

Lone Star's Fabulous Fodens

This year marks sixty years since Foden unveiled its revolutionary 'S24' tilt-cab lorry. James Robertshaw takes a look at Lone Star's attractive models including several rare and previously undocumented versions.



Lone Star's trio of Impy Fodens. The same cab/chassis was used to give tipper, tanker and box-body versions. Several colour combinations were produced but these are the most common.

Introduction

The 1950s and 60s were the golden age of road haulage with the mighty 8-wheel lorry the undisputed king of the road. This was a time when iconic British lorry manufacturers dominated the highways and byways, with their legendary names and logos proudly emblazoned across radiators and grilles. One of the biggest names of all was Foden who in the 50s and 60s were producing some truly revolutionary and stylish commercial vehicles. Not surprisingly many toy manufacturers of the era reproduced these impressive lorries with Dinky, Matchbox, Morestone and Benbros all adding several different 8-wheel Fodens to their ranges.

Lorry design really took off at Foden when, in 1958, it introduced its 'S21' cab. This revolutionary cab design earned it the nicknames 'Spaceship' and 'Sputnik' when reviewed by the motoring press. The groundbreaking futuristic cab was made possible due to an innovative new manufacturing material; Glass Reinforced Plastic or 'GRP'. Four years later this light weight material gave rise (literally!) to another major advancement from Foden, the first mass produced tilting cab. With its sweeping lines and distinctive curved front Foden's new S24 cab looked both ultra-modern and elegant. The forward tilting action gave much better engine access

for servicing and maintenance and has been a feature on most trucks ever since.



Foden's stylish new 'S24' tilt-cab is seen attracting the limelight at the 1962 Earls Court Commercial Vehicle Show.

Lone Star Lorries

Lone Star's first toy vehicles appeared in the late 1950s with the introduction of a series of seven 'Road-Masters' cars followed by the popular 'Modern Army

Series'. The cars were acceptable scale models although Lone Star's first attempt at a lorry, for the 'Modern Army Series', was a much less convincing effort. Lone Star weren't actually responsible for the design as it was a blatant copy of a Dodge truck produced by American toy manufacturer 'Pyro Plastics'. Later the Dodge went on to appear in Lone Star's 'Roadmaster Lorries' range along with an equally primitive looking bonneted Austin WE prime mover. Both lorries stayed in production well into the 1970s but were not comparable to the much more realistic scale models being produced by rivals; Matchbox, Corgi and Dinky Toys. If Lone Star was to make a serious attempt at gaining a share of the market, then a much-improved range of toy vehicles would be needed.

First announced in 1965 Lone Star's answer was the 'Impy Super Cars' which promised to be realistic scale models with 'real-car features' and 'accurate details'. The Impys launched early the following year initially with 8 different cars and a programme to add a new model every month. The proposed future models were listed on the Impy packaging and tantalisingly included; 'No.24 Foden Truck', 'No.26 Foden Bulk Sugar Transporter', plus; 'No.28 Cement Mixer Truck'.

Enough to excite any Foden fan! However as was normally the case with Lone Star not everything went to plan!



'The Greatest Impy Yet!' proclaims this July 1967 advert and any Foden fan would certainly agree! Note the non-standard pre-production style of tipper body.

No.24 Impy Foden Open Truck

It's no real surprise that Lone Star opted to base its new lorries on the iconic 8-wheel Foden. Several manufacturers had done the same and closest rivals Matchbox already had two attractive 8-wheel Foden lorries in its 1-75 Series. 'No.10 Sugar Container Truck' featured Foden's S20 cab whilst 'No.17 (Hoveringham) Tipper' had the futuristic S21 "Sputnik" cab.

Lone Star were obviously keen to go one better so opted for the latest design from Foden, the S24 with its revolutionary tilting-cab. The tilt-cab also gave a cutting-edge feature which Lone Star could easily incorporate on its model. Frustratingly,



The Impy Foden Open Truck was available with 3 main body colours. Unfortunately, the realistic grey finish is harder to find than the garish orange. Stickers were never applied to this model despite the flat panels on the body sides.



This fascinating pre-production model has several casting differences to the standard version. Most noticeable are the completely different style of tipper body and fitment of a spare wheel which was omitted from the production model.

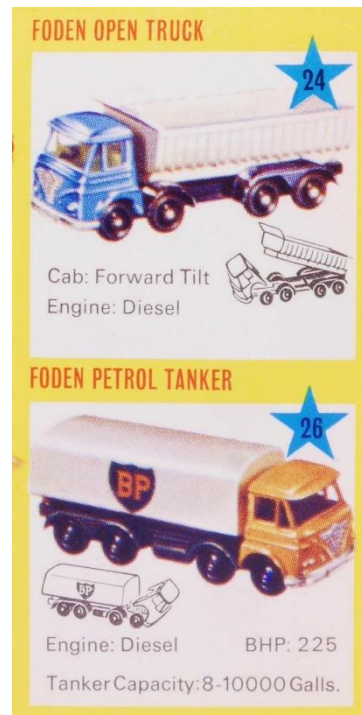
despite being first to model Britain's first tilt-cab lorry, Matchbox had already showcased this feature by fitting a tilting cab to its Bedford TK tanker! That's some rather brazen artistic licence from Matchbox as Bedford TK cabs did not tilt!

Lone Star's first Foden model was a tipper which was given the vague title of 'Open Truck'. Finally appearing in the summer of 1967, it was very appropriately numbered No.24 (matching Foden's designation) and was the first proper commercial in the Impy range. Despite the larger size of the Foden tipper Lone Star maintained the same price point as the

Impy cars but in doing so had to cut back on the special features as well as using plastic rather than diecast metal for the large tipping body. With a plastic body and metal cab Lone Star's model was actually the reverse of the full-sized plastic-cabbed, steel bodied Foden S24 tippers! The lack of features such as jewelled headlights and opening cab doors actually resulted in a much neater and realistic looking model. Lone Star proudly marketed its new Foden as 'The greatest Impy yet!' It's undoubtedly one of the most accurate and attractive models in the range so it's hard to disagree!

Pre-Production model

Shown here with a light blue cab is what appears to be a pre-production version of the No.24 Foden Open Truck. Interestingly there are several casting differences, the most noticeable being the spare wheel fitted to the chassis and the plastic tipper body which is a completely different design to the one issued. Several of Lone Star's early illustrations are based on this pre-production design. A July 1967 Meccano Magazine advert (shown), features this same style of



Lone Star's Impy models were well received in America with a number of importers opting to use their own branding and packaging as seen here.



These attractive drawings featured in an Impy sales leaflet dated May 1967. The tanker's design and livery can't have been finalised yet so instead Lone Star's artist cheekily copied them from Matchbox's Bedford BP tanker!



A selection of Impy Mobil tankers pose in front of a Mobil Service Station. Although a Service Station was shown in Lone Star's 1968 trade catalogue it is not believed to have been issued so this version from Blackpool based Casdon Toys makes for an appropriate alternative.

tipper body whilst Lone Star's 1967 trade catalogue shows the model with the spare wheel. Other differences include the silver trim which is hand painted and the latch to hold the tilting cab in place has not yet been cast onto the rear of the cab. This fascinating model gives a unique insight into the development of Lone Star's first Foden model.

Truck' so it would appear Lone Star had followed suit. If you want further evidence that Lone Star were keeping a keen eye on rivals Matchbox then the first drawing of this Impy tanker (in a sales leaflet) shows it with a tanker body and livery directly copied from Matchbox's latest Bedford BP tanker!

The issued model featured a stylish plastic tanker body which was Lone Star's own design. The tanker cab was usually dark blue but other shades of blue and green were used on the Impy version although the plastic body seems to have only come in red with 'Mobil' labels.

No.26 Impy Foden Tanker

Lone Star's second Foden appeared later on in 1967 as 'No.26 Foden Tanker'. This was a change from the 'Bulk Sugar Transporter' which appeared in Lone Star's earlier model listings.

By now Matchbox had dropped its similar Foden 'No.10 Sugar Container



Lone Star got one over on rivals Matchbox by being first to produce a model of the stylish Foden S24. The Matchbox version arrived a year later but, with a single casting for both the cab and bulky donkey engine, it lacks the finesse of Lone Star's neater casting.

No.29 Impy Express Freight Truck

It wasn't until over a year later that another adaptation of the Foden emerged. From the start a 'Cement Mixer Truck' had appeared in listings as No.28, then later on as No.29. Sadly it never materialised nor did a 'Horse Box' or 'Articulated Flat Truck' which both also made optimistic appearances in Lone Star's model listings!



The Lucas Batteries model started out as a promotional give-away. It is seen here alongside an array of later 'Express Freight' versions which initially made use of surplus 'Lucas' dark green components.

The Cement Mixer may well have been dropped as by now Matchbox had also modelled the Foden S24, as an 8-wheel concrete mixer. This would have therefore been similar to Lone Star's proposed model. Whilst the Matchbox version is a relatively accurate model it looks toy-like by comparison and did not feature the all-important tilting cab.

Lone Star's third Foden actually appeared as a promotional item for Lucas, a British automotive parts manufacturer. It is believed to have been produced ahead of the October 1968 Earls Court Motor Show where the model was used by Lucas as a promotional giveaway. This Foden featured a new plastic box-body depicting canvas curtains on each side. The model was finished in Lucas's smart, if a little uninspiring, all over dark green livery complete with 'Lucas Batteries' labels. The model must have been a success for Lucas as they went on to commission other



This rare 'Shell' version gave a brief interruption to the 8-year run of 'Mobil' tankers.

promotional model lorries from Dinky Toys in the 1970s and Corgi in the 1980s. The Lucas model was quickly added to the main Impy range becoming No.29 though soon afterwards a new brighter livery was introduced complete with generic 'Express Freight' labels which continued as the standard issue. This usually has a dark blue cab and grey plastic body although early issues used up surplus stocks of the dark green Lucas bodies.

Hi-Speed Commercials

In 1969 Lone Star launched their hi-speed 'Flyers' cars in response to Mattel's hugely popular Hot Wheels. The existing Impy cars were

successfully modified to take new low-friction race wheels and given attractive lustre paint finishes complete with contrasting racing stripes. Meanwhile the trio of Fodens along with the other Impy commercials were left unchanged and now appeared separately in trade catalogues as 'Impy Super Car Commercials'. Surprisingly three years passed before, in late 1971, the commercials received some long overdue attention. The three Fodens all received hi-speed wheels and excitingly two new lorries were announced: a Leyland and another Foden this time based on the unusual S50 half-cab. Both the new cabs made use of the existing 8-wheel Foden chassis which was altered to have 'Foden Tilt Cab' removed from the base. (More on these



In 1972 Lone Star finally updated its Impy Fodens with new 'hi-speed' wheels and rebranded them as 'Lone Star Commercials'. Here are several variations of the Commercials Mobil tanker, note differing label styles.



Silver Flyers and Silver Commercials were issued around 1972 for the Japanese market. Two Fodens were included in the range. Note the intriguing 'Diesel Oil' tanker drawing on the box. Just the artist's imagination or does it exist?

interesting lorries to follow in a future article).

Our three Foden S24s were now rebranded simply as 'Commercials' and went on to receive new colour schemes the most noticeable being a Shell version of the No.26 Tanker. A bright yellow plastic body was produced which carried square Shell stickers. The same stickers were also used on the 'Commercials' Ford Transit breakdown truck (see April 2022 issue of Diecast Collector magazine). Today both Shell models are very hard to find so presumably they were only produced for a short period before the Foden reverted to its 'Mobil' livery and the Transit regained 'Esso' stickers. Maybe there was a prohibitive licencing issue with Shell?

Japanese Fodens

Equally as rare are the ranges of silver-plated Flyers and Commercials produced primarily for the Japanese market. 'No.24 Foden Open Truck' and 'No.26 Foden Tanker' featured in the range as 'S24' (matching the Foden cab designation exactly!) and 'S26' respectively with the 'S' referring to the silver finish.



Lone Star's Fodens certainly made it big in Japan. The special labels applied to the Express Freight Truck read 'Japanese Railway Containers'.

The boxes for the 'Silver Commercials' are large enough to accommodate the 'Express Freight' Foden but as far as the author is aware it was never included in the 'Sivers' range. The two Fodens had garish silver-plated cabs and chassis which contrasted with the coloured plastic bodies. The box artwork depicts the tanker with a yellow body and 'Diesel Oil' labels. Most likely this is just an artist's impression but with a yellow body being produced for the Shell version does this exist?

Lone Star did fantastic business in Japan so much so that they issued a special version of the Express Freight truck with 'Japanese Railway Container' labels, printed in Japanese of course! This model, like the rest of the Commercials and Flyers ranges, was available in special Japanese packaging and gift sets produced by the importer Modern Toys.

A Fourth Foden

For most toy collectors the excitement comes from tracking down the documented rare models and colour variations. For Lone Star collectors not only do completely new colour combinations frequently come to light but occasionally even entirely new undocumented models! This exciting final Foden is just such a find.

Unlike its larger rivals it appears Lone Star often lacked the production capacity and resources to have all the required components available at the right time for each model. Consequently, it was common practice for Lone Star to substitute parts (as well as packaging) in order to fulfil orders. This has resulted in a wide range of 'non-standard' colour schemes across Lone Star's ranges but occasionally gives rise to something even more unusual! When Lone Star introduced its new Leyland cab it was paired with a new

flatbed body. However, the existing Foden tilt-cab and chassis could also take the new flatbed body, cue a 'Friday afternoon special!'

With a load of eight plastic girders, the Leyland flatbed was issued as 'No.41 Builders Supply Lorry'. However, a small production run of 'Builders Supply Lorries' left the factory fitted instead with the Foden S24 cab. This cab and body combination results in a very attractive and rare model. It also hints at what other striking model lorries could have easily been

produced had Lone Star given more attention to its Commercials range.

Fond Fairwell Fodens

By 1975 Lone Star's 'Flyers' and 'Commercials' ranges were becoming increasingly expensive to produce making them uncompetitive when compared to the cheaper toy cars now arriving from the Far East. Lone Star hastily introduced a number of cost-cutting measures to both ranges which included replacing most of the 8-wheel trucks with new 6-wheel versions. No.24 Foden Open Truck was replaced by a 6-wheel Foden S50 tipper but the Mobil tanker and Express Freight truck soldiered on. The packaging was revamped too with a new brightly coloured window-box for the 'Commercials' lorries. However, in Lone Star's



Collecting Lone Star is never dull and even after decades of searching it's still possible to find new uncatalogued models. The 'Builders Supply Lorry' was ordinarily fitted with the Leyland cab but this Foden version makes for a very attractive and rare model.



A colourful selection of 'Express Freight' Commercials. Note the attractive artwork on the boxes and the unusual red body on the carded example.

typically ill-thought-out fashion this packaging was too small to accommodate the 'Express Freight' Foden!

Inevitably these last-ditch efforts to save the range weren't enough and the following year the 'Commercials' models were discontinued and replaced by a series of generic lorries which were significantly cheaper to produce. Acknowledging this position, Lone Star marketed these to the trade as 'new low-cost models'.

Final Foden Thoughts

Even without the increasing production costs the time was up for the dated Foden

models. The S24 cab had actually been discontinued by Foden back in 1967, the exact year Lone Star introduced their model of it! Foden's replacement, the S34 still looked very similar but by the mid 1970s Foden had moved on to modern squarer cab designs.

Lone Star squeezed 9 years production from its Fodens resulting in a fantastic array of attractive models for Lone Star and Foden collectors alike. Lone Star didn't always get things right when designing their Impy models so it's worth mentioning again what a superb and accurate model its Foden S24 is. So much so in fact that with some additional detailing it can be made into

a very realistic model indeed. Even today, after a boom in the availability of scale model lorries, old Lone Star Fodens (being 1/76 scale) can still be found displayed on many 'OO' railway layouts. Other than Matchbox's mixer the only other diecast model of a Foden S24 came along much more recently when EFE launched their scale model in 2005. The truth is, despite major advances in technology the EFE model fails to capture the complex curves of the bulbous S24 cab meaning Lone Star's 55-year-old toy still remains the superior model. Five stars to Lone Star!

A final Foden line-up. These colourful examples with their Hi-Speed wheels all come from Lone Star's not very imaginatively named 'Commercials' range.

