

# Lone Star's Kiwi Connection

James Robertshaw tells the story of Lone Star's appealing Roadmaster cars and the exciting discovery that they were also produced in New Zealand



## Introduction

Following on from the fascinating discovery that Lone Star's Impy cars went on to be manufactured in Pakistan (Diecast Collector Jan 2023) we now head back in time to focus on some unique Lone Star cars which were produced even further afield. This intriguing story takes us around the globe to the booming toy industry of 1960s New Zealand.

## New Zealand's Toy Industry

During the 1960s strict import restrictions and tariffs were in place across New Zealand as the government sought to protect its manufacturing industries. Imported toys were subject to tariffs which, by inflating the cost price, helped local toy producers maintain a competitive edge. Despite its small size, the baby-boom of the 1950s made New Zealand particularly appealing to overseas toy makers which were keen to gain a share of this lucrative market. A way to avoid the high tariffs, which gener-

ally related to the import of finished goods, was for an overseas toy manufacturer to pair up with a New Zealand company which could then produce its toys under licence. This usually involved the overseas manufacturers providing moulds or the component pieces enabling the toys to be produced locally. Toy giants Lines Brothers went one further by acquiring New Zealand manufacturer 'Joy Toys' so it could establish a subsidiary company complete with a new 'Tri-ang' factory in Auckland.

Not only did these import restrictions help generate a thriving local toy industry they also resulted in some unique models when established overseas brands were forced to team-up with local New Zealand manufacturers. This is all good news for collectors with scarce 'Made in New Zealand' toys ranging from Matchbox Roadway sets to Tiptco tinplate toys, plus of course a wide range of models from New Zealand's numerous small-scale toy manufacturers. For a relatively

small country New Zealand certainly offers collectors a surprisingly rich and diverse array of rare and unique toys to search out.

## Lone Star Roadmasters

The 'Road-masters' name was first used by Lone Star in 1956 for a range consisting of 3 sports cars and 4 veteran cars all around 1:35 scale. Plastic was widely used in their construction making them particularly fragile. Perhaps this contributed to poor sales as the range was soon discontinued with Lone Star understandably returning its focus to its much more lucrative toy guns and cowboy accessories.

A more successful second series of Roadmasters launched in 1960 and it is these cars which are of interest here. The initial four models were actually produced for the American toy manufacturer Tootsietoy. It's therefore not surprising that the cars were all based on American prototypes from 1960 with Tootsietoy marketing them as part of

its 'Classic Series'. The four cars were, a Ford Sunliner, Cadillac 62 Sedan, Rambler Station Wagon and a Chevrolet Corvair. All were to 1/50 scale making the compact Corvair noticeably smaller than the other models. It's likely Tootsietoy partnered with Lone Star as they lacked the ability to produce models to this standard which was required to compete with the toy cars now arriving in America from Dinky Toys and Corgi. The baseplates of the four cars were cleverly designed so they could be fitted with inserts featuring either the 'Tootsietoy Classic Series' name or Lone Star's own 'Roadmasters' branding. The arrangement appears to have been short lived and by the following year the four Roadmaster cars were available in the UK at Woolworths stores.

During 1961 the range was expanded to include two further American prototypes, a Chevrolet El Camino pick-up and Dodge Dart Coupe. It's likely these had also been intended to be part of the Tootsietoy range or maybe Lone Star, like its British rivals, had realised the popularity of toy cars based on the stylish and flamboyant American designs of this era. The final new model was more patriotic being from Rolls-



Lone Star's first four Roadmasters cars were produced for Tootsietoy in America.

Royce and based on its elegant Silver Cloud II. All seven Roadmaster cars had chrome plated trim, working suspension and glazed windows putting them on a par with models from rivals Corgi and Dinky Toys.

The Roadmasters were issued in grey boxes with red end flaps each featuring an attractive drawing of the model contained inside. The grey coloured Rolls-Royce was issued in a more colourful red and yellow box presumably to avoid a drab box design showing a drawing of a grey car against a grey background.

### German Ramblers

Before we head to New Zealand, we

first need to divert to Germany to examine a trio of ultra-rare Roadmasters produced exclusively for the German market. These models were based on the existing Rambler casting but with the addition of a plastic aerial and roof beacon. The resulting three models were an ambulance with a large red cross on the roof, a fire chief car with 'Feuerwehr' printed on the bonnet, and a 'Polizei' version. As yet little is known about these, particularly how they were packaged. Another part of the Lone Star story waiting to be discovered!

These models produced specifically for the German market together with the cars sold through Tootsietoy in the USA demonstrates a surprisingly versatile and proactive approach from Lone Star



Lone Star's seven Roadmasters cars with their attractive individually illustrated boxes.



This trio of rare Rambler cars were made for the West German market and were the only versions to feature the plastic aerial.

when entering new markets. This doubtlessly stood Lone Star in good stead to penetrate the lucrative but restrictive market of New Zealand.

### New Zealand Roadmasters

Lone Star again demonstrated its resourcefulness this time by pairing up with New Zealand based wholesalers; Sargood Son & Ewen Ltd. It appears Sargoods arranged for a number of Lone Star toys to be produced locally in New Zealand. Lone Star's Roadmaster cars would have been particularly desirable being far superior to any produced locally which still tended to be primitive hollow castings.

It's likely the Roadmasters were supplied as bare metal components for painting, assembly and packaging in New Zealand which explains why the baseplates retain 'Made In England'. Interestingly this is very similar to what happened with full size cars as automotive manufacturers also looked to circumvent import tariffs, taxes and restrictions by supplying vehicles as knocked-down kits. Of the 7 Roadmaster cars 6 were produced in New Zealand with the smaller, less impressive Corvair excluded.

The New Zealand produced Roadmasters are easily identified by the unique very dark brown baseplates. This colour hasn't appeared on any other Lone Star

toy vehicles with the standard 'Made in England' versions having either black or light grey bases. Generally the cars were finished in similar shades to the models produced by Lone Star in England. However, excitingly there are also some completely different colour schemes which are unique to the models produced in New Zealand. These add some extra colour to this interesting story and the Roadmasters line-up!

### Ford Sunliner

Lone Star's 'Ford Sunliner' is based on a 1960 Ford Galaxie, the evocative 'Sunliner' name was used by Ford for its convertible models. At its launch the New York Times described the car as; "The longest, lowest and widest in the fifty-six year history of the Ford Motor Company". Lone Star certainly captured its low stance and wide

body, so wide in fact that it only just fits in its box! The Lone Star version was initially white then pale blue with a contrasting red interior. The New Zealand issues also came in blue although the shade is usually darker.

### Nash Rambler

This attractive model is based on the 1960 Rambler Station Wagon. It was a good model for New Zealand where full size Rambler cars were available in the late 50s and 60s. Like the Lone Star toys the real cars were supplied in knocked-down kit form and assembled in New Zealand.

Both the models produced in New Zealand and England had cream painted roofs although there is a lot more variation in the shade of cream used on the Kiwi versions. Lone Star's own Ramblers had the taillights picked out in red,



Lone Star issued its Ford Sunliner in blue or white. Blue was used in New Zealand as seen here on this trio of models (right) all finished in different shades.



something that was omitted on the New Zealand models. The shade of paint used on the New Zealand Ramblers is much more of a turquoise-blue rather than the usual turquoise-green. This is also our first model with a completely different colour scheme unique to New Zealand. This rare version is finished in an attractive metallic brown with a contrasting cream roof and looks very striking indeed.

Lone Star's Rambler was usually finished in a metallic sea-green shade. The New Zealand factory came up with these attractive metallic blue and brown alternatives which certainly added some extra colour to the range.



From left to right; the Tootsietoy branded model, German 'Feuerwehr' version, Lone Star's issue and a New Zealand produced model.

### Cadillac 62 Sedan

Nothing shows off the flamboyant American car design quite like the big Cadillacs of the 1950s. By 1960, which is the year Lone Star's model is based on, the design had been restrained a little with more subtle wings and less chrome styling. The shade of blue and finish on the New Zealand Cadillacs is very similar to Lone Star's own versions, with just the cream roof again varying in shade.



The finish on the New Zealand produced Cadillac (right) was a close match to Lone Star's own models.

### Dodge Dart Phoenix

With its concave grille and reverse fin design the distinctive styling of the 1961 Dodge Dart was certainly controversial. Lone Star captured these unusual features and the overall sleek design very well. 'Phoenix' was the designation given to the highest of three levels of interior trim. It could be judged a little ironic for Lone Star to include 'Phoenix'



British and New Zealand produced Dodge Darts finished in similar shades of metallic dark blue.



A rare carded Rolls-Royce is shown here alongside two New Zealand produced models. One is finished in similar black over grey whilst the other is in a striking two-tone blue colour scheme which was unique to New Zealand.

in its model title as at this time Lone Star's version didn't have an interior! This is another model where the colour and finish achieved in New Zealand are very close to Lone Star's own examples.

#### Chevrolet El Camino

Whilst the full-size version of this car-derived pick-up was not sold in New Zealand, similar Ford and Holden 'utes' were everywhere no doubt making this distinctive model very popular at the time. Dinky Toys also modelled the 1961 Chevrolet El Camino although if it was available in New Zealand it would have been subject to the import tariffs

and therefore noticeably more expensive. Orange was used for both the Lone Star and New Zealand versions however the latter are usually finished in a darker shade. There is also a New Zealand example with an unusual matt-orange finish.

#### Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud II

Lone Star's attractive Rolls-Royce was the first non-American prototype in the Roadmasters range. Initially modelled on the Silver Cloud II Lone Star later updated the model to the Silver Cloud III simply by changing the front-end design from single to twin head-

lights. Lone Star followed Rolls-Royce's lead and finished its model in an attractive two-tone colour scheme which was also replicated in New Zealand. Standard models were issued in black over grey which whilst being realistic could have been judged a little uninspiring for a toy. Perhaps someone at the New Zealand factory had the same thought as an alternative colour scheme emerged with bright blue replacing the drab black. The resulting colour scheme might not impress a Rolls-Royce purist but it certainly brightens up the model!



A 'ute' was a good model choice for the New Zealand market. The two Kiwi produced versions, with their differing shades of orange, are seen here on the right.

## Model Assembly

Assembly of the Roadmaster cars in New Zealand mirrored the manufacturing process at Lone Star with the baseplate being riveted in place. A steel strip clamped to the inside of the baseplate between two rails cleverly holds the axles in place whilst still being able to flex sufficiently to give the effect of working suspension.

Unfortunately, on several of the New Zealand Roadmasters fitment of this strip has failed causing the axles and wheels to rise inside the car body rendering it useless as a toy. Indeed visible dents on the baseplate caused during fitment of the strip suggest there were difficulties with this part of the assembly. It could be a contributing factor, but a different metal was used for the suspension strip on the New Zealand models which have a copper colour strip rather than the usual silver steel. It's unclear whether this issue was resolved, or if the failure of the suspension resulted in returns and poor sales. The latter could explain why a relatively high number of these Roadmaster cars have survived as unsold stock still packaged in their outer trade boxes.

## Packaging

The New Zealand models were issued in 6 packs with an outer card sleeve which lists the six models contained inside as well as featuring the Sargood's script and squirrel logo. The individual cars came in red and yellow boxes which all featured drawings of the Rolls Royce Silver Cloud with the model inside only identifiable by the name printed on the end flaps.

These attractive red and yellow boxes were manufactured in New Zealand by the 'United Empire Box Company Limited' and carry a small 'United Empire' logo on the inner end flap. They are a



Fitment of the suspension strip appears to have been problematic on New Zealand models resulting in four dents to the centre of the baseplate. If the strip came loose then the wheels would rise up into the body causing the car to sit on its baseplate (as seen here on the Dodge and rear axle of the Rambler). This rendered the model useless as a toy.



direct copy of Lone Star's box for the Rolls Royce but are slightly bigger in order to accommodate the larger American cars. Presumably it was deemed not to be worth the effort of designing and printing six different individual boxes as Lone Star had done back in England, or maybe Lone Star only supplied an example of the Rolls-Royce box for United Empire to copy. At a quick glance the New Zealand produced box and Lone Star's Rolls-Royce box look identical but under closer inspection it's apparent that

At a quick glance these two boxes look identical. However, the slightly larger version (top) is a copy manufactured in New Zealand by 'United Empire Box Co.' and used for all the New Zealand produced cars.

The 'United Empire' logo from the inner flap of the box.



this is not the case. As well as being different sizes, all the font and spacing is completely different and tellingly the 'United Empire' boxes are missing 'Made and printed in England'.

### Final Roadmasters

It appears the arrangement to produce Roadmaster cars in New Zealand was limited to the above six models and took place in the early 1960s. Back in the UK production continued with the Roadmasters range expanding to 13 models. At the same time as the new models were introduced the whole range was updated with grey plastic



A Sargoods branded outer box containing the six different models which were produced in New Zealand.

The final 13 Roadmaster cars produced in England by Lone Star. The models on the back row utilised existing castings, the exception being the attractive Citroen DS which was the last model to be added to the range.



trim, new plastic wheels and the addition of moulded plastic interiors. Unfortunately, the new wheels were usually an unrealistic white colour, presumably trying to imitate the 'white wall' tyres of the era. Five of the 'new' models made use of existing castings to give; a police car (Dodge), fire chief car and army staff car (Corvaire), and civilian and military ambulances (Rambler). Additionally, 'Feuerwehr' and 'Polizei' versions were once again issued for the German market. The final new Roadmaster was an attractive model (ignoring the unrealistic white wheels) of the stylish and futuristic Citroen DS.

The updated Roadmasters now came

in new yellow window boxes although clear plastic cartons (copied from those used by Norev) and carded packaging were also available for a time. The range disappeared in the late 1960s with Lone Star focusing its toy car production on the new Impy Super Cars followed by the hi-speed Flyers.

### Further Kiwi Lone Stars

Excitingly Lone Star's venture into New Zealand wasn't limited to its Roadmaster cars. Models from Lone Star's 'Modern Army Series' and 'Roadmaster Lorries' ranges were also produced in New Zealand. This ap-

pears to be a similar arrangement with Sargoods importing unfinished castings for painting, assembling and packaging in New Zealand. Eight models were selected from the above two ranges and included the Armoured Car, Land Rover, Dodge truck and Austin prime mover. The models were marketed by Sargoods under its 'Target Toys' banner with the individual model packaging carrying the title 'Lone Star Transport Range'. Like the cars the colour schemes were similar to those produced by Lone Star although again there are some unusual and rare New Zealand variations to watch out for.

## Conclusion

Credit is due to Lone Star which for a 'second tier' toy manufacture certainly had some ambitious plans and with flexibility and drive were able to successfully penetrate new markets around the globe. The Roadmasters cars were accurate models and some of Lone Star's finest which, at the time of their introduction, might well have caused some concern at Dinky Toys and Corgi. Today the Roadmasters cars are desirable models which display well alongside contemporary offerings from the bigger manufacturers. The unique New Zealand models add an extra dimension for collectors with some rare and attractive variants to look out for.



This attractive pair are finished in completely different colour schemes unique to the New Zealand factory. Today both are difficult to find.



Excitingly, models from Lone Star's 'Modern Army Series' and 'Roadmaster Lorries' ranges were also produced in New Zealand again resulting in some unique and rare colour schemes. These Lone Star models appeared in a Sargoods catalogue (along with some field guns from rival manufacturer Britains) under it's 'Target Toys' brand. The locally produced very basic packaging simply listed the Lone Star models as the 'Lone Star Transport Range'.

