

Robert Newson's Favourite Toys

Time for another taste of the 1940's with these two Scammell lorries made by Kembo.

The artic was the first version, a big, solid toy with an overall length of 174 mm. The die-cast cab had a sheet metal base, usually tinfoil but the one in the photo is actually aluminium. A separate casting formed the radiator surround and the two headlights, and was cleverly riveted to the bonnet so that the rivet formed a radiator filler cap. The lower end of the radiator surround was held in place by the base, which was folded around the radiator surround to make a bumper. Early baseplates were plain, and later had KEMBO stamped in large block letters. Under the cab roof was cast MADE IN ENGLAND in a circle.

The trailer also had MADE IN ENGLAND cast underneath (in a straight line) and some had paper labels on each side with KEMBO TRANSPORT printed in red letters.



Wheels were two-piece tinfoil constructions, and the model illustrated has its original blackrubber tyres with fine treads. Each tyre has the letters K.L.- D. moulded on one side, which you might think stood for Kembo Limited, except that there was no such company! More about this below.

The Artic lorry can be found with the cab in red, crimson, maroon, green or light blue, and the lowside trailer in red, light blue, pale green or dark green. No doubt there are other colours too.

The Scammell cab was then modified to make the breakdown lorry version. The major change was to convert the base and wheels to die-cast components. The base had "KEMBO" MADE IN ENGLAND cast on it. The hole for the trailer connector was modified to a keyhole shape to accept a pin cast underneath the breakdown crane. This pin had a lug cast on to it so that the crane could only be removed from the chassis when it was turned 180 degrees from the normal position. The crane had a separate die-cast winder, pulley wheel and hook. Around the base of the crane casting (visible in the illustration) was cast the name KEMBO.

I have seen the breakdown lorry in green or light blue, both with a silver crane. Length was 119 mm.

The trailer die was also modified to make a flatbed version with a headboard. This came with die-cast wheels and was painted green. Unfortunately we do not have one to hand to photograph.

There does not seem to have been a company called Kembo, but the name was registered as a trade mark for metal toys in 1948 by Lovell Bros & Jardine of 60 Priory Road, Southpark, Reigate, Surrey. This firm was a partnership between Gerald, Donald and Kenneth Lovell and Paul Jardine. In the 1948 Reigate and Redhill directory they described themselves as die-casting engineers. By 1951 they had a half page advert in the directory which read as follows:

*Lovell Bros. & Jardine
Die Casting Engineers and Manufacturers
Die Castings in zinc base alloys, aluminium, etc.
Stove enamelling
Specialists in repetition component work and the development,
quantity production and
assembly, etc. of proprietary articles to customers'
own specifications.
Individual attention to all inquiries.
60 Priory Road, Reigate. Telephone: Reigate 3336*

In 1954 plastic moulding was also mentioned.

It seems clear that like so many small die-casters, they found that toy manufacture was a very good way to make money in the years after the war. As better quality toys became more plentiful, the small firms either moved away from toys, or themselves grew in range and quality to compete with the established manufacturers. The Kembo range had only a couple of other items that I know of apart from the Scammell lorries, and probably did not last beyond the zinc ban of 1951-2.

There may also be a connection with Kemlows, who were a similar small die-cast toy maker in north London. The MADE IN ENGLAND lettering on the Scammell cab and trailer was achieved by using a standard die stamp, and the same stamps are found on some models by Kemlows. We know that Kemlows bought in their dies, and the common die stamps would suggest that Kembo used the same toolmaker. Kemlows and Kembo both produced Packard saloons which are similar in style (though far from identical) and John Strange of Kemlows thought he could remember allegations that Kembo were passing off their similar line by using such a similar name.

Copying of designs by small manufacturers was very frequent, but it shows even more lack of imagination by Lovell Bros. & Jardine if they were unable to come up with an original brand name for their toys, and instead simply altered the name Kemlows slightly to Kembo. However, there is no other obvious explanation.

This still leaves the mystery of the K.L.- D. lettering on the Scammell's tyres. Perhaps K.L. was Kenneth Lovell? Probably we will never know. 