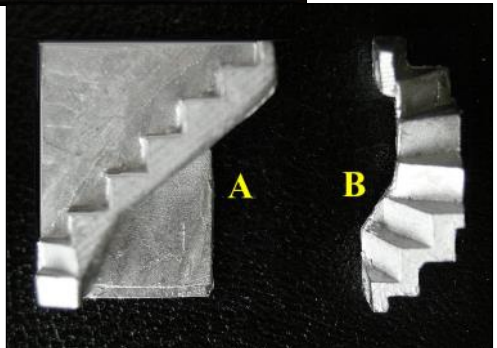
Fig. 2 (Below)
The two types of staircase included in each kit.

enclosed staircase, A, and two angled spiral open staircases, B (see Fig 2, right).

Phase 1 is how the trams were originally built. There were two classes with first class passengers boarding the tram at the front and proceeding to the upper deck where there were transverse seats, while third class passengers boarded at the rear for the lower deck with its longitudinal seats (there was a conductor on each deck). The kit makes up in this style “straight out of the box” with no modifications required. You use the single straight staircase (A in Fig.2) at the front nearside. Worth noting at this stage is that Hong Kong trams are single-ended, although can in emergency be used the wrong way round so have doors on both sides and controls at both ends, a feature that proved useful during the 2014 pro-democracy demonstrations when trams from Shau Kei Wan were reversed at Victoria Park.

Phase 2 was very short lived and probably did not apply to all trams. In 1972 the two classes were dispensed with. Soon after, a second staircase, one of the spiral ones (B), was added at the rear nearside where a seated conductor collected fares. You need to panel over the window next to it. I use a small piece of plasticard.

Phase 3 comes from 1973 onwards when the



straight staircase was removed and a second spiral one (B) was fitted at the front offside. Again the window by the staircase has to be panelled over. From 1976 these cars became driver-only operated. The kit contains the coin box which is fitted next to the driving position at the front end.

Later Changes

From the early 1980s onwards, the closed panel where the nearside front staircase used to be was opened up and replaced by a window, and the blind box moved to the lower part of the panel covering the rear staircase. To do this I build new window frames in plasticard strip. At

the same time the upper deck end hopper vents (above the end central window) were removed and flush panelling fitted. This can be achieved on the model by using filler. If you want to build replica heritage tram 120 (built in 1991 and still running today), it is in this condition, but from the early 2000s has had an ugly resistance box fitted at the front of the roof, matching other Hong Kong trams.

After 1986 lifeguards were removed from trams and those post war cars that were to remain in service for a while were so treated. Instead of the lifeguard, an extension was fitted to the lower edge of the bumpers to make them much deeper.

Liveries

Ignoring one-off experiments, the trams carried five main livery types. As built they were painted in a dark Brunswick green (with brown window frames). This colour was very dark and in fact at times with age and in some lighting conditions looked almost black. Next, from 1969 after experiments to improve visibility, the lower deck panels were painted yellow. Only about a third of the fleet were to be so treated. Fairly soon the advertisements, which were already in use on the upper deck and dashes, encroached onto the lower deck side panels as well, making the use of the yellow unnecessary and then from the early 1970s the trams received a lighter Jade green livery instead of dark Brunswick green. From 1978 onwards the livery changed yet again, with Jade green being replaced by a brighter and yellow-green simply known as 'Tramways Green' but variously described as apple or grass green. Window frames, the driver's visor and the hopper vents were in a darker green. On some trams the lower deck quarter-light windows were also painted over in the dark green. At various dates the visors have been painted in other colours on a few cars, such as with red and white stripes at the introduction of phase 2 to show the public that a seated conductor was located by the rear

entrance. (You should consult photos). Finally, commencing with 18 cars in the mid-1970s, trams were to receive all-over advertising. By the end in 1991 only one tram retained its green livery with separate adverts, car 86.

Adverts and Windows

Adverts dominate Hong Kong trams. The separate ads from about 1970 to 1985 are regarded as the most attractive. To aid the modeller I have created a selection of these which can be downloaded in pdf form from a URL provided in the instructions when you buy the kit. They were typeset using CorelDraw but with thanks to Joseph Tse for helping to obtain the correct Chinese characters.

It is hot in Hong Kong. Usually the trams run with all the windows open, except possibly for the windows over the staircases which were not so easily reached, so you cannot see the central window frame pillars. I have removed these pillars from most of my models as they then look more realistic with open windows.

Example Models 88

The model of tram 88 (*below*) is shown in the livery that was used in Hong Kong from 1969 and the model reflects that date. The upper parts are in dark Brunswick green (I used Tamiya acrylic XF-27 black green, but you could try the equivalent Humbrol 91) and the lower in yellow



(Humbrol 154). Numerals are white in a small light green circle. Window frames are brown, and they can be seen in this model as the windows are all closed, very unlikely in real life except when the trams are being washed. The model uses the phase 1 single staircase (style A) at the front. As the handrails on this staircase were very visible from the outside of the tram, I added wire ones. The kit is otherwise made up "out of the box" with no modifications. Posters are from the pdf download. All my Hong Kong models were given a final coat of varnish after painting as some of the paints used are matt.

120

Car 120 was the prototype for the series, built in 1949 (not to be confused with the current replica). The model (*below and on the title page*)



is shown in the livery that it would have carried in the early years of the 1980s, with separate posters from the pdf download. It is in the lighter green (I used Humbrol 2 emerald green), with dark green fittings (Humbrol 3 Brunswick green) and in this case the quarter-lights are painted over. There are minor differences to the side windows. The model is at phase 3 with two staircases (style B). The two windows next to the staircase (one on each side), have been blocked with plasticard. The most obvious differences with this car

compared to the standard are the ends. The destination blind is central on the upper deck end panel, instead of being about two thirds of the way down. This is achieved on the model by filling in the recess on the original with Humbrol Model Filler. Also the upper deck front windows were four inches deeper than normal. I opened up the model windows with a needle file. As it was thought to be dangerous, a bar was fitted across the inside of these three larger windows to prevent people falling out. After 1979 this was replaced by a thicker bar on the outside of the centre window only, as seen on this model.

163

In 1979 tram 163 was created by rebuilding trailer car 1 of 1964 (itself more or less the lower deck of a standard car). There were notable differences from the normal. The side windows did not have the centre pillar. The lower deck quarter-lights were replaced by hopper vents, and these plus those on the upper deck were now flush with the body sides. In the model (*below*) this is achieved by filling them all in with pieces of thin plasticard. At the ends, the upper deck hopper vents were removed and panelled over. This I have done by filling them in with Humbrol model filler. Staircases are at phase 3, with the adjacent windows blocked. The window on the nearside where a



front staircase normally had been, was of course a proper window. You need to cut out the existing panel, and also the blind box in the next window. I then rebuilt the missing window frames out of strips of plasticard (Evergreen). The blind box on 163 was in the upper part of the last window on the right. My model (actually modified from an original Tramalan kit) represents the car as it was in 1981 with the Wing On department store livery that it carried for most of its life. This model was hand painted.

tions. Likewise, the staircases and adjacent windows are as phase 3. Unlike 163, the blind boxes were relocated into the lower part of the nearside rear staircase panel. You may note (only just visible) that on the model the side destination blind is showing the blue flag typhoon warning for “Ferries Have Stopped”. This is from the pdf download of additional blinds. The standard blinds are provided on paper with the kit. The model is in the advertising livery of the Chinese Bank. It was created by me in CorelDraw and printed onto decal paper. By this date lifeguards had been replaced by a metal section to deepen the bumpers. I have done this on the model by adding a strip of brass.



Obtaining the models

The kits can be purchased from Majestic Trams, details at www.tramwayinfo.com/majestic

The model can be motorised with the ME34D09 34mm wheelbase 9mm diameter wheel motor unit or fitted with the ME34U09 34mm wheelbase 9mm diameter wheel unmotorised chassis, both from BEC Kits.

145

Some of the changes introduced with 163 were incorporated into the standard fleet when they were reconditioned in the 1980s. The model of 145 (*above*) represents the final condition of the class and is as this tram appeared in 1990 (it was withdrawn at the end of that year). The hopper vents at the upper deck ends are filled as with 163. The front staircase panelling was removed at this stage, so the model has to be treated in the same way as the 163 modifica-

Seen in Des Voeux Road Central in April 1981, tram 77 is still in the jade green livery of the 1970s. The top right panel with black and yellow stripes indicates that the tram is pulling a trailer, in this case trailer no.13.

(photo Bob Appleton)

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