



This tinplate clockwork 'Waltzing Couple' was made by Günthermann and distributed as a Moko toy between 1905 and the early 1910s...

MoKo: The first 80 Years...1875 to 1955

Most reader's will know about the link that was formed by Richard Kohnstam and the Lesney duo, Jack Odell and Leslie Smith during the early 1950s...have a look at a regular wheel box circa 1953 and you will see that its contents was a Moko-Lesney toy...



Who or what was Moko and why the connection with Matchbox? The most concise article on Moko remains the one published in *Collecting Matchbox Diecast Toys – the First 40 Years* written by Kevin McGimpsey and Stewart Orr in 1988. Thanks are extended to Hans and Marco Ludwig for allowing me to show some of their wonderful toys...

The fact that the names Moko Lesney appeared on the packaging meant nothing to most people and the majority of the customers who bought the models probably never gave the matter a second thought.

The Moses Kohnstam era

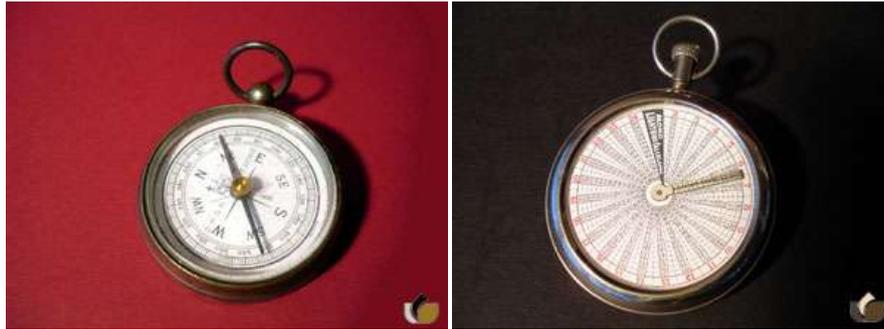
Moko was actually the trademark of an old established firm of toy merchants M. Kohnstam & Co. and was derived from the first two letters of the two names of the founder Moses Kohnstam.

He is thought to have originally come from Czechoslovakia. He was a kindly man who possessed shrewd business acumen. Moses Kohnstam, who lived in Germany, noted with interest the steady increase in the number of toy manufacturers as a result of the healthy expansion in worldwide trading being experienced by Germany towards the end of the 19th century. Germany was beginning to supply the world with many goods; toys represented a significant portion of this trade and there was a good future for any enterprising businessman.

Moses Kohnstam decided not to become a manufacturer but to start in business as a wholesaler of toys in the small town of Fuerth, (also spelt Fürth) close to the city of Nuremberg in Bavaria, where most of the country's toy business was centred. He had reasoned correctly as it transpired that many of the smaller firms coming into being would need someone to take care of the distribution side of their business. The great majority of Germany's toy manufacturers had set up in and around Nuremberg.

There were many good reasons for this, the main one being that there was an excellent concentration of skilled workers available in the area which could be of great use in the production of tin plate toys. Nuremberg had been for many years the home of the clock-making industry and of manufacturers of other small items, including musical instruments. The clock-makers, in particular, were suffering from a serious decline in trade as a result of the importation of cheap watch mechanisms from America and the work - not entirely dissimilar - offered by the new toy factories was very welcome.





Kohnstam distributed a range of brass metal table lighters and look-a-like watches, compasses and gauges...

The future looked good and the production of clockwork powered tinsplate toys, aided by the opening of conveniently situated tin mines in Bavaria was to continue successfully right up to the world trade depression of the 1920s. Business was good for Moses Kohnstam, too, as his firm could offer the busy industrialists the combined services of advertising, wholesaling, packaging, and distribution throughout Europe, leaving them to concentrate on production. Under the trade-name Moko the firm became a toy factor of some importance.



On the left, a horse racing game

On the right, this Railway Time Keeper doubled up as a waterproof match holder

The business commenced in 1875 and eventually Moses Kohnstam had storage space at his offices in Nuremberg plus all the necessary facilities to distribute toys from several of the leading manufacturers. These toys were sometimes sold under the actual makers' name, whilst others would be offered bearing the Moko label, with Kohnstam receiving commission from the manufacturers on every toy sold.

As part of his work in developing the scope of his business outside Germany, Moses Kohnstam often visited Britain where there was a great demand for toys from Germany although local manufacturers were not too happy about the flood of German manufactured goods which were pouring into the country, just as Japanese imports were later to do in the 1960s.



This Austin 7 Van advertises the Moko stand at the 1954 Harrogate Toy Fair...

In 1880, Moses Kohnstam was a co-founder of the Manchester Toy Week, which became a regular event and was welcomed by toy wholesalers from the North of England and its inauguration created what is regarded as the forerunner of the present day Harrogate Toy Fair held every January.

By 1894 Moses Kohnstam was represented by offices in London, at 24 Milton Street EC (later EC2), as well as in Fuerth, Milan, and Brussels. The firm's catalogues were packed with play-things of every kind and included a vast range of toys and novelties; mouth organs, accordions and concertinas. The consumers were eager to buy the cheap goods churned out by the continually improving mass-production methods. Moses Kohnstam handled all classes of toys; right down to the humble tinsplate Penny Toy once sold by pavement traders and nowadays eagerly sought after by enthusiastic collectors. The firm marketed the products of many prominent German manufacturers, including the tinsplate marvels offered by that most revered firm of German toymakers, Gebruder Marklin. The source of some of Kohnstam's toys is not certain and many of the suppliers have not been identified, but it is known that he received goods from such toy makers as S. Günthermann (trademark S.G.), Georg Mangold (trademark GAMA), Oebruder Einfalt (trademark Technofix), Adolf Schumann (trademark A.S.) and Richards (trademark Rico).



The Flying Police Squad Car features a battery operated searchlight and was made by Richards of Bavaria in the 1920s. A great touch is having its original Moko price label still attached...



This classic clockwork flying toy could have been made by the likes of Lehmann...



In the 1920s and 1930s M. Kohnstam & Co. had the agencies and importers all over Europe. Here we can see that their Belgian distributor was E. Villain & Co.



Dolls (poupées) form a large part of the Moko range in the 1920s. Top left is the clockwork Limousine with a piston popping engine...shown in its three colour schemes in the next photograph...



These 3 tinplate clockwork Limousines made by the Georg Mangold firm for J. Kohnstam retailed in the U.K. at 2s. 9d (13p). One rather clever feature was the moving pistons. The Moko trade mark can be seen on the radiator. By far, the pale blue variant is the rarest, then the pale grey...

Between the 1920s and 1930s the Moko catalogue pictured a wealth of toys and, besides an



amazing variety of tinplate playthings, there appeared boxes of lead soldiers, toy telephones, dolls' house furniture, air rifles, miniature gardening sets, dolls' bathrooms (with electric light and running water), toy theatres, soldier outfits for children, sparking novelties, small musical boxes, toy gramophones, toy horse-drawn carts made from wood, rocking horses, pedal cars, toy castles, toy



A selection of Gem Magic Lantern slides...

stoves, dolls' tea sets, miniature shops, composition miniature animals, Noah's Arks, dolls' furniture, pewter altar ornaments, wooden sailing boats, celluloid novelty toys, novelty filled Christmas Stockings, electric motors, pull-along soft animals, cinematographs, dolls of all sizes, toy typewriters, toy sewing machines, lithographed figural show cards for shop window display, and even animated novelty figures for shop windows. The terrific selection of tinsplate in the Moko trade this time included a of clockwork animated figures, many carpet toys, fire engines, aeroplanes, airships, merry-go-rounds, toy locomotives (both clockwork and steam powered), toy boats, railway stations, stationary steam engines with animated accessories, trams, and tin plate cars.

Many of the Moko wares shown were from well known German toy makers such as the Georg Levy (Gama) Double Billiard Player toy; the Tipp & Co. Santa Claus car and the flywheel s by J. L. Hess. The wholesaling of dolls and cuddly toys began around 1909 when Moses Kohnstam registered the trademark Cupid (No. 312593) to be used to define a certain range of dolls being marketed. The registration of a patent of a design of a baby's bottle followed in 1910. Known as 'Mother's Darling', the bottle was supplied in two separate distribution in Britain and in Germany. The British version featured a flag bearing the Moko name and the legend: 'quiet and good, requires no nursing attention or food'.

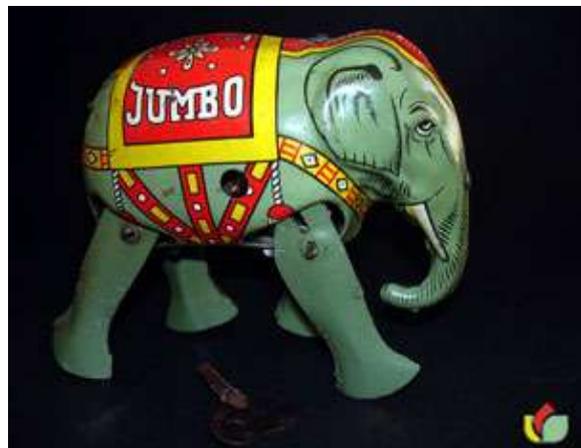
The J. Kohnstam era from 1914...

Moses Kohnstam died in 1912 at the age of 72 leaving three sons Julius, Willi and Emil. Business came to a standstill with the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 and the London office was taken over by the British Government for use as a Lord Roberts Memorial Workshop. M. Kohnstam & Co. was wound up in the same year.

Julius had gone to England in 1890 and founded the London branch office. In 1912, immediately after the death of his father, Julius opened a doll factory under the name Keen & Son in part of the Milton Street premises, using imported German-made heads. One of the dolls produced was known as 'Vera'. His supply of toys came from the head office in Fuerth and were mainly marked Moko. In 1920, he established a doll and toy manufacturing business under the name of James Garfield & Co. which lasted until 1927.

Julius had also formed a new company, J. Kohnstam & Co. Ltd., incorporated on 31 December 1923. This was the business that was to have a direct link with Lesney some two decades later. Typical clockwork novelty toys imported into England by J. Kohnstam & Co. Ltd., included the teetering Penguin Waiter who tried his best to balance a bottle of soda-water on a tray as he wobbled along,

and the toy clockwork tinplate elephants produced by Blomer & Schuler...the inspiration behind the Lesney Jumbo Elephant toy in the 1950s.



In 1933, Julius established a doll making company in Aylesbury, in Buckinghamshire, under the name Dollies Ltd., in a bid not only to expand business, but to build a financially secure base for the rest of the Kohnstam family still living in Nazi Germany. Willi and Emil stayed in Germany until 1933, at which time the Fuerth office was closed down because of the political situation. Emil left for England to join his brother in 1934, leaving Willi behind.

Jack Odell a co-founder of Lesney Products vividly recalls Richard Kohnstam explaining how his family had managed to escape from Germany in the 1930s. Odell, "Emil came to England in 1934 when the problems started in Nuremberg in Germany ... The Jewish people had been thrown out of Poland ... many of them were toy makers and they all ended up in Germany. They soon realised that they were going to get thrown out of Germany also, so their community leaders chose several

leading business men to go to England one of them was Emil, and under the guise of the doll factory opened up by his brother Julius, Emil established himself in England as a toy importer. Companies in Germany began to send him millions of toys for distribution in England and they were all bought by him from his suppliers at half price! Part of the profit he put into the bank and so built up large accounts. That money then bought property in London to help house many of the German Jews who fled Germany in 1937 and 1938."

In 1935, Julius died at the age of 62 and Emil took over the running the business. Julius's only son Richard began to form his own business in 1938 but with the war looming up he stayed with Emil at J. Kohnstam & Co. Ltd. The business survived World War II with some difficulty but managed to stay in existence by making and marketing simple games.



The Richard Kohnstam era...

Richard Kohnstam served in the Royal Artillery during the war and became a glider instructor, later working in intelligence. When peace returned he gave up the idea of setting up on his own and decided to concentrate on the marketing and distribution of diecast toys with his Uncle Emil. Emil and Richard registered the trademark Moko in England in 1949. Richard was well-educated and he could speak several languages fluently. He never lost the common touch.



One of his often cited beliefs was: "The success of a product in the toy market is directly proportional to the amount of pleasure the consumer receives, i.e. play value." Another was, "People are more important than products and if the people behind the product are good, then the rest will follow."

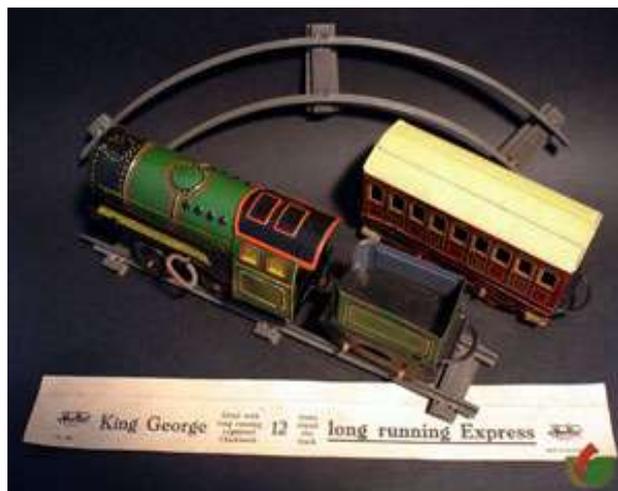
Richard's instinct was such that if he was to tell a manufacturer that he had got it wrong, there was never an argument!

In 1946 to further expand his business interests Richard Kohnstam contacted several of the many toy manufacturers who had set up business in the north of London, such as Charbens and Benbros. He became interested in the new firm of Lesney Products who had commenced business in 1947. Lesney had decided to make toys and turned to Emil and Richard Kohnstam, who at this time were located at Clerkenwell Road in the City of London, for help and advice.

Odell, "One of the people that I used to work for in industrial castings before I made toys was Charbens. Charles Reid and Dickey Kohnstam knew each other before the war . . . he was selling their stuff and my name was mentioned to Kohnstam." Richard Kohnstam, because of his background, had developed strong commercial links in Europe. He would annually visit the toy fairs in Germany, France and Italy. At the Nuremberg Toy Fair, for example, he would have a tent containing a huge range of toys from several British toy manufacturers, and would accept orders from the European wholesalers. Thus began the famous Moko Lesney connection and an understanding was reached whereby Lesney would manufacture the toys whilst Moko in the main - (there were other rival toy factors who had good working relationships with Lesney) - would carry out almost all the packaging, advertising, distribution, and selling of the new range. It was also agreed that, when Kohnstam bought toys from Lesney to sell abroad, he would pay Lesney within seven to ten days thus ensuring a good cash flow for Lesney.



By the mid 1950s J. Kohnstam & Co. Ltd., had also marketed several non-Lesney diecast toys, including a diecast Drummer Soldier with a clockwork mechanism, a revolving Fairground Carousel, a Crawler Bulldozer, a Crawler Tractor, a Crane, a Hayrick; and a large scale model of a Ruston Bucyrus Excavator.





One of the more valuable non-Lesney Moko toys was a superb space toy which was part of the 'Konstrukta Range' which was similar to a Meccano construction set.



There was no Moko involvement in the very early Lesney toys, such as the Aveling Barford Diesel Road Roller, the Crawler, Bulldozer, the Crawler Tractor, the Soap Box Racer, and the Cement Mixer. J. Kohnstam & Co. Ltd., however, acquired tile rights from A. Gilson to manufacture a Muffin Junior



Puppet, and Lesney were given the project), Jumbo the Elephant, the Prime Mover, Bulldozer and the Small Coronation Coach were also Lesney toys of the early 1950s that had a Moko involvement.



Whilst he was associated with Lesney, Richard Kohnstam continued to involve himself with other British toy-making firms and was responsible for the launch of another character toy, Prudence the Kitten. Amongst other Moko toys were the Farmette series and in 1955 a figure of a girl on a scooter.



The involvement with Lesney led to the "Matchbox" Series of 1953, the Major Packs of 1957 and the Gift Sets from both ranges. It was agreed that the name Moko would be placed alongside the name Lesney on the boxes. This enabled Moko to promote the models more confidently.

Leslie Smith, a co-founder of Lesney Products remembered Richard Kohnstam recalling his early days in Germany to Jack Odell when Moko used to distribute little wooden dolls in matchboxes as a novelty range of toys. This memory cemented the idea already thought of by Jack Odell of packing the diecast miniatures into cartons designed to resemble matchboxes. Unbeknown to Smith and Odell, Emil and Richard Kohnstam registered the trademark "Matchbox" in late 1954. This did not please the Lesney owners when this registration was discovered.





In 1958 Emil Kohnstam died at the age of 77, and by following year, 1959, Lesney bought out Richard and with it, the full title to the name "Matchbox", long with the sales rights and the design registrations. By 1961, the Moko name no longer appeared on Lesney's cartons.

It appears that Richard Kohnstam had intended to retire from business in 1959. But he must have decided against this as he almost immediately set himself up in a hobby import business trading as Richard Kohnstam Ltd with the registered trademark 'Riko'. His business was established at White Lion Street, Islington and he immediately secured the agencies of two of Germany's leading toy manufacturers, Marklin and Faller.

Railway Modeller March 1963: "We were interested to see on the excellent stand of Richard Kohnstam Ltd., a wide range of continental imports, with particular emphasis on the famous range of Marklin, Faller and Bursch products."

In 1968 he was asked by the Japanese toy making firm of Tamiya, who had taken a small stand at the Nuremberg Toy Fair, if he would spearhead their business in Europe. He tackled the job in his usual energetic manner - just as he had done so when working with Lesney - by filling his car boot with samples and driving off to the Continent. His method was to select a target city, book a hotel room, and set out his wares to display to all the likely customers he could round up in the area. He was the ideal person for the requirements of Tamiya, knowing the business so well, and having the necessary excellent command of foreign languages. He later bought the business of Colonel Stewart Beattie with its well-known chain of shops that specialised in model and hobby products.



Richard Kohnstam died in 1985, the last of a line of specialist toy wholesalers. He had obviously inherited the drive and expertise of his grandfather. There was no doubt that old Moses would have been proud of his grandson, especially for the leading part he had played in putting the famous

"Matchbox" Series on the path to success. Much of the history of the company's successful days reflected the marketing guidance he had provided. He had relieved Lesney of the chores of packaging, distribution, and advertising which allowed them to spend more money on developing moulds for their essential new products. He had presented the firm with the idea of 'Jumbo the Elephant', a direct copy of the popular toy from Blomer & Schuler, and was also responsible for their creation of the popular television character toy of 'Muffin the Mule'. He had marketed for them the extremely successful miniature 'Coronation Coach' which sold over one million pieces and, using the well respected name of Moko, had been highly successful in the marketing of the "Matchbox" ranges in general. He had also helped to develop the idea of matchbox style boxes in which to present the Company's models and the use of the name "Matchbox" itself, an idea which certainly appealed to the members of the public!

