

The

Rovex Column

by PAT HAMMOND

Tri-ang in India

When I was researching Volume 2 of the Rovex Story, I contacted Richard Lines about rumours I had heard of Tri-ang tools having gone to India. This proved to be the start of quite an adventure.

My initial clues had been a reference to two train sets for India (known as 'RI.A' and 'RI.B') and some rather crude toy trains that a friend of mine had bought in a shop in India, while holidaying there. The latter carried the trademark 'Crown Railways' and clearly showed Tri-ang influence. I have discovered nothing more about any RI sets but research into Crown Railways has, after several years, at last borne fruit.

S.Kumar & Co. (Pvt) Ltd

Richard had sent me a file of correspondence that Lines Bros. had been having with a Mr. S.Kumar of Calcutta from 1966 until 1970 and this had fired my interest. The correspondence is detailed in Volume 2 of the Rovex Story and showed that Mr Kumar was wanting to acquire tooling from Lines Bros. so that he could manufacture trains in India. I got the distinct impression that the problem was that S.Kumar & Co. had little or no money with which to buy tools and at one stage offered shares in his company in exchange. At the time, Indian importers were finding it hard to obtain licenses to buy in ready made goods from the UK but the import of tools for the purpose of manufacturing within India was encouraged. Subjects discussed included the 1st series stations and lineside features, the 1st series TC passenger cars, the tools for the Primary sets and tools no longer used by the South African factory.

Electronic Toys (India)

Kumar had his head office at 15 Shakespeare Sarani, Calcutta 16 and factories or warehouses at 63/64 Foreshore Road, Shibpur, Howrah, Calcutta and at 13/7 Mathura Road, Faridabad, Delhi but the Kumar end of the story had gone cold in the Spring of 1970 and so research switched to Crown Railways. A train set from India turned up next, which carried the name 'Electronic Toys (India) of Bombay'. The real breakthrough came, however, when I made contact, through the Internet, with Indian businessman and Tri-ang enthusiast Mani Shaunik. I found that he too was fascinated by the Tri-ang Indian link and, armed with all the information I had accumulated so far, he set out to follow the trail.

He established that Mr. Kumar owned a business called the India Hobby Centre which included shops in Delhi, Madras, Bombay and Calcutta and that Crown Railways had been manufactured in Bombay by Electronic Toys (India) which was owned by a Mr. Ashwin K. Mehta. After a while, Mani managed to arrange a meeting with Mr. Mehta and established that Crown Railways were manufactured in India during the years 1982 to 1984. Sometime during 1981 or 1982, Mr. S. Kumar

asked Mr. Mehta to manufacture trains from the Tri-ang tools he was holding in his Jadavpur factory in Calcutta. The tools passed over to Mr. Mehta were those for the R223 suburban coach, R217 Primary open truck, R218 Primary open van, R24 TC coach, R25 TC vista dome car, R130 TC baggage car (also called a luggage van) and R153 saddle tank.

Mr. Kumar would market the train sets through his India Hobby Centre chain of shops and Mr. Mehta would sell the trains through various other hobby and toy shops all over India. The first six items were made directly from the Tri-ang moulds and were done in various colours. They were to be exactly like their original counterparts. Although the saddle tank tools were passed to Mr. Mehta it was not produced in the Crown Railways range, but more of this later.

Crown Railways

To extend the Crown Railways range, several models were tooled up locally and these were largely based on Indian rolling stock. They included a flat wagon, open box wagon, closed box wagon, oil tanker, guards van and a small passenger coach. Electronic Toys (India) made all these tools, and, for the wagons, the chassis was a copy of the Tri-ang one. The bodies of the oil tanker and brake van were a bit over scale and, I understand, this was an experiment to try and replicate Indian broad gauge. Unfortunately, the experiment did not work out as intended.

In the case of the small passenger coach, the bogies, chassis, coach ends and roof were copied from Tri-ang coaches. The sides of these coaches came in a few variants with the window sizes of varying lengths in some coaches.

For a loco to go in the sets, a copy was made of the Hornby R852T Continental 0-4-0 tank engine. This was designed and tooled by Electronic Toys (India) and it was quite a remarkable effort considering the limited resources available locally. However, the X04 motor which had been promised never materialised and the motor they finally used in the loco was a locally made 4.5V DC motor which was hopelessly inadequate for the job it was intended to do. The loco had very little pulling power and eventually Electronic Toys (India) was forced to import 200 units of the SD-35 locomotive from Pemco in Hong Kong to keep the trains going.

The track posed a major problem as they were unable to make pieces with solid rail as no manufacturer was prepared to provide such a small quantity. This led them to make hollow rails from a metal sheet, which was eventually to be their final undoing. The sleepers and the track base were copied from the Tri-ang track with the tools being made locally. The range of track produced in this way included a straight, small radius double curve and both right- and left-hand points.

Electronic Toys (India) also tooled up quite a few accessories for their Crown Railways including a straight station platform, platform sloping ends, platform roof, signal and a fireman and driver (in metal) all of which were copies of existing Tri-ang models. Other accessories, not copied from Tri-ang, were a straight and curved girder bridge sections, incline piers, a streetlight (copied from a Tyco street light) and a catenary post (copied from an old Marklin design).

Two train sets were made. The passenger set consisted of the loco with two passenger coaches, an oval of track, a battery powered controller and a tunnel kit which consisted of two plastic molded tunnel faces and a cardboard cover. There was also a freight set, of which very few were made, which had a loco, flat wagon,

open box wagon, oil tanker, guards van, an oval of track, a battery powered controller and a girder bridge and pier set.

Electronic Toys (India) finally ceased production of Crown Railways in 1984 when the tools for the rails wore out. They again tried to make a solid rail but ran into the same problem of minimum volumes. The ex-Tri-ang tools were returned to Mr S. Kumar in Calcutta and the Crown Railways stock had all cleared by the late 1980s. The tools were eventually sold for scrap.

Leo Chook Chook Train Set

Electronic Toys (India) also made one more train set in the 90s. It was for Leo Toys, a premier Indian toy manufacturing company who marketed it under the name Chook Chook Train Set. This really has no connection with Tri-ang except that it used the body mould for the R153 Primary Series saddle tank. The chassis was a locally designed one with a 0-4-0 wheelbase and no connecting rods and the motor was a 3V DC toy motor powered by two pen cell batteries which were mounted inside the loco. It was rather a strange-looking model being brightly coloured.

The tracks were molded from a single piece of plastic, and the Leo train set had 8 curved and 4 straight sections of this track as well as three passenger coaches that were copied from the Hornby four-wheeled GWR Coach.

Leo Toys stopped marketing these sets years back, but Electronic Toys (India) still makes the odd batch on demand and markets them directly to the toyshops in India.

Crown was a bit too early for its time in India. More so in the context that they had to develop many things on their own, making it an even more uphill task. To be fair

to them, it is difficult for any small organization to completely develop a working train set for marketing in a country where even today the volumes required make it an unviable business proposition. Even today the local Hornby distributor struggles to build up some sort of viable and workable volume in sales. Maybe if Crown had

got the complete dies from Tri-ang for making a complete set with a buy back option, the picture would have been different.

What then of Mr Kumar? A friend of Mani Shaunik managed a brief meeting with the man himself and reported that he is very old and that his memory is not too good. He said that he was a very close personal friend of the owners of Lines Bros. and that the toolings he got were given to him free of cost. He recently sold all his India Hobby Centre shops, and his family is going into another business. He sold his stocks years back and the tooling was sold for scrap. It is difficult to locate anything as he had also sold off his factories and warehouses.

Apparently, he came to the UK in the 1990's to dispose off some old and rare items and was doing this through a person here.

During the interview he was shown photocopies of pages from Volume 2 of the Rovex Story referring to the Indian connection and wanted to know more about the book. He was fascinated by the interest shown in what he produced and has agreed to provide more of the story. And that is the stage we have reached.