

COMMUNIST LEGO

...or, a review of some Chinese copies

LEGO Clone Brands

LEGO is a global brand and has been the subject of many copies over the years. The US company Tyco were the first with 'Super Blocks' in 1984, after LEGO's brick patent expired in 1983. Almost every attempt at cloning has been inferior, mainly due to production costs being lower resulting in inferior grade materials and poor fitting pieces. Set design has generally varied from mediocre to rubbish. However, the recently invigorated factories of China have begun to churn out various LEGO clones. It's worth noting that the potential Chinese domestic market is far, far larger than that of Europe and America combined.

China

There are many Chinese companies making LEGO copies, with new ones starting up at an astounding rate. For example, a brief trawl of the Alibaba and AliExpress export websites finds a list of 50 companies making plastic building blocks, with probably at least half doing LEGO clones. Most if not all are based in Chenghai, the toy capital of China. Some companies appear to source their products from each other and subcontract, so working out exactly who makes which branded kits is not always straightforward. Many are of random quality and there is a lot of chaff and little wheat. The following is an incomplete list of some of the more actively promoted brands. By the time you read this, there will probably be more. It is interesting to note that many Far East websites list the keyword 'Enlighten' above 'LEGO'.

Many of these names have been found from import websites, internet blog sites and video reviews, of which there are many. Some of the reviews are very comprehensive.

Ausini – This brand is manufactured by the Guangdong Ausini company and have a very wide range of products, generally matching the larger Chinese clone companies. Set design seems quite good, with the latest railway kits probably the best available in China. They state they have an in-house design team producing 200 new products per year (although these may include other non-brick items). They appear to be well priced. However, minifig expressions have the mildly disturbing huge-eyed look typical of east Asian tastes, and the skin colour is verging towards the zombie. Interestingly they package in either English or Russian, giving some idea of their perceived markets.

Banbao – This brand (made currently by the Penbu Toy Factory) hit the news in 2012 as its copying was so blatant even the Chinese law courts ruled in LEGO's favour. They now have changed their designs enough to not make them obvious rip-offs, and have mostly moved into themes where LEGO do not produce sets. New kits include a large 1400-piece Long March 2F space rocket. They also market under the **BaBlock** brand name.

BELA – Brand of a currently unknown manufacturer, possibly also selling under the name **Jilebao**. They are probably hiding for a reason. Produces blatant copies of Ninjago, Bionicle and Hero Factory, Technic and (recently) Chima sets. Have also been copying the Cars sets under the "Let's Go!" theme. Seem to be goading legal action.

Blocko – The brand name of the **Coco** Toy Company based in Nanjing, China. Their product range concentrates on naval vessels (military and historic), farm and town, and fantasy castle themes. The HUMVEE sets (both military and civilian) look particularly impressive.

Blocko – The brand name of the **Kimboli** Toy Company (based in China), producing sets mainly for Asia and the US. The apparently have 43 design patents listed in China. Their product range covers all types of Duplo and LEGOland themes and also has military sets. The minifigs are of a slightly different design with wider torsos.

Brick – A rather awful cheap copy brand producing small kits that appeared in the US a few years ago, but may have been rebranded to **IQ Block** after a few legal words (and damning website reviews).

CB Toys – Currently unknown manufacturer. Makes mediocre blatant copies of Legends of Chima minifigs.

Chaobao – Currently unknown manufacturer. Makes copies of Tamiya model and radio control sets, but also includes a range of LEGO clones.

Chaug Li – Currently unknown manufacturer. Relatively good quality copy brand making small city-type sets.

Coco – See **Blocko**.

COGO and **Little White Dragon** – Manufactured by the **Loongon** Animation & Toys Industrial Company Ltd. This company proudly states their product is compatible with LEGO and even shows off pictures of their factory machinery. Their range includes all LEGO sizes (Quatro, Duplo etc.) and standard brick sets include pirate ships. They originally used their own name, but now market under both the COGO and the Little White Dragon brands and oddly seem to overlap some themes. Their products apparently meet European and American standards. COGO cheekily have 'Expert to Enlighten Children' written on the boxes. Loongon make sets of the famous Chinese boy pig hero 'GG Bond' and have (apparently) recently picked up the rights to produce 'Monkey King' kits - the 2010 52-episode cartoon version of 'Monkey'.

COKO Bricks – Clone brand producing mainly Duplo-type sets. They have an elephant logo and are available in Asia and Australia.

Concord Toys – See **Enlighten**.

Decool – Bizarrely-named brand that specialises in Technic-based clones, including the supercar sets and Hero Factory robots.

Dr Luck – See **Ligao**.

Enlighten – The trade name of the Zhongyue Industry Company that makes many blatant LEGO copies and is *the* major brand in China. Currently they market under the name Concord Toys. They make a full range of LEGO themes, and also a lot of military sets with camouflage patterned bricks (although they can be a rather startling green colour). Some more recent sets have begun to diverge from duplicates, although mostly the kit design is not as good as LEGO and is rather blocky. They sell their non-motorised train sets as separate kits, so whole rakes of trucks and carriages can be purchased. Enlighten minifigs are direct copies of LEGO. Rather more unique is their kit of a worryingly realistic full scale working handgun that fires 3x1 technic rods (set '407' is *well* worth a web search).

Fuh Yeah – See **IQ Blocks**.

Funny Toys – See **Peizhi**.

GX Toys – See **Weagel**.

Hawk Blocks – Cheap copy brand available briefly in the US. Not only was it badly made, it was a different size to all of the other clone brands. Managed to score 0/10 on a review site.

HELO – See **Zephyr Knight**.

Intelligence Bricks – Small designer-type sets found in the US, with the maker name **Xingda**. Bad Chinglish but original designs and quality found to be quite good.

Intelligence Toys – See **Xin Qi Le**.

IQ Block – Used by Block Tech as a supplier. Different under-brick locking method that is almost incompatible with LEGO. Probably rebranded from **Brick**, judging by the logos and lack of quality.

IQ Blocks – Not to be confused with IQ Block, these are produced by the **Fuh Yeah** company and look to be Duplo size. They may or may not be compatible.

Jilebao – See **BELA**.

Jubilux – This company market themselves under both the elephant logo Jubilux, and the four-plated **Woma** registered in Hong Kong. As with other brands they produce a variety of themes, some rather closely modelled on genuine LEGO (such as the pirate ships). They make their own Army range and a **very** pink princess castle theme. The 'Space Team' logo looks suspiciously Lucasfilm, although the kits themselves appear to be home designed. Woma and Jubilux are exported to many countries and can be found occasionally in the UK. The minifigs are similar in shape and size to LEGO but have moulded knees and weird heads.

Kazi – The Kaiyu Toys Company is a rival to Enlighten, with a full range of LEGO clones branded Kazi. Their recent kits look to have had some thought put into them, although earlier copy genuine LEGO or are fairly basic. Kazi appear to compete with Enlighten on cost, with inevitable quality issues. Kazi is also spelt 'KaiZhi', although for the UK, Kazi are probably not fully aware of brand-name irony.

Kimboli – See **Blocko** (not the Coco name).

LELE – Clone brand copying Ninjago, Bionicle, Ninja Turtles minifig sets.

Leyi – a new company with another mildly amusing name, made by the Shantou **Megafun** Toys Industrial Ltd. Their mottos include 'Products can be copied but not the value', and 'We highly value honesty'. Their stated selling point appears to be producing stuff that doesn't harm the environment or children (insinuating that their Chinese rivals do). Blog sites suggest quality is actually at Kazi level. A brief browse of their website shows a vast array of their own kits (including a 2000-piece aircraft carrier) but also many blatant copies of LEGO sets, including Star Wars and even using the LEGO and Duplo names on the boxes. Either none of their marketing guys have ever been to law school, or they all got 1sts and are itching for a flight. With everyone.

Ligao – Another copy brand with a somewhat amusing name, made by the **Wange Toys** Industrial Company. Occasionally branded as **Riddle Bricks**, the Wange name, or used as a sub-contractor, they have a wide product range which includes town vehicles and 1000-piece architecture kits such as Big Ben and Tower Bridge. They seem to be a low-cost brand. Interestingly, their safety compliance documentation is missing off the export websites... Wange Toys have recently launched '**Dr Luck**' that seem to copy Sluban.

Lingnan – Brand of the Lingnan Toys Co. Ltd, who also market **Zhiling**. Their website states 'It is all about imagination', which is probably the only sensible translation of any of the clone brands. Products are the typical range of town, boat, and pirate themes. Minifigs appear to have yellow heads and hands.

Little White Dragon – See **COGO**.

Loongon – See **COGO**.

LOZ – brand name made by ZhenFeng Science and Educational Toys, and one of UK importer Block Tech's suppliers. According to their website they were formed in 1998 to make plastic toys, building blocks and baby potties (which they still do). Many LOZ sets are very blocky and reminiscent of early 1980s LEGO. Some sets adopt a different size to standard LEGO with no round pieces and very odd-looking minifigs. LOZ Toys also have the brand **Micro Blocks** which are mainly architecture sets. LOZ appear to be aiming at the Chinese domestic market with 'only' \$10m in exports. Many older small LOZ-based Block Tech sets are sold in the UK by discount stores such as Poundland and JJB Sports. It would appear that LOZ have been superseded by PeiZhi and IQ Block in the Block Tech empire.

Megafun – See **Leyi**.

Micro Blocks – See **LOZ**.

OK – Basic building sets available in the far East

Pengcheng – See **Plastic Toy**.

PeiZhi – Another brand marketed by Block Tech. Their kits are either direct copies of LEGO or strange blocky creations reminiscent of those made with the leftover bits at your gran's in the 1970s. PeiZhi have also been marketed as '**Funny Toys**' to the mild amusement of some of their US customers. They are one of those brands that have 'contents may differ from artwork' on the boxes which doesn't exactly instil confidence.

Plastic Toy – made by the **Pengcheng** Toy Co. Ltd, who are subcontracted by others (such as Loongon). Various kits are shown on their website with the box logos blurred out. One kit of interest is the Loongon brand military sand-coloured MLRS with sandbags. The minifigs look fairly similar to those used by Best-Lock.

Pioneer Blocks – LEGO Basic clone sets of appalling quality, probably aimed at the US and Canadian market as the boxes have English and French writing.

Qiao Le Tong – A brand producing town-style sets which appear to have unique designs and some special vehicle pieces.

Qigao – This brand is only available in Asia and looks to be a close copy of Enlighten.

Riddle Bricks – See **Ligao**.

Sluban – This company mainly copies old South Korean **Oxford Toys** kits (a copy of a copy?) complete with the slightly odd-looking minifigs. They have a Europe-based export company based in the Netherlands with an easy-to-use mail-order website – although postage is a bit steep. They have many military kits which include a dark olive green colour, various town-based sets, and have Duplo clones. Some older sets appear rather blocky, but the website looks very professional and they even display building instructions. They have recently brought out new themes including train sets, which have black plastic tracks with half the curvature of the standard LEGO track (although they don't look directly compatible). Another new subject is 'Redcliff', a mediaeval Chinese castle theme suited to their domestic market. Best giggle come from the Navy submarine kit, which is translated simply as 'Nuke'. A more oddball Sluban theme is skiing. Is this big in China?

Star Diamond – Strangely-named brand made by the Lianhuan Toys & Crafts Company which started up in 1994. Has a relatively wide range of products and again seems to be aiming for Enlighten's market in China. They have their own kit designs, with extremely similar instructions to LEGO and identical minifigs. They cryptically have the phrase 'About Sluban' under their Culture page, but there is no other obvious link to this company and as they seem to be in direct competition it seems unlikely they are the same. Blog sites suggest excellent quality but high prices. Star Diamond kits are not directly imported to the UK.

SY – Produce utter rip-offs of LEGO Friends, Super Heroes, and Star Wars minifigs, using the same artwork, names and designs. They have cheekily put a trademark next to the Friends writing. Until the lawyers call.

Wange Toys – See **Ligao**.

Weagel – Also known as **GX Toys** and manufactured by the **ZhiYing** Toy Factory. They appear to have a wide list of products, but the website is currently inaccessible so may have been closed down or rebranded.

Wit Toys – These creator-type clones also have **Bela** on the box, but it is not obvious whether they are the same **BELA** copying modern Chima minifigs or a completely different company. Set 8879 has the phrases 'Fully exert your inagination' and 'Amazing visual convulsion' on the front. Only seen on Russian websites. Not sure the wording would make anyone who spoke English buy it.

Woma – See **Jubilux**.

Xingda – See **Intelligence Bricks**.

Xin Qi Le – Sometimes abbreviated to **XQL**. A cheap copy brand producing **Intelligence Toys** a few years ago. Have probably been rebranded now, judging by the viperous nature of the reviews on internet blog sites. They may be responsible for, or be the same as, the much maligned **Zephyr Knight**, as the packaging and products look very similar.

XQL – See **Xin Qi Le**.

Zephyr Knight – Awful cheap copy brand found a few years ago in the US. May be related to **Xin Qi Le** and **Intelligence Toys**. The bricks have **HELO** printed on the studs.

Zhiling – See **Lingnan**.

Zhiying – See **Weagel**.

ROW

For balance, there are various **non-Chinese** companies producing LEGO-type products, although almost all are probably made in China anyway.

Airfix QuickBuild – This new venture will see LEGO-style brick aircraft manufactured in the UK. This produces a quandary – should we be proud of ripping off the Danish brick? Quality should hopefully be very good.

Best-Lock and **Cobi** – Best-Lock were originally a joint UK and German company (although registered in Hong Kong), and merged with the Polish-based Cobi a few years ago. Cobi produce a lot of military sets and have, for example, produce McLaren, Jeep and Boeing-licensed models. Cobi also are the source for the UK-based **Character Building** Toys, who produce various themed kits including UK Armed Forces and Scooby Doo – albeit with completely different minifigs vaguely similar to LEGO Jack Stone. **Chad Valley** also use Cobi-sourced bricks for their own range. Best-Lock mainly source from China, are the cheaper end of the range, and tend to sell in the US. Cobi used to be made in Poland, but have switched mainly to Chinese manufacture. Best-Lock are licensed to produce military kits by the US Army, and recently acquired the rights to produce Stargate SG-1 and Terminator branded kits and are selling themed minifig sets in a similar way to Mega Bloks. Wilkinson have recently launched their **Blox** range which are old Best-Lock kits.

Blox – See **Best-Lock**.

Brik Tek – French clone brand, unknown supplier.

BTR – Produced some GI-Joe themed kits about 10 years ago. Minifigs were like small versions of Action Man.

By The Pound – Canadian brand made by Northern Technology. Sold as basic bricks in big buckets in the US.

Byggis – Swedish copy brand that has produced Super Mario, Flintstones and Jurassic Park themed minifigs and sets. Also may be related to the **Kloss** brand.

C3 Construction – US brand of loosely similar LEGO clone bricks who produce the Minimates figures.

Chad Valley – See **Best-Lock**.

Character Building – See **Best-Lock**.

Cheva – This is the brand name of the Czech manufacturer Chemoplast BEC. Products are vaguely similar to LEGO, but have different underbrick grab designs and straight-armed minifigs.

Cobi – See **Best-Lock**.

Construblock – A fairly new Spanish brand, originally appearing to use old Oxford Toys sets but branching out by having more unique minifigs similar to Jack Stone.

Cra-Z-Art – US brand of LaRose Industries LLC based in New Jersey, making the **LiteBrix** range of clear LEGO-type sets with... lights.

Famoclick – Spanish re-branded **Cobi** products.

Ideal – Another South Korean company, formed by some ex-Oxford Toys employees.

Kloss – Swedish copy, may be related to **Byggis**.

Kre-O – See **Oxford Toys**.

LiteBrix – See **Cra-Z-Art**.

Mega Bloks – now known as Mega, this Canadian-based company has been churning out their own bricks for years. They have licence agreements to make Halo, World of Warcraft, Need for Speed, Moshi Monsters, Hello Kitty, and Smurf branded sets (no, really). Improved over earlier products, in much the same way as toothache is over a migraine. Or am I being too harsh? Mega Bloks are made in China.

Ministeck – German company selling LEGO clones, most probably sourcing from **Jubilux-Woma** in China. A variety of themes, with the most interesting their range of train kits. They sell black railway track with curves double the radius of LEGO tracks. The minifigs appear to have yellow heads and hands.

Oxford Toys – This company is South Korean and has produced a lot of town and military stuff in the past. They trade under both the Oxford Toys and the **Kre-O** name. After being bought out by Hasbro they now make Transformer sets and have the rebooted Star Trek franchise. Their new Kre-O minifigs are distinctly different from LEGO minifigs. The standard kits are however very similar, and even have advertising with moving minifigs in the same way as LEGO.

PEBE – The original Communist LEGO, made in East Germany from 1955 until about 1990. Slight different underbrick locking method, but compatible.

Rik et Rok – French LEGO type sets with different minifigs vaguely similar to Playmobile figures. Most sets are themed around town and rescue sets.

Super Blocks – See **Tyco**.

Topaz – French brand looking very similar to the Czech-based **Cheva** with straight-armed minifigs.

Tyco – The first LEGO cloner with **Super Blocks**, now long since ceased trading.

Reviews

In the interests of The Future Of LEGO I acquired some of the Chinese sets to see how the Eastern Block was evolving. These hooky bricks and minifigs are now being held in an immigration centre until genuine reasons for citizenship or deportation can be established, with the perimeter policed by 4000 LEGO Clone Trooper minifigs and a Star Destroyer. Or maybe they've been put in a box. If notified in advance I can bring examples to shows for curious Brickishers. To be honest, most of the set purchases were made to acquire minifig zombies, and here many of the clone sets came up trumps. Maybe the skin colour is a cultural thing. Most of the minifigs are now in the deportation buses headed for the immigration centre for processing.

The following are reviews of some of the kits. Obviously, the scoring rules are based on a large statistical sampling exercise with a comprehensive auditable peer review process - or maybe I made up the numbers in the pub. Anyway, all comments are of the opinion of the occasionally sarcastic reviewer only, and do not represent Brickish, LEGO, or anyone else alive or dead, real or fictitious, etc. etc. Well, not officially, anyway. Results are colour coded, and are split into the categories :

Quality	- how well the bricks are made, including manufacturing defects;
Value	- the overall cost of the set compared to what is in the box;
Fit	- the 'grab' of the bricks against one another and to real LEGO;
Compatibility	- how well the parts would combine with real LEGO if ever given the chance (shudder);
Minifig	- the comparison of a minifig with a genuine LEGO minifig;
Design	- the overall skill and interest of the kit;
Instructions	- the size, colour, layout and helpfulness of the supplied instructions;
Total	- addition of all the above, with quality, fit and minifig being scored twice.

Many more reviews of clone sets can be found on various dedicated blog sites all over the internet. However, hands-on experience and scoring from a British point of view may be more relevant to the reader. The following is recommended as a helpful guide if thinking of purchasing kits of the clone bricks:

Explanation of colours, scoring and consequence:

Green: 90%-100%+: *no real problems at all. Be happy and build on. Have cup of tea, relax, and survey your masterpiece.*

Light green: 70%-89%: *some minor issues, but generally OK. Get mildly irritated. Have a cup of tea to steady nerves. Relax, it'll be fine from a distance.*

Yellow: 50%-69%: *some problems. Get annoyed. Have a cup of vodka to steady nerves. It'll probably be OK from a distance in poor light with some superglue and if no-one touches it. And it's in a display cabinet. Probably.*

Orange: 30%-49%: *some serious problems. Get angry. Tea, vodka and therapeutic massage by supermodel do not help to steady nerves. It looks bad, even in the dark. Take set back to the shop or attack it with a hammer.*

Red: 0-29%: *Show-stopping problems. Get apoplectic. Prescription medicine does not help to steady nerves. Wonder how the miserly little set ever got out of the factory. Send multiple letters of complaint to shop, company, local MP, Chinese government, Ban Ki-Moon, and Daily Mail. Use home shredder for purposes unforeseen. Burn plastic shreds whilst cackling insanely. Jump up and down on ashes, apologise to neighbours and police officers, sweep up using dustpan and brush, and deposit into tiny urn. Have cup of tea, relax, and survey your masterpiece.*



Mega Bloks

One day I bought a Smurf Mega Bloks kit. Let's get things straight. I have never liked Mega Bloks, and I am not keen on the Smurfs. However, the thought of a diorama involving a LEGO lawnmower and a hapless tubby blue Belgian unable to outrun it was too great - even after taking set number 10770 to the checkout at Toys-R-Us and saying "How much?". £6.99 for 21 pieces is not good value. Not for LEGO, and certainly not for Mega Bloks. Bad start.

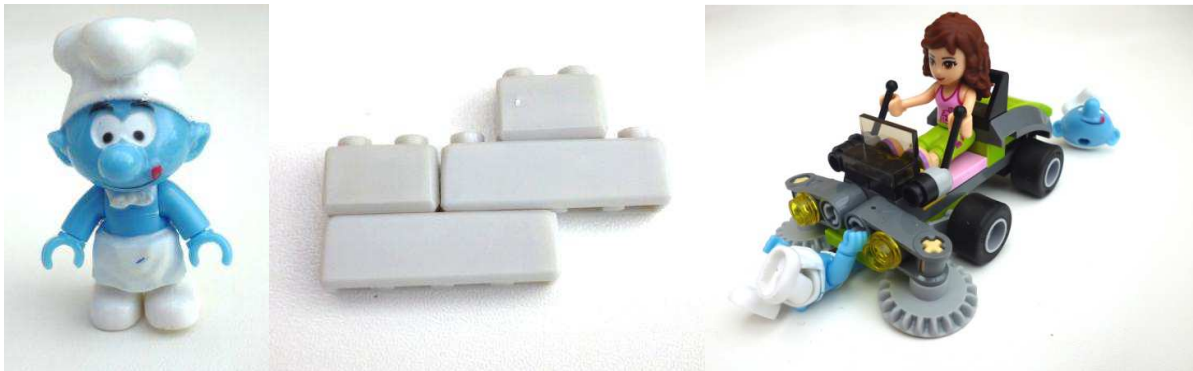
The kit itself was a plastic bubble pack with the character and a small landscape to play with. In effect, this range was a minifig collection exercise which could be joined with the bigger Smurf sets. The main cost of the set, and the main effort expended, was the figure. Here, Mega Bloks had actually done well. Although the little minifig was only purchased with destruction in mind, it was actually very well made and try as I might I could not fault it over a LEGO equivalent. The chef's apron made it hard to pose the legs, and the head had a hexagonal fit so it did not move in angles other than 60°. The torso swivelled around the hips (an improvement over Friends). Overall it felt very good quality. Even though it was a Smurf.



Mega Bloks Baker Smurf kit as bought. This is all you get for £6.99? I don't think this guy would win Masterchef. And I really hate Smurfs.

The Bloks were another matter entirely. The fit was not too bad, with about the right amount of grab, but the feel and quality was still poor, with sprue marks, mismatched colours and bad overall look. The clips and minifig hands did at least hold the tools. Colours were not the same as LEGO and so it would be hard to mix parts up without being obvious. This was a good thing.

The instructions were well laid out and used photos of the actual bricks with marks showing where to put the new pieces. They were, however, almost screwed up inside the container which spoiled the effect. They did not score 100% as the first word was 'color'; I thought the Canadians had more culture than that. Reading through the text, apparently the Italian for Smurfs is "I Puffi". I suppose that's interesting. Chinese for Smurfs is Lan Jing Ling. It would appear there are no Chinese copies of The Smurfs. I suppose that's not surprising.



Minifig is very good, even for a Smurf. The bricks are rubbish. LEGO should not worry. The Smurf should. Olivia says, "This IS worth £6.99".

In summary, this kit was way too expensive for a few poorly made bricks and an OK character minifig. Mega Bloks may have changed their marketing strategy and moved into areas LEGO do not occupy, but based on this I would never get Mega Bloks again, unless much cheaper. And they had something I wanted. Which they don't. Mega Bloks seem to think they can charge as much as LEGO for a similar sized product. That is a risky strategy indeed.

Mega Bloks are as rubbish quality as ever but now more expensive. The surprisingly high overall score of 74% is the benchmark for all Chinese clones to beat.

Scores	Baker Smurf
Quality*	60
Value	40
Fit*	70
Compatibility	70
Minifig*	100
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	74



Enlighten

Two Enlighten railway sets (a UK diesel in early 1960s colours and a steam-era 1st class carriage) were purchased from a retailer in Hong Kong. These were airmailed without the boxes to save on cost. Purchase price (including post) was about £12 each. These kits were not obvious copies of LEGO sets, as were most of the other Enlighten railway kits. Both sets made much use of dark green, cream, and pearl light grey colours. The carriage had unique printed designs on the windows and doors. The carriage set came with 3 minifigs, the diesel 2.

Enlighten bricks were not the same quality as LEGO and did not pass the 'clink' test, sounding only slightly better than Mega Bloks. Close inspection showed the pieces had some moulding marks and the bricks were not fully smooth. The fit was not bad, holding together relatively well. The colours were not as strong as LEGO – the black and red were not so vibrant and the dark green had an odd speckled patina. Most bricks were exactly the same type as LEGO, but there were some unique parts – a very long 1x24 brick, and a 2x2 plate with studs on top and bottom which was a SNOT dream piece. All of the 1x1 round 'clear' parts were translucent bright green – probably to save on cost. The buffers were light pearl grey colour but showed horizontal moulding lines along the buffer heads. The wheels and magnets seemed comparable quality to LEGO and ran OK-ish on track.

The minifigs were exact clones of LEGO, but of random quality with some having loose arms, legs and hands. The Enlighten minifig yellow was slightly more orange than standard LEGO yellow. From a distance they looked OK but would be a bit annoying to play with. The fit on the supplied seat in the diesel was tight. At a pinch, the minifigs could be suitable for dioramas which were not touched too often.

The diesel was probably meant to be a UK Class 31 - most likely based the old Hornby D5512, as the front plate had 'E5512' and A1A-A1A on it - but visually was closer to a Class 35 Hymec. It had some cab and engine detailing and featured SNOT for the noses. The kit had rather nice modified 2x2 aircraft windows in dark green. The only oddity was the design of the bogies, which had been unnecessarily raised by a plate height and were easily improved with the pieces supplied. Otherwise, this was a rather impressive set which could be used as the basis of a bigger MOC. Since the Enlighten Union Pacific GP38 kit seems to be partially based on Jacob McKee's MOC, it's possible the same has happened here (does anyone recognise it?).



Enlighten "E5512" diesel – most likely meant to be a Class 31. Although a bit short, this is actually quite good. Did they copy it?

The carriage resembled a Pullman, with one end rounded and the other a corridor, and was of good length (34 studs), if a little tall. It had 4x3 glass panels with prints of curtains which looked effective. The detailing inside had tables, a good seat design and (rather bizarrely) a computer terminal. The kit was designed to hinge on the roof so that half of the carriage wall swung upwards - a good idea, but spoiled by the fit of the pieces in that it broke apart every time it was opened. As supplied, the kit had a missing black 6x4x1 door frame (this error occurred in the factory and not through the supplier), so this was substituted with a genuine LEGO piece. This showed up both the dullness of the Enlighten black compared to LEGO, and the complete fit compatibility of the pieces with each other.



Enlighten 1st Class Carriage, and behind LEGO Emerald Night for comparison. Looks good, just don't try to play with it. Pearl Grey is a bit rubbish.

Enlighten appeared to produce bricks of OK quality, but were let down by the minifigs and the fit of some of the pieces. The actual design of these two kits was quite effective and showed some nascent ability to produce interesting sets. And the scores beat Mega Bloks.

Scores	Diesel	Carriage
Quality*	80	80
Value	80	90
Fit*	90	60
Compatibility	100	100
Minifig*	70	70
Design	100	90
Instructions	90	90
Total	85	79



Kazi

A set of the Kazi Heavy Lift Helicopter – a CH-47 military Chinook - was sourced from Hong Kong via eBay. Including shipping it came to about £25 (LEGO Chinook kit is £35), although it can be got for about £18 from the export websites. The kit box was sturdy and had an inner box. Pieces were supplied in bags; two were made of the same plastic as LEGO but most were of a much cheaper plastic. The instructions were formed of a small booklet with rather hard to view colours (so, er, quite like some current LEGO kits, then).

The clink test proved marginally better than Enlighten. Pieces had the name ‘Kazi’ on the studs. The fit was OK, but the quality was markedly inferior to Enlighten (and almost every single other clone reviewed) with the sides of the bricks noticeably ‘wobbly’ and certainly not smooth. The set did have all the pieces to build the model with a few extras. As supplied, about 5 bricks had flash moulding and one slope had some of the front missing. The minifig radio and assault weapons were made of a very rubbery plastic which had reacted with the ‘clear’ glass in transit and melted into it (ewww...). The clear window parts were VERY poor quality and badly finished. The few red and yellow pieces were less strong in colour than the Enlighten bricks and looked very cheap. The majority of the kit was dark green (similar to LEGO dark green), whereas the box art definitely suggested an olive green shade. One of the white bricks had ‘something’ on it that wiped off, which was... unsettling... as it came packed from the factory. The box did not state it included free avian flu. Is it a plot to infect us, or are Kazi sets put together in farmyards?



Kazi CH-47 helicopter with all 5 supplied minifigs actually in one piece, and the tiny armoured fighting vehicle, presumably for pixies.

Minifigs (4 soldiers and a ‘pilot’ with a cap, all in dark green garb) were close copies of LEGO figures and were supplied with separate hands to fit. This proved hard as the hands ranged from poor to atrocious in both finish and fit. One of the torsos had a printing error. Arms were OK with fit and movement (better than Enlighten), but legs were randomly loose (worse than Enlighten). Minifig quality overall was thus mediocre to poor, although they looked OK with a good variety of expressions. The hands could not be swapped for LEGO as the shanks were of a slightly different diameter. This just made me angry.

The model itself was extremely well thought out and had a good amount of detailing on the interior and exterior. It certainly resembled a CH-47, and had an opening top to access the inside, and a ramp at the rear. There was clever SNOT use for the nose and technic pieces were used for the engines. A pointless little armoured car was included which, although resembling a Chinese AFV, was way out of scale of the rest of the kit. When built, the helicopter looked fantastic, but taking it apart again would probably break some of the pieces.



It would appear Kazi consider quality control something that other companies do. I wanted to use gloves to assemble this kit. Minifigs are awful.

Overall, this kit was surprisingly bad. It had the potential to be excellent but was fatally let down by the terrible quality. The model was OK to put together but either the pieces were a tight fit or very loose. One of the engine covers just fell off. The clear parts were awful. Comparison with the current LEGO Chinook showed better design skill but much, much worse quality bricks.

Using this kit as a benchmark I would never ever get Kazi again even if free, let alone buy it.

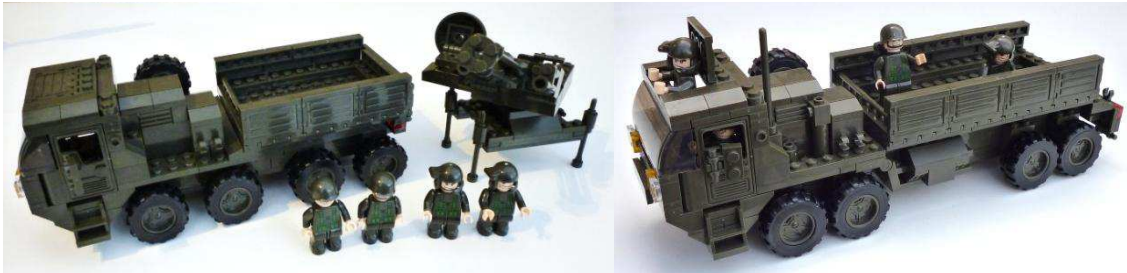
Scores	Heavy Lift Helicopter
Quality*	50
Value	50
Fit*	70
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	60
Design	100
Instructions	80
Total	69



Sluban

Sluban make many military kits, and the 'Land Forces 2 Heavy Transporter' was found from a UK supplier on eBay for a grand total of £14.35 including postage. This set was an 8x8 army truck (either a US HEMTT or Chinese Sanjiang clone) with an anti-aircraft Gatling gun payload. The box had an internal tray and all parts were in a rather forlorn-looking clear plastic bag. There were 6 separate bags inside it with parts and minifigs. The 5 minifigs pictured on the outside of box turned out to be 4 minifigs inside the box – the leader guy was missing - although there were flesh hands and heads supplied as well as the yellow ones shown. The instructions were OK, albeit small and complicated enough to reduce the steps to less than 50.

The clink test was worse than Enlighten. The pieces had no name on the studs and were noticeably shiny, as if they had been dipped in gloss paint. There were no mis-shaped parts but the overall feel was cheap and one of the clips broke immediately. The windscreen had got scratched in transit. The tyres were nasty - hard and glossy and with lumpy mould marks. The fit was generally OK, defaulting to 'hammer required' over 'loose'. The sides of the bricks were not very smooth but better than Kazi. The set did have all the pieces to build the model with many extras. Almost every piece was in a dark green olive, which was very effective and consistent for all bricks, but did make the kit rather dull to make. The clear parts were fairly decent, but the minifig yellow had a cheap orange tint. There were a few interesting unique parts, including 5x8 plates, 1x1 double-thickness plates, 4x1 bar bricks, vehicle doors, and steps. The supplied weapons sprue was very impressive with 4 massive assault rifles.



Sluban HEMTT truck with gigantic gun. Looks good, but don't be fooled. Hammer useful for assembly. MOC from same bricks on right.

The minifigs (4 soldiers, two with army helmets and two with crash helmets) were of a slightly different design to LEGO figures with unique legs. The torsos were supplied with "yellow" hands and arms already attached as best they could be. Swapping over the flesh-coloured hands showed the appalling torso-arm fit with some falling off just by moving them. The legs fitted and moved OK, but standing or sitting the figures on the truck proved difficult without a mallet. The torso print designs were also quite bland. The hands did at least fit in the arms, but did not hold the guns (or anything else) tightly.

The model itself was quite well designed, and there were enough pieces left over to have a good go at improving it (longer wheelbase, hatch hole and side fuel tanks were possible). The biggest problem was the terrible tyre and wheel fit, which stopped most of the wheels from moving. As a static kit this was not bad, but was spoiled by poor quality pieces. The minifigs looked quite good but were really, really awful quality. Perhaps the heads, helmets and rifles could be salvaged. It was apparent that anyone playing with this would be a) interested in the military, b) develop immensely strong hands, and c) get angry. Maybe that's Chinese social engineering at its best.

It is interesting to compare this with the far better made Jubilux Woma Block Tech 'Military Justice' truck.



Which are better – Kazi or Sluban soldier minifigs? Neither, they're both rubbish. Sluban arm fit is appalling, torsos don't fit on studs, legs dire.

Sluban have a professional website, well designed sets and cheap prices. Don't be fooled – they are bad quality and best avoided.

Scores	Heavy Transporter
Quality*	60
Value	90
Fit*	60
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	30
Design	90
Instructions	80
Total	65



Loongon / Little White Dragon

Loongon makes both Little White Dragon and COGO brands. Loongon appear to have an individual approach to set design, although as it seems to be based on a limited brick selection from the 1970s this does not play to their favour. The box art alone rings warning messages that their quality might not be up to LEGO standards. The boxes have a motto 'Clap hands for our children', which presumably is some form of reference to praising improvement of their cognitive skills through using Loongon (some hope). I was not planning to spend any effort reviewing their kits until 'Crane Lorry' turned up in a charity shop, imported and rebranded under the KandyToys M.Y label.

M.Y produce their own good quality boxes. The photo on the front was marginally different from the Little White Dragon set 19122, and showed the Loongon minifigs. 19122 had 150 pieces, whereas the M.Y set had 137. As supplied by M.Y, there were 3 bags with various sized pieces in each. The minifigs were assembled (maybe this was the parts number difference) and had the standard LEGO head expression rather than the larger unsettling Loongon version. Brick quality was roughly at the Sluban level, with a slightly less hard feel and a lightweight clink. Two parts had flash moulding errors. The fit was average to loose which made the long truck liable to break in half. The black was not a strong colour, the yellow much more orange than genuine LEGO, and the clear parts mediocre. The string for the winch was already frayed. The tyres were surprisingly quite good rubber. Instructions were on one piece of paper, with quite a few bricks to add per stage. The model itself went together quite easily; all parts were present and a hammer was not required. I didn't bother applying the stickers as I wanted to do anything less boring than assembling the kit, such as watching paint dry or standing on Didcot station in the rain.



Crane lorry, Loongon version (left) and M.Y import (middle) as opened. Minifigs supplied assembled, blissfully unaware they are zombies.

The minifigs were laughably bad with the most zombified skin tone yet reviewed (actually, this was the main driver behind buying the kit in the first place). To be fair, the arms and legs moved quite well, so to play with they were not too bad. Quite who decided that the "flesh" tone was correct must have had questionable colour recognition. The set design was mediocre: the truck looked like it was from the 1940s; the crane used ladders for the arm; the driver had his hands almost up to his helmet at the wheel; the crane operator could only fit into his seat with the 'crane' in its highest position; the ladder restricted how high the crane could elevate; and the string was not long enough to reach the ground. The non-hammer fit meant the ladder kept falling off the hinge plate, and the winch did not stay on its support if used. And the wheel-tyre combination looked rubbish. Outcome: a bored and unhappy child liable to wake up in the middle of the night fearing hordes of the undead building a shopping centre.

Overall, this was a rather uninspiring kit with the only 'selling' point being two very poor-looking minifigs. The fit also meant that the soon to be angry children trying to play with it would not develop immensely strong hands, but would instead be haunted by nightmares of zombie construction workers. Back in China, Loongon have understandably replaced it with a much better-looking kit, although still staffed by the undead.



Crane truck as made. Seriously ugly kit, just what the box art shows. Minifig easily brained by ladder – luckily, zombies have no brains.

Summary – dull design, poor feel, mediocre quality, genuinely frightening minifigs. Will help raise a whole generation of lacklustre underachieving psychotic Chinese civil servants. Don't ever buy Little White Dragon, or you will suffer the same fate.

Scores	Crane Lorry
Quality*	60
Value	50
Fit*	60
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	40
Design	40
Instructions	70
Total	54



Ligao

This example of dodgy Chinese LEGO was a small emergency car set, found unopened in a charity shop for £1. The box was branded Kandy Toys after the UK importer, with the instructions having the brand Ligao. This was apparently suitable for ages 5+: almost all other makes claim 6.

The general quality of Ligao pieces was better than Kazi but worse than Enlighten. The feel (and clink) was fairly close to LEGO, although some pieces still appeared cheap and the red was rather translucent. The pieces had a characteristic half-hollow stud on the top, showing a different mould from Enlighten and closer to Jubilux. The fit was OK, but it was noticeable that they don't hold well with one stud. The 'trans light blue' windscreens were quite well made, but had a very tight fit. The wheels were a terribly loose fit on the axles, which was a big issue as this was meant to be a car for whizzing around the carpet. At least they didn't jam. The tyres were surprisingly good quality rubber and were unbranded.



Ligao 'Speed Car' with minifig from hell. A prime candidate for destructive experimentation. Instructions show less scary LEGO minifig clone.

The design of the car was a bit suspect. It was relatively symmetric front and rear which was a bit boring. It had a design flaw at the rear which meant it tended to break into two every time the roof was taken off to ram in or yank out the minifig (immensely strong hands required, naturally). The front and rear lights were 1x1 tiles in the 'trans light green' colour which was presumably cheap to make. Quite why the rear lights were not supplied in red is a mystery, as the police roof lights included a 2x1 trans-red tile. The side panels had 'Pioneer' printed on them for an as yet unknown reason. The red tiles covering the bonnet and boot were of such bad quality that the white studs of the bricks underneath showed through. The white bricks were, however, not too bad. The instructions were well drawn, with each stage shown in colour and previous stages in grey which was quite helpful.

The minifig was where this Ligao set was really let down. The pictures on the box and instructions showed a direct LEGO police minifig clone, whereas the single supplied figure was a poor-quality copy with different head, arms and legs. The odd-shaped minifig would certainly annoy any LEGO-owning child who got this as a present, as it only just fitted in the car and looked, well, rubbish. Pulling the head off did at least make a satisfying pop. It would be done often. The skin tone was a good yellow, making it unsuitable for the Zombie Army. Pity.



Weird minifig; head has moulded ears. Good quality tyres and moulding numbers on some pieces. Car as made up is bent. Red colour is poor.

Looking at similar sets in toys shops this probably retailed new at around £2-3. The bad fit of the wheels and the terrible minifig made this poor value compared to LEGO. The wheelarches and tyres were quite well made, but there were no other redeeming features to recommend this set.

Tolerable, but I would avoid Ligao by choice. The minifig would be useful for giving to a cousin you didn't like.

Scores	Speed Car
Quality*	70
Value	40
Fit*	60
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	20
Design	50
Instructions	90
Total	57



Best-Lock

Best-Lock appear to be still trading and releasing new kits. Wilkinson are also selling the earlier kits under their own Blox brand name. They are all noticeably cheap. A Best-Lock 2009 racing car set was found unopened in a charity shop for £1 (noting that the Blox equivalent is only £1.50 new). I passed over a newer, bigger Best-Lock set for £2.50 as it was just too much to pay. The smaller box proudly showed the photo of a rather poor quality racing car and a minifig that had the cohesiveness and pallor of a zombie. Parts were made in China. Could Best-Lock *really* be as bad as everyone said? There now follows an in-depth analysis of the set.

Main set and construction.

AARGHH!



Best-Lock racing car thingy. I haven't seen plastic this poor since the 1970s. Instructions are in black and white! Bumper is unique...

Minifig.

AARGHH!



Minifig comes fully assembled. Pliers needed to pull head off. Skin has unsettling undead hue, but at least it's less scary than Woma figures.

I find it very unlikely anyone would ever buy more than one of these sets through choice. It would be the sort of present that an aunt would get you, and for which your mum would force you to write a thank-you letter with more lies in it than an Italian political manifesto. Truly awful. I suppose the minifigs might come in handy as cheap alternatives for an undead assault theme.

Not only would I never buy these again, I would consider forming a protest group to actively keep them out of the country.

And I thought this was the worst clone kit you could buy today.

Wrong.

Scores	Racing Car
Quality*	Nope
Value	40
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	25
Design	40
Instructions	30
Total	26



Best-Lock

The Best-Lock range has been refreshed over the past year or so, with newer kits looking something like 1980s LEGO sets and retail prices at similar levels. The older more blocky sets are still for sale but considerably cheaper. This SWAT kit was found a car boot sale for £2, which was almost good value for the three minifigs. New versions can be found for £8. This kit will be reviewed without glib comments or swearing. Well, not very much...

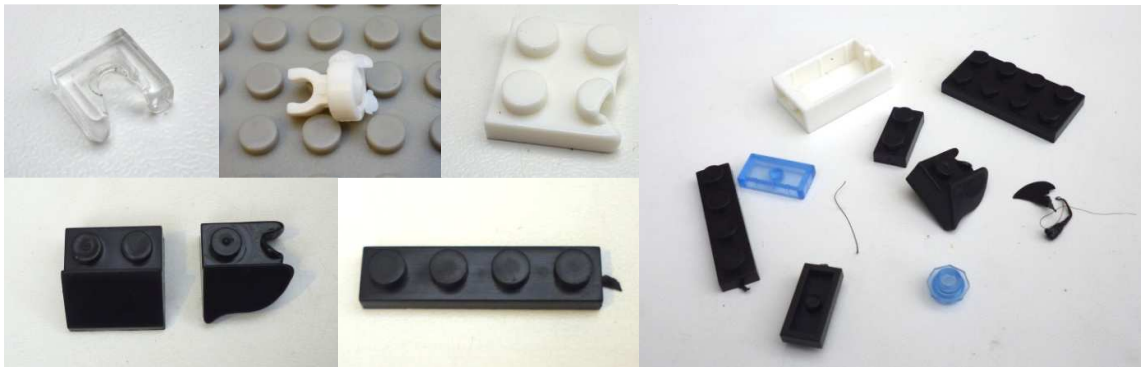
The rubbish flimsy inner box partially collapsed under the strain of just being carried home. The cars, helicopter and building each had their respective instructions, but the multiple bags held random pieces and had to be all opened at once. The bricks were of typical Best-Lock quality – awful. The grey colour was terrible and resembled LEGO old grey that had been left in the sun for a few months, although to be fair the black colour was strong and the large rubber tyres were excellent. The minifigs came fully assembled, with the police officers having armoured vests and sunglasses prints over eye dimples which was only mildly disturbing. The pilot had an almost opaque visor to hide his extremely angry expression. There were some unique parts, including 1x5 and 3x4 plates, a 1x5 brick, and (bizarrely) a 11x19 plate. Having been well trained by the Chinese to have low expectations and immensely strong hands, the set went together with only mediocre levels of language and disappointment. There were many badly formed or partially moulded parts, and the excitement was almost tedious as the final model was made and the possibility of missing pieces became more likely. In the event there were no wholly missing parts, although the squad car did have to make do with some partially formed bits. Fit ranged from hammer to loose. The whole set was put together without any pieces breaking, probably due to luck more than skill.



SWAT kit, as opened and made. Cops have bullet-proof vests and ammunition rounds – but no guns. Helicopter pilot is incandescently angry.

The squad car was virtually identical to the small Best-Lock and Blox starter kit – utter rubbish. The helicopter was lacklustre in design, with small main rotors, no tail rotor and a non-opening roof so that ramming the pilot in was a major task. The 4x4 police truck was a strange design with some clever use of SNOT – spoilt by the terrible grab of the SNOT-enabling pieces – but at least the wheels went round, unlike the squad car. The main building had no real redeeming features at all, was a pain to put together, and looked plain weird. The loudhailers kept falling off. Some clips broke.

The minifigs came fully assembled, with the helicopter pilot having a loose leg that fell off when moved. The two policemen were sunglasses and happy, but the pilot was very very angry indeed. Inspection showed reasonable quality torsos. The skin pallor was vaguely flesh coloured which made all three figures unsuitable for the Zombie Army. This was quite disappointing, given the awfulness of much of the Best-Lock and Blox range. The set, complete with minifigs, went straight a charity shop, although was seriously considered for a ‘fire retardant capability test’ nearer Bonfire Night.



Selection of quality control issues. Some spare parts, and the entire contents of the Best-Lock factory rubbish bin helpfully included in the bags.

Overall, this set was dull and uninspiring. The new Best-Lock police station has blue instead of black, a different truck and helicopter, replaces the squad car with a motorbike, but inexplicably keeps the same design of building. It is comforting to know that Best-Lock exist mainly for the British and Germans to jointly produce rubbish for American kids, and not to impart pain just on our own. Best-Lock’s new marketing strategy seems to be to use branded minifig-rich themes, and looking at the ludicrously high prices this could indicate a move to higher quality. It could hardly be lower.

Horrid.

Scores	SWAT
Quality*	10
Value	50
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	30
Design	30
Instructions	60
Total	32

Some of the bigger Blox kit designs look half decent, even if the bricks are terrible. There is, however, no excuse for the following.

The Blox fire engine kit for £1.50 was bought from Wilkinson to see whether it was any improvement over its Best-Lock cousin. It was deliberately chosen as the box art suggested that it could take the honours of being the worst new set available in the UK today. (It isn't).

The box was of OK quality and the plastic bag wasn't too bad. The instructions were in colour, although they were almost screwed up inside the box, almost as if someone didn't care. The minifig came assembled. Brick quality was best summed up by my daughter who saw the newly opened set and wondered if the bricks had been chewed. The dark grey plate had flash moulding. The red hue varied between pieces. Although stated to be made in China, there was no manufacturer mark anywhere to be found, which was probably just as well. The minifig looks suspiciously similar to the Loongon types made by Pengcheng, but the maker could be any one of the many low cost factories around Chenghai.



Blox fire engine as opened. Design as built jams the wheels and brains the angry fireman. This can be rebuilt to work using pieces supplied.

Building the set revealed a few flaws. The wheels were a terrible fit on the axles, so that only two went round freely and one was actually jammed. However, this didn't actually matter as the inverse slopes touched the tyres and stopped all the wheels from moving anyway. The angry fireman minifig could not sit in the engine without having his head smacked by the 'ladder'. There were four 1x1 plates left over in the kit, and with a bit of rebuilding an 'improved' version could be made that would allow the wheels to move (theoretically), and let the fireman fit properly. Maybe the designers realised their mistake after printing everything and included the parts to make it better. The windscreen was of a different design to the LEGO equivalent, but ideally required a hammer to attach it to the model. For balance, the 'ladder' hinge joint was comically loose. There were stickers to apply, but by this time I really couldn't be bothered.



Minifig skin colour less grey than Best-Lock. Arms and legs do actually move OK. Angry fireman is very, very angry without helmet.

The minifig was marginally improved quality over the Best-Lock abomination, and to be fair the hands were better than Kazi and Enlighten and the arms and legs moved freely. The flesh colour was OK, although judging from other Blox photos zombification is random across the range. The head had a moulded nose and mouth with an angry, angry expression. Replacing the head and squinting would create an almost passable LEGO minifig. Almost.

I found another of these sets in a charity shop. This time the angry fireman was hopping mad as his leg broke off due to bad fit and shoddy moulding. Even with some replacement LEGO legs he is still very angry. Both are now listening to whale song and having yoga classes. In vain.

"Mummy - the fire engine doesn't work, and the fireman scares me."
 "Don't worry dear, we won't be buying these again."

Scores	Fire Engine
Quality*	None
Value	30
Fit*	15
Compatibility	65
Minifig*	30
Design	20
Instructions	35
Total	24

I felt guilty after slating the Blox fire engine, so in a fit of remorse bought the Combine Harvester new for £4.50. I had not learnt my lesson.

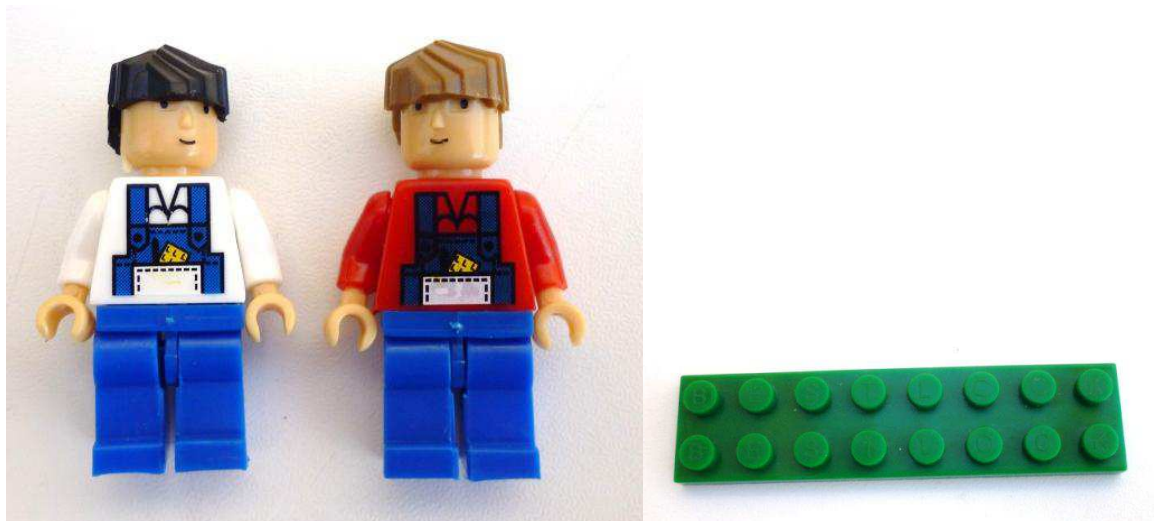
The harvester was a good sized kit for the money, with two minifigs and a well-proportioned machine in green, representing a John Deere of some sort. The box itself was well made and had an internal box with stiffeners. The pieces came in two nice plastic bags. The instructions were in colour and reasonably well laid out. The pieces had no excessive flash moulding, but there were numerous sprue tags. The 2x8 plates had b-e-s-t-l-o-c-k on the studs, so no guessing where Wilkinson got their bricks from.



The Blox combine chasing a hapless minifig, although it's touch and go whether the legs or wheels will fall off first. Stickers help hold it together.

I wanted this kit to be good. It wasn't. The green pieces felt, and were, as poor quality as the other Blox and Best Lock kits. Two pieces were missing; the fit ranged from mallet to fall off; the model was bent when made; there was a tyre included that only had about ¼ of the moulding; and the design had flaws that could be easily rectified. The stickers were too big, but did stick. The two rustic minifigs were not as angry as the Blox firemen, but did still induce nightmares. The supplied implements were all brown and included a pitchfork and, bizarrely, a chainsaw.

The combine cutter moved round when pushed along the carpet. The seat design was clever. This was good. Absolutely everything else was not.



Minifigs are far less angry than the fireman, but still quite useful for an undead horde. Bestlock green plate. Awful quality. Just awful.

The score table shows that this is not as bad as the Blox fire engine, mainly due to the higher value and the better design. I certainly felt more disappointed with this kit, as the appalling quality and missing pieces just made me cross. The rustic minifigures can just about be passed off as zombies, but they are not as angry as the firemen. An opportunity lost. This set is now for sale in Wilkos for £2.25. There are loads left.

Sum up: This is a blatant job creation scheme for the Wilkinson customer complaints department.

Scores	Combine Harvester
Quality*	Still none
Value	70
Fit*	20
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	30
Design	80
Instructions	50
Total	36

Now happy that the Blox range would almost certainly supply appalling quality, I bought the police car, construction truck, and tractor to get some zombiefigs. The police car and construction truck kits were bought for both £1.50; subsequently, the truck was reduced to 75p, with the tractor bought at £1.25 (down from £3.50). The smaller kits were presented almost identically to the Fire Engine.

The Blox "SWAT Cruiser starter box" was a rather angular design, with no attempt at progression from lacklustre 1970s styling. The black and white colours were a bit approximate, and the overall effect was... poor. The brick quality was, of course, as terrible as the other Blox and Bestlock products. The model was roughly straight. All of the wheels actually went round, which was progress. The stickers stuck. Kind of. The minifig could just about hold the radio at an odd angle. And that's all the positive spin I can muster.

The "Construction Truck starter box" was of a similar build to the fire engine, which meant it didn't work as the wheel-arch slopes touched the tyres. Again, this didn't really matter as the wheels were a tight fit on the axles and didn't actually go round anyway. As with the fire engine, spare bits were supplied which could be used to correct the design flaw, although most children probably wouldn't care by that point. Without a 'ladder' the construction truck seemed worse value than the fire engine. The yellow was approximately yellow. The minifig was very angry.

The tractor has an inner and outer box and came in two bags. Although the bricks were awful quality the model itself was OK. Yes, the rear connector broke very quickly, one of the windscreens cracked when being fitted, and front wheels didn't go round – but the tractor was straight and resembled a tractor. There were an astounding 49 spare pieces with this kit (1x1 brown round bricks x12, 1x2 and 1x4 plates galore, and 13 1x1 round 'black' plates) which presumably made up the claim of 120 pieces on the box. The set included a farmer guy who was not angry, and a brown horse which was also not angry. The horse was vaguely similar to the LEGO design but with a more realistic head and a movable tail. Tractor stickers were provided, although the instructions didn't show them and only some were on the poorly finished model photo on the box.



Blox police car and truck, proudly upholding the range's record of being rubbish. Tractor not great either. Loads of spare bits to build a pyre.

The sets were bought to get more terrible minifigs for a zombie army. Here, Blox were better than expected, with the police car and construction truck giving worse quality than the angry fireman. At some point the head printing machine at the factory had gone out of alignment and the eyes and mouths had been printed 20° further around the head. The effect was to put the moulded noses under the left or right eye, turning the already zombie-like figures into grotesque gothic nightmares. It was difficult to choose between the angry construction worker and the unsettling sunglasses policeman as the most scary. Certainly both would give Chucky a run for his money in any horror film. To be fair, the farmer and another construction worker bought later were not facially special and had flesh-coloured heads, although the farmer had a leg that would not stay on and the construction guy had a deformed left hand. All minifigs came fully assembled, although this tended to rapidly change after playing with them for any length of time.



ARGH! Genuinely grotesque police and construction worker minifigs. Atrocious quality control on tractor. Get orf moi land...

What can I say? I've now reviewed 5 Blox kits, and they range from awful to atrocious. I'd guess some middle manager decided "It's all the same, isn't it?" when presented with an offer to use the old Best-Lock kits. I really want to read the minutes of their next review board. Suffice to say, most Blox kits are now heavily discounted to get rid of the stock, although bizarrely, the fire engine has gone up to £1.75.

Sum up: Plausibly a Chinese plot to psychologically damage a generation of Western children with shoddy build quality and disturbing minifigs.

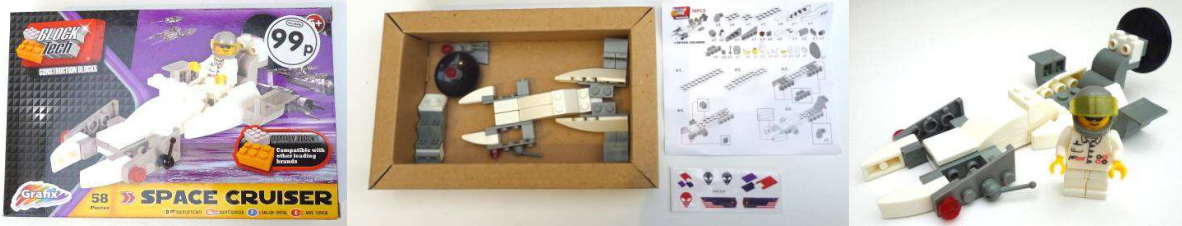
Scores	S.W.A.T. Cruiser	Construction Truck	Tractor
Quality*	Erm...	Missing	Only quantity
Value	30	20	60
Fit*	15	15	10
Compatibility	50	40	40
Minifig*	20	20	20
Design	30	10	50
Instructions	35	35	35
Total	21.5	17.5	24.5



Block Tech (PeiZhi)

Block Tech kits are imported by Swindon-based RMS International under the name Grafix. It would seem that there are only a few sets in their range, and these change frequently as they switch suppliers. Three Block Tech kits were sourced which came from different Chinese manufacturers.

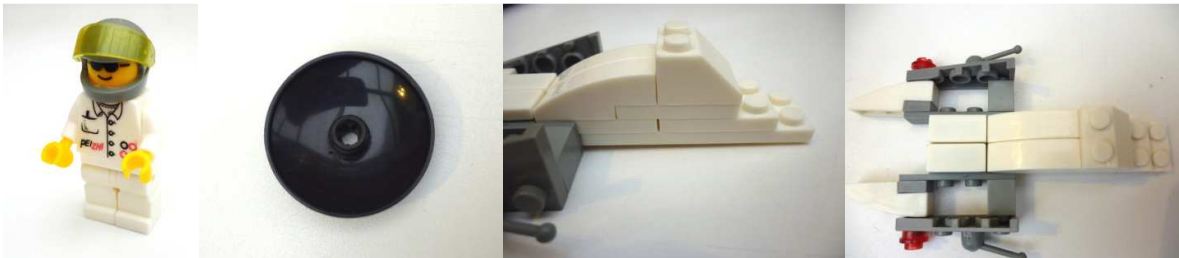
'Space Cruiser' was found new in a bargain book store for 99p. The kit's origins were PeiZhi, yet another Chinese LEGO clone brand based in Chenghai. The kit seemed to be a unique design of spaceship and came with a spaceman minifig. It would be typical of a £4-class LEGO kit. The box had an inner sturdy cardboard box and the pieces were in a single plastic bag. The instructions were small but easy to follow (with a loupe). The brick clink test and quality was close to Kazi (not good) with the grab OK but rather wobbly mouldings. There were no manufacturer marks on the lugs. The pieces were made slightly too small at the ends so that there were gaps between the bricks which looked very cheap. The white was a bit cream in colour (the worst of all kits tested, even Blox) and the light grey colour varied piece by piece and looked dirty. The kit also had a design flaw so that the back tended to fall off – this could have easily been fixed with one extra plate under the model. The 4x4 radar dish had a hole in the stud so that it could be mounted centrally under a plate – the one interesting part of the entire kit.



Block Tech's Space Cruiser made by PeiZhi, as supplied with stickers and miniscule instructions, and kit made up in rare 'hasn't fallen apart' state.

The supplied minifig was completely disassembled and contributed significantly to the claim on the box of 58 pieces. It was easy to put together and the head and hands were well made and proper yellow, far better than the Enlighten or Kazi efforts. However, the arms had noticeable moulding dimples on the shoulders, and the legs had pinholes either side. The torso printing was of OK quality, although strangely had the PeiZhi company name and logo printed on it. The bare hands, open-top shirt and biro in pocket were, to be honest, probably not best suited to exo-atmospheric flight. It would pass for a LEGO minifig quite easily, and would not fall apart when played with.

Stickers were also supplied that were completely unnecessary, rather thick, and only served to underlie the cheapness of the kit.



PeiZhi 'spaceman' minifig with company logo, arm dimples and leg holes; "interesting" 4x4 radar dish; and dirty-looking bricks with terrible fit.

This set was OK for the price but nothing special. The PeiZhi parts were of average quality, better than Best-Lock or Blox (of course), but worse than Ligao or even Little White Dragon and certainly not worth getting for spare parts. However, the minifig was of decent quality: although supplied unassembled and having a few dimples it worked very well and made the kit far better value than Ligao as it was roughly comparable with LEGO. In fact, even with dimples it was the best non-LEGO minifig (short of Star Diamond) of all tested Chinese clones.

Apparently, another PeiZhi racing car kit has a tile with the words 'High Class' printed on it very badly, which may be worth getting purely for ironic effect.

Summary

Keep the minifig, throw the rest in the bin. This still actually makes it quite good value.

Scores	Space Cruiser
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	80
Design	50
Instructions	70
Total	73



Block Tech (IQ Block)

I was tipped off that the local Poundland had some new hooky brick sets in stock. This Block Tech kit was one of them. It would appear that Block Tech are now part of the Funtastic company. The UrbanX Sport was one of three car sets, although this one was the only of the brand that had a minifig. The box art showed a frankly appalling figure, so hopes were high that this kit could be truly rubbish. Diligent internet searching revealed it matched the IQ Block set 29007 "MX Cross Country Sand Twinkling" which was reviewed as "shit". This review will be more thorough.

The outer box itself was thin and revealed an inner brown open carton made of rather weak cardboard. Inside was a single bag of parts and a slightly forlorn misprinted instruction sheet. It was apparent that the colours of the pieces did not match those on the box, nor on the instructions. Ironically the box was one of the very few reviewed that did *not* have the awful phrase 'contents may differ from model shown', or words to that effect. Once opened, the bag revealed pieces from an unknown manufacturer, a cheap sticker set and an unmade minifig. The clink test and the general feel was quite good, impressive for a £1 kit.



Block Tech are sourcing from yet another factory. Plastic bag quality improving. Finished model actually not too bad. Winner fast, FAST.

Once made up the set itself was OK. The wheels were plastic, not rubber, but typical of the cheaper LEGO car kits. The pieces fitted together surprisingly well, bearing in mind the different moulding on the rear and the price. The blue colour was good and the black strong, although the red was a little weak. The clear yellow looked a little cheap, but the minifig yellow was a very good match for genuine LEGO. Further testing revealed that the pieces did not fit strongly with genuine LEGO or any other clone, making reuse of the parts questionable. The flag stickers read 'Winner fast FAST' that was, erm, vaguely relevant Chinglish. The stickers were thick, typical of those in toys bought from the seaside in the 1980s.

The minifig itself was a different colour to that on the box and when assembled was of decent enough quality – except for the hat, which sat far too high on the head and had numerous flash mouldings. Assembly did require immensely strong hands, in true Chinese fashion. The arms and hands moved freely, with the arms having a slight gap between them and the torso. The torso had a very cheap print on it that was slightly missing. The legs had some odd colour blotches, and one had a large sprue mark that prevented proper movement on the hips. The leg and torso designs were almost identical to LEGO, although getting the figure to actually sit down in the car required some serious force and more than a dash of anger. There was a printing error mark on the back of the head. The expression was a bit odd but one of the least scary of any of the Chinese clones. The torso print wasn't really of a racer, more like a shirt, tie, pocket, Sherriff's badge and work pass all tattooed onto a naked chest. This was more than a little worrying, but could potentially contribute to a very interesting if slightly illegal future diorama.



Different design underneath plates. Annoyingly unmade minifig. Made minifig with rubbish helmet, strange fetish torso and mark on head.

Overall this kit was nowhere near as bad as the box art suggested, coming out as mediocre. There were of course problems with quality, fit with other clone bricks and real LEGO, and the contents differing from the box.

A bit shit.

Scores	UrbanX Sport
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	70
Compatibility	60
Minifig*	70
Design	80
Instructions	50
Total	69



Block Tech (Jubilux Woma)

'Military Team' was bought new from a UK toy shop for £10 in a sale under the Block Tech name. The Chinese supplier of this kit has not been definitely identified but is almost certainly Jubilux Woma. It is basically a Sluban copy. This makes it a copy of a copy of a copy.

The rather worryingly-named 'Military Justice' lorry was the main model, although there were 10 models covered in the large instruction booklet. The standard pieces were far, far better made than Enlighten, Sluban, Kazi, Ligao or PeiZhi: the 'clink' test was almost indistinguishable from genuine LEGO and the bricks were smooth. The olive green colour was a very effective shade and was different from Sluban and Kazi. The fit quality was not bad, but single-stud connection was slightly worse than LEGO. Although most pieces were copies of genuine LEGO bricks, there were a few parts (e.g. a 6 stud-wide roof hinge and a 1x2 double 33 degree slope) that LEGO do not make. The windscreens were copies of Oxford Toys and were badly made - poor materials, poor design, and poor fit – although not as bad as Kazi. Also, one of the standard bricks had a moulding error, but there was a spare. Wheel fit was good; the thankfully rubber tyres were however of mediocre quality and were not a good fit on the rims. The supplied seats were only one stud long and as shown in the instructions did not allow the minifigs to sit in the cab.



Block Tech's "Military Justice" truck from Jubilux Woma, and some unique parts that would be quite useful in real LEGO.

The instructions were quite well drawn and easy to follow, but looked oddly out of proportion. The model design itself was not bad – the truck was large, chunky, held together well and looked like a modern military lorry. With a MOC hat on, the front and rear could be improved, and the roof hinge tended to pull off the rear bricks which a couple of tiles would easily solve. The scale was bigger than most LEGO vehicles at 8 studs wide, although other Chinese manufacturers are beginning to adopt the same width (such as Sluban and Star Diamond).

The huge left and right handed Gatling guns had a non-firing missile attached all as one piece, which was not quite what the box art suggested. To compensate, there was also a triple-armed aimable plastic dart launcher which could properly have someone's eye out. There were also two supplied sprues with various black minifig-scale heavy machine guns and ammo boxes, perfect for Smurf hunting.



Combined chain-gun / missile parts for those Justice dispensing moments, and zombiefigs guaranteed to induce nightmares for decades.

The minifigs were weird and identical to Jubilux. They resembled Oxford Toys (and Sluban) figures. They had fairly decent torsos and different legs with kneecaps. The torso came assembled and in essence was supplied as LEGO supply their minifigs. The heads and helmets had a strange reverse stud – the heads had a hole in the top to accept the upside-down stud (bigger than a standard stud) in the headgear and so were not compatible with LEGO headgear. The heads and hands were vaguely flesh coloured, but more than suitable for zombies. Experimentation showed the minifigs did not quite fit on a LEGO seat. The minifigs were not in traditional military garb and instead had light blue vaguely space-themed uniforms with helmets and blissfully happy expressions – probably as their brains had been scooped out.

Jubilux Woma are obviously copying Sluban and are doing a much better job of quality control. The olive green bricks would be quite useful, but the minifigs still haunt my every sleeping moment.

And Justice is very well armed in China.

Scores	Military Justice
Quality*	90
Value	80
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	40
Design	80
Instructions	70
Total	74



Jubilux Woma

This Jubilux-branded space kit was sourced new from a UK toy shop for £3. It was a Woma export and imported by Tobar UK in Beccles. Set number J5674A entices the buyer with the promise, “As A Team, We Can Accomplish Anything. Every styles fully wonderful”. Presumably collectives of Chinese children happily build these kits together, occasionally bursting into song and dance routines and praising the generosity of the State. It must be said that I was rather less enthusiastic.

The kit itself was well boxed and all pieces were inside a single plastic bag. The canopy was inside its own bag inside this and was actually quite an impressive moulding. The minifig torso was supplied assembled. The bricks were obviously not LEGO but did not have the cheap clink of most of the other Chinese brands and were quite similar to COGO. Pieces were supplied with printing on them and no stickers which was good. The printing had errors and poor colour matching which was bad. The instructions were quite well drawn and easy to follow. The bricks fitted together reasonably well, and there were some spare parts supplied. The model as made did not quite work – the spaceman would not quite fit under the canopy to allow it to close fully, but use of the spare parts did allow this. Maybe this is what you do ‘as a team to accomplish’. I was not convinced that ‘every style fully wonderful’.



“Star Fighter” as opened. A lot of effort has been expended on the canopy moulding - shame it doesn’t fit well. Best of the cheap clones so far.

The minifig really let the kit down. The torso was well made, if a little dull. The head design was different to LEGO for some reason (legal?) with a hole instead of a stud on top. The legs were also different with hollow backs and tiny knobble knees. When assembled the taikonaut looked OK from the front but would not fit well on the brick studs. The flesh colour was at least not entirely grey and was fairly close to the LEGO minifig hue. This minifig design was Jubilux’s own, which makes the company’s products different to others but resulted in incompatible heads and headgear.



Printing mismatch on wings. Part moulds are handed. Minifig is straight from the Gates of Hell and induces seizures. Well, maybe.

Jubilux Woma are probably aiming at the Sluban market in China and are producing better products. The unique design of minifig is a hindrance for compatibility which ultimately drags this set down. And the fact that it’s scary.

Another win for the recruitment section of the Zombie Army.

Scores	Star Fighter
Quality*	90
Value	70
Fit*	70
Compatibility	80
Minifig*	40
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	72



Click 'n' Snap (Ausini)

Poundland was found stocking the "Click 'n' Snap" brand of LEGO clone. Closer inspection showed that this was marketed by Funtastic, the same company who had recently taken ownership of Block Tech. Apparently there are more than one to collect in the series, but the shelf only had numerous boxes of the Pizza Van. The box art showed a terrible zombiefig which if all else failed would be perfect for attacking Shaun at The Winchester. I enquired of the Poundland staff how much the set was. It was a pound. Apparently a lot of items are a pound in Poundland.

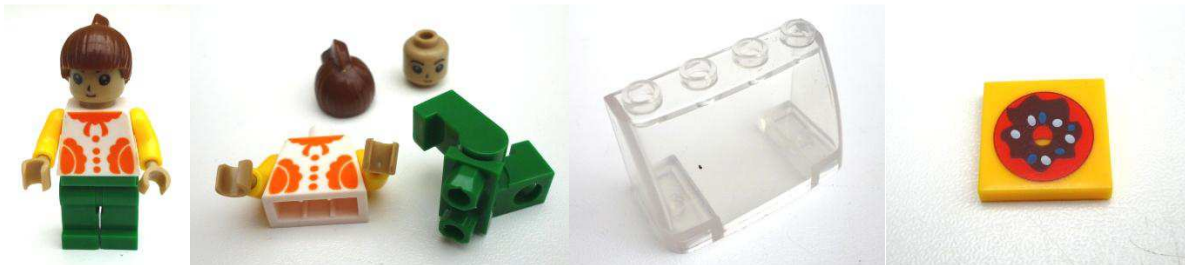
Unlike the Block Tech kit, Click 'n' Snap had a thicker single box with instructions and parts inside. The photo on the instructions suggested the kit already existed in China from an established brand, and although it was initially thought to be COGO, an exact match was found with Ausini kit number 25204. There was a sticker set that was not shown on the box art but was in the instructions. The pieces were not awful quality and were slightly better than Enlighten in feel and 'clink'. They appeared very similar to, but better than, the Little White Dragon pieces,

Quality was a bit suspect. At least one brick had an organic substance on it (I'm becoming more convinced this is a plot to give us Europeans avian flu), and the windscreen had something black embedded inside the (approximately) clear plastic. The red, white and yellow colour strengths were actually quite good. Wheels were hard plastic but were a good enough fit on the axles. Making the kit was not a chore, with brick grip erring towards the hard but immensely strong hands not required. The zombiefig came assembled and was actually quite good, potentially giving hours of graveyard fun and japes without too much chance of losing limbs. It would certainly need a cricket bat more than a Dire Straits record to fell it.



Short Order Pizza Van as supplied, and made. Bit of a design issue with Big Hair. And... design issue solved! So what WERE the designers doing?

There were, of course, a few issues with the set. The zombiefig skin colour was identical to the Loongon Little White Dragon tone, making it hugely scary for Western tastes. The head also had a very Eastern-themed big eyed expression which only served to enhance the potential terror to any small sensitive child. The torso print was OK quality but looked awful. The 'pizza' was a print on a 2x2 yellow tile. The print itself was a hologram, which was mightily impressive. The fact that it was a donut was not. The stickers on the truck had not been reviewed by anyone who spoke English as a native tongue, with the 'PIZZA APPETIZING' just about acceptable, but 'SHORT ORDER' only funny. [This would all work as a set: what makes more sense than an undead creature turning up with a donut and not taking 'no' as an answer?] Also, the design of the van meant that the female zombiefig would not fit in the seat without losing her hair. This was very simply fixed by reversing the rear van compartment. Perhaps all Chinese clone sets have errors in them to stimulate children and benefit the future of The Nation. Personally, I reckon it highlights the sloppiness inherent in the lacklustre and formulaic culture that is inevitable from decades of bureaucratic control, but maybe I'm wrong... anyway... erm, the kit was OK but had faults.



Good quality zombie with disturbing face. Windscreen has black mark embedded in plastic. "Pizza" hologram print is a donut, let's be honest.

Overall this kit was actually a rather good bargain – although this has to be tempered by the fact I was looking for a zombiefig and scored a jackpot. For the price the set offered a very playable vehicle with a figure that did not break in less than a minute. As long as the recipient had a strong stomach for the appalling skin colour and genuinely disturbing expression, they would not be disappointed. Ausini have some excellent modern train designs which would probably be worth getting if your H5N1 vaccine is up to date. And be warned, the sets will be staffed by The Undead.

Ausini figures mostly come out at night. Mostly.

Scores	Pizza Van
Quality*	60
Value	100
Fit*	80
Compatibility	90
Minifig*	60
Design	70
Instructions	70
Total	73



Click Brick (Star Diamond)

The 63-piece Click Brick 'Tow Truck' was bought in the same store as the Block Tech Space Cruiser, but was double the price at £1.99. It was imported by M+G Agencies NW Ltd FIA TOYS. Click Brick sets are designed in the UK and foreign made. The Click Brick logo bears more than a passing resemblance to that of Block Tech, perhaps ironically as they both import copies. Most kits are small, and include a recently launched 'mystery bag' collection of 15 random kits with two 'jackpots' of twin minifigs. There is no mention of China, nor of Star Diamond whose bricks are used in the kit. Since it had proved hard to source an actual Star Diamond kit, this was seen as the next best (and cheapest) way to test them out.

The box was an odd design, tall and thin with a sloping top for the opening flap. The pieces were inside two bags, made of plastic of the same type as LEGO bags. The bricks had 'Star' on the lugs (with one being flat for moulding). The bricks themselves were extremely well made and passed both the clink and fit test very well. The red and black were very slightly less vibrant than LEGO under close scrutiny. Interestingly, some of the pieces had their own moulding number on the underside, unlike almost any other observed Chinese clone brick. The minifig was annoyingly unmade, helping to make up the piece count. It was however immediately apparent that Star Diamond were streets ahead of all the other cloners.



Click Brick Tow Truck using Star Diamond parts. Minifig is of decent quality – the only good one in the entire test

The instructions were very similar to LEGO and easy to follow, although it was not clear whether this was typical of Star Diamond themselves. All pieces fitted together very well indeed and the only gripe was a very slight misalignment between the 2x1 and 1x1 corner panels (although LEGO have this problem too). The minifig had a marginally different leg design but was well made and would be hard to tell apart from a LEGO figure when assembled. The kit design itself was a little odd (as are almost all the Click Brick sets) but would be at home in a typical brick town.



Star Diamond parts are identical to LEGO in quality; tyres actually slightly better. 1x1 corner panels slightly misaligned if being really really picky.

Apart from a marginal lack of vibrancy in the red and black colours (and 'Star' on the lugs) there was very little in this kit to distinguish it from genuine LEGO. 'Click Brick' appear to be expanding their range, but apart from a tractor their set design does not come anywhere close to the Star Diamond collection. Click Brick's larger sets are probably most kindly described as 'obsessively blocky' and are certainly no rival to any real LEGO kit – or most of the clone kits, to be honest. Hopefully this is down to legal issues and not wanting British design skill.

It was obvious that real Star Diamond kits might be worth investigating further. So I did.

Scores	Tow Truck
Quality*	95
Value	70
Fit*	95
Compatibility	95
Minifig*	100
Design	80
Instructions	90
Total	92.5



M.Y. Toys (Star Diamond)

M.Y. are a product name of part of UK-based KandyToys who import various Chinese clone sets and rebrand them. Careful cross-referencing spotted that the M.Y. City Bus was the Star Diamond 82102 kit of the same name. It was found on Amazon for £9.23 including postage. The supplier had shown two different box pictures of a lime green or yellow bus. The ones that arrived were lime green.

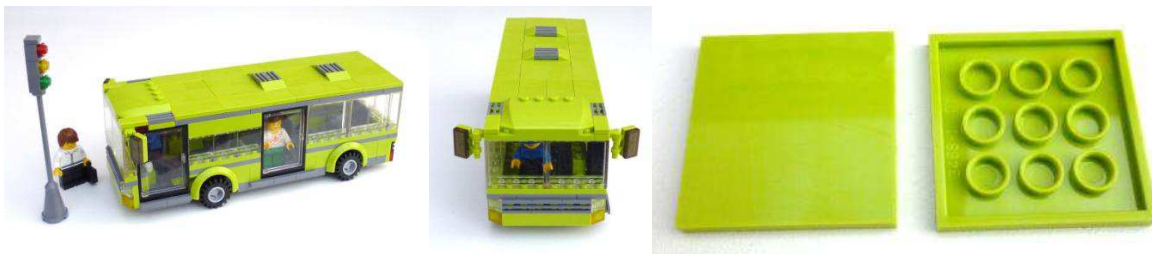
M.Y. have their own sturdy boxes with an outer and inner box. There was no mention of the manufacturer, or, in fact, even that the kit was made in China. Presentation was extremely good with the Star Diamond parts inside 4 bags. These bags were not numbered so all 4 had to be opened together. Instructions were basically the same as Star Diamond, but in this case the bus wheels looked slightly out of perspective. The three minifigs were supplied completely disassembled, but once made appeared of good quality. The male passenger had a newer style hairpiece than the older type shown on the box. Close inspection showed the brown hair colour looked a little washed out when compared to genuine LEGO, although the minifig quality was streets ahead of all other Chinese clone brands. The suitcase was hollow on one side. A single set of traffic lights was also included in the kit.



M.Y. City Bus – parts as supplied; annoyingly unmade minifigs; serene driver, whimsical gal and weaslaphobic suitcase guy.

The model itself was relatively easy to build, although the tiled roof required immensely strong hands. The 8-stud wide design meant the seats were placed either side of an aisle which in theory allowed two rows of minifigs to sit in the bus. Unfortunately the designers hadn't tested their product very well as the seats were too low compared to the windows to let the minifig arms take advantage of the thin glass, and so would not fit properly. The roof as built was firmly studded to the windows making it rather hard to put the passengers inside anyway. Both could be easily fixed by raising the seats and adding some tiles between the windows and roof. It is surprising that the designers did not notice the seat problem; perhaps there was a parts limit. No Star Diamond kits tested had removable roofs.

Comparison with genuine LEGO showed a fairly good match for lime green, but a slightly lighter hue for the dark bluish-grey colour. Some of the parts had LEGO-style part and mould numbers on the reverse side. The wheels and tyres were excellent quality; the tyres had 'Star Diamond' around the sidewalls, and in some aspects were better than the LEGO ones. This kit had 4x4 tiles, which are not (yet) a LEGO part. Overall fit of the parts was very consistent, feeling marginally tighter than real LEGO. This meant the rear view mirrors stayed on the clips better than LEGO itself.



Good value and well made – but at 8 studs wide not really compatible with anything else in Town. 4x4 tile – note moulding number

Overall this kit was quite good, although the low seats and immovable roof made it tricky to play with. The 8-stud wide design is becoming a common feature of quite a few recent Chinese clone kits, although is a bit big for the normal LEGO town theme. Using the parts supplied and few extras with 6x3 windscreens it is possible to make a good 6-stud wide version. There are two Star Diamond double-decker buses that are 6 studs wide, but they proved impractical to source.

Star Diamond are way, way ahead of any of the other Chinese manufacturers tested in quality, although kit design is not quite up to LEGO standards in this case. The very slight difference between the lime green colour and real LEGO would be noticeable under certain lights (although this is true of genuine LEGO too) so it is not a straight swap. This is the only identified Star Diamond kit under the M.Y. brand.

Scores	City Bus
Quality*	100
Value	100
Fit*	100
Compatibility	95
Minifig*	100
Design	90
Instructions	100
Total	98.5



Star Diamond

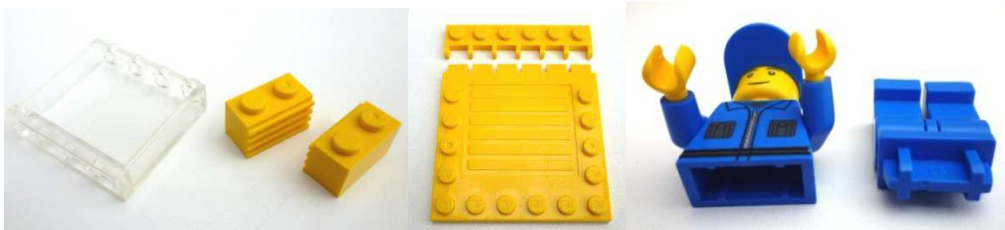
Original Star Diamond kits are very hard to source for the UK, but a single supplier based in Hong Kong was found on eBay, and 2 weeks later the '24H Express Truck' arrived. The cost was AUS \$25 + AUS \$10 postage (about £23.50 in total) which made it about 30% more expensive than a comparable LEGO set.

Presentation was excellent. The box was well made and sturdy, with a smattering of good and amusing English translations amongst the Chinese. The pieces were supplied in very well made bags. The instructions were well laid out and easy to follow. There was a sticker sheet, but these were good and were easy to apply. The pieces had the 'Star' writing on the lugs, and were of top quality and indistinguishable from LEGO in feel and fit (quite hard for yellow and black). There were a few different pieces – a 6x6 hinge roof (not quite same design as the Jubilux Woma version), the grill 2x1 bricks were only grilled on one side, and the 4x3 clear panel had side stiffeners. Interestingly, the 6x6 panels had both left- and right-handed versions, judging from the moulding button. The trans-black windscreen was excellent. The kit was easy to make and was well designed, with study cross-joining and SNOT used for the front and rear. The lorry itself had a well-proportioned shape. It was a pleasure to build. Overall, it was very hard indeed to find any differences in quality between this and a genuine LEGO kit of a few years ago.



Star Diamond 24H Express Truck as supplied and made up. There's a driver and a loader guy. Are those counterfeit iPods?

The minifigs were supplied with separate arms, hands and torsos in true Chinese fashion. Unlike all other Chinese manufacturers, these were of excellent quality, and the hands appeared to be *better* than those used the current batch of LEGO collectable minifigs. Torso printing was fine in detail. The whites of the eyes were a bit large for European tastes. The torso-legs assembly joint was different to a real minifig and marginally less stiff. One minifig was identical to the Click Brick Tow Truck driver.



Some different pieces including useful 6x6 roof hinge, and a close-up of the driver minifig showing different torso stiffening and leg assembly.

Was there anything wrong with this kit at all? Well... on the back of the box is that awful phrase 'Contents may vary from photos and illustrations on packaging' which is not exactly inspiring. The instructions had a couple of small joins at the top where they hadn't been cut (seen this in LEGO kits too, though). The minifigs had to be assembled and the heads were a tad boring. The truck design was a bit annoying as the cab had no easily removable roof or doors, making the minifig driver rather a prisoner. The driver's seat was yellow just like the truck – perhaps a different colour would be better? And maybe the stickers hark back to the 1990s (although no more than the current Star Wars kits). But that's about it, really. I positively liked the 'BLH' rip-off of 'DHL', and the computer / Apple thing on the boxes (there's a banana too, which I suspect might just be genuine humour).

Many of the newer Star Diamond kits seem to be of good design and comparable with, but sufficiently different from, genuine LEGO themes. It must be said that the older sets do however show a lack of imagination. If the newer sets are ever imported into the UK and sold at a competitive price (say at £10 as for the M.Y City Bus) they would form a proper alternative to LEGO, and in fact if this kit was cheaper it would outscore the LEGO cement mixer. Star Diamond are the only manufacturer with which I have had hand-on experience that are anywhere near capable of this.

I would buy another Star Diamond kit!

Scores	24H Express Truck
Quality*	100
Value	60
Fit*	100
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	105
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	97



Star Diamond

Looking around for an ice-cream van revealed no new LEGO model, and being a bit lazy I used the supplier based in Hong Kong to buy the “Ice Cream Truck”. The cost was still AUS \$25 + AUS \$10 postage; changing economics made it £22 in total, less than the DHL truck but still about 30% more than a comparable LEGO set. Previous experience with the 24H express truck did not discourage me from buying it.

This set was from the same new series of Star Diamond (number 82108 with the DHL truck 82105 and the city bus 82102). This box had only badly translated English whereas the DHL truck at least had some sense. The significance of “520” is still a mystery to me. Presentation was again excellent, with pieces supplied in very well made bags. The instructions were well laid out and easy to follow. There was a sheet with stickers that were easy to apply. The pieces were of top quality and indistinguishable from LEGO in feel and fit; the wheels especially were very good indeed. Most of the medium lavender and pink colour pieces are not yet made by LEGO (e.g. wheel arches and slopes), and the colours were all but identical.

The set design was extremely good with detailing inside for the ice cream dispenser. The kit was not perfect – the rear wheels seemed too far forward in proportion to the van length; the wheels were too high up the wheel arches, and the roof didn’t come off so it was tricky to play well with the guy inside. These were relatively minor niggles and quite simple to change (as it would be with any set LEGO make). It was a pleasure to build and again it was very hard indeed to find any differences between this and a genuine LEGO kit of a few years ago.



Pastel colours table and chairs, no real ice creams, tubby girl in racy outfit and Harry Potter bloke. Lights are Photoshopped on the box pictures.

Three minifigs were supplied with this kit – an ice-cream guy (who looked a lot like the director), and a male and female customer. The male guy was a Harry Potter copy with big hair; the female looked something like a character from the Town beach theme and appeared to have ripped her blouse through eating too much ice cream. One of Harry Potter’s arms was slightly loose (a bit like an old LEGO torso). Not full marks there, then. The supplied hair, although OK, was not identical to LEGO. And there were no ice creams or lollipops to hold.

Was there anything wrong with this kit at all? Not really. The only gripe is not being able to buy it cheaply in the UK.

Scores	Ice Cream Truck
Quality*	100
Value	60
Fit*	100
Compatibility	100
Minifig*	95
Design	100
Instructions	100
Total	95

Conclusions

Mega Bloks are still terrible. DON'T BUY MEGA BLOKS!

The **Enlighten** kits were bought as they were of interesting UK subjects, and the design of the sets was surprisingly good. The pieces were however noticeably worse quality than LEGO - the colours were not as strong, the clear not completely clear, and bricks were not fully smooth. The minifigs were exact LEGO clones but their quality was fairly random and would rapidly fall apart if played with. The kits were thus let down by the quality of the plastic and the minifig mouldings. Personally, if available *cheaply* in UK shops (less than £10) I might buy the carriage again, but the design would have to be changed as the hinges don't work properly. DON'T BUY ENLIGHTEN!

Kazi brick mouldings were of even worse quality than Enlighten. The Chinook kit was a good design and potentially was very playable. The brick colours were not strong and noticeably rough. The minifigs were near clones of LEGO but had randomly poor quality. Overall, the Kazi kit was *terminally* let down by the quality of the bricks and the minifigs. I would never ever use Kazi bricks by choice. LEGO do not make military kits, but even so I would try to source LEGO pieces instead if I wanted to build another of these in green. However, I *would* build a LEGO civilian Chinook based on the Kazi design over the current LEGO version, even though the LEGO design is actually quite good. I just think the Kazi design is even better. DON'T BUY KAZI!

Sluban were marginally better than Kazi, but the minifigs were terrible and were of a different design to boot. Hands-on experience means no more Sluban for me, thank-you, no matter how enticing their website is. DON'T BUY SLUBAN!

Little White Dragon were again marginally better than Kazi, with the mediocre minifigs resembling Sluban but with an unholy skin colour. Boring sets. **COGO** are of better quality with mildly interesting sets and LEGO-ish minifigs, but with the same unholy skin colour. DON'T BUY LITTLE WHITE DRAGON OR COGO!

The **Ligao** was OK as a LEGO substitute, but the set would not be worth getting in the UK as the price differential was just not good enough even without the appalling minifig. Would I buy another Ligao kit? No, no, no. DON'T BUY LIGAO!

Best-Lock and **Blox** pieces were manufactured by an unidentified company in China, although suspicion must fall at Pengcheng. These sets were the worst tested by quite some margin, although the minifigs did come pre-assembled. Truly dire. DON'T BUY BESTLOCK OR BLOX!

Peizhi was much the same as Ligao, with worse colour white but a reasonable minifig for the price. However, there are no really interesting kits or minifigs in the Block Tech marketed range to make it worthwhile buying them again. DON'T BUY PEIZHI!

The Block Tech army truck came from **Jubilux Woma**, copying Sluban with markedly better quality. It was not really a direct rival to LEGO as it covered a military theme. The military set design was not too bad and the quality of the bricks was almost indistinguishable from LEGO. The army minifigs were not really suited to the theme and had very odd heads. The olive green colour bricks were perfect for military themes. The Gatling guns would be excellent if they were detached from the missiles (cue gas ring, sharp knife and garnet paper). The huge minifig weapons were very good, if you're into that sort of thing.

Star Diamond stood out as the only Chinese copy to have no major flaws. The pieces are of LEGO quality and the minifigs are well put together (when put together). Click Brick sets are of only passing interest, but some of the newer Star Diamond kit designs for sale in China are sufficiently different to LEGO to make them a viable alternative. For example, their range of town vehicles (especially the buses) is very good and this could make them a rival to LEGO kits. It has, however, not been possible (so far) to find proper Star Diamond kits for sale in the UK, although the green bus MY kit marketed by Kandy Toys is a repackaged Star Diamond 82012.

As it stands, most Chinese clone copy quality is nowhere near that of LEGO and this prevents them from being equal rivals outside China. This testing exercise highlighted the great quality of real LEGO! Out of the kits *reviewed* (except Star Diamond) I'd only really consider getting the Enlighten carriage again, and only then if I could get it cheaper. However, with a dispassionate hat on I *would* consider getting Star Diamond kits if they were available in the UK because of their quality bricks and interesting different designs. The only problems would be finding another room to keep the bricks apart from LEGO, and the very real prospect of having to hide from the many heavily armed angry LEGO fanatics who would be baying for blood. Yike.

The Star Diamond make has shown that it is possible for China to produce comparable quality kits, and it may be only a matter of time before they build up a decent product range. More companies will undoubtedly follow. Whether they form a rival to LEGO outside China will mostly depend on whether the manufacturers can be bothered to export. I suspect that in the end, they will.

The Eastern Block

This is a summary of an epic review of 11 Chinese clone LEGO manufacturers. There are actually over 30 separate companies copying LEGO in China, so this is just scratching the surface.

LEGO 60015 Cement Mixer (moderator case)

Fantastic kit, great quality and superb design. Instructions are starting to verge towards the daftly easy for each step, and stickers are harking back to the 1990s. Good value, sensible sized box and looks brilliant. Excellent to play with, too.

LEGO 41010 Olivia's Beach Buggy (Friends, targeted character minifig moderator case)

Well thought out kit design, minifig better than anticipated. Tree design a bit lacklustre and price a bit steep. As a theme this is actually very good, if a bit expensive for the smaller kits. Expect numerous Chinese copies in the next few years - once they've done China.

"Mega Bloks" Baker Smurf

Reasonable quality bespoke minifig, poor quality bricks (as ever). Mega Bloks seem to think they are now an equal rival to LEGO and can charge the same price. I have never understood Canadian humour. LEGO Friends show how to do it properly. Certainly will not buy again.

"Enlighten" diesel locomotive and Pullman carriage

Good kit design, mediocre quality. Minifigs blatant copies of LEGO, but legs keep falling off. Colours not quite right and clink test sounds bad. Hinges don't work well which is very, very annoying. Missing piece in one kit. Railways wheels and magnets work well enough, and nice windows. Cheap, but not really cheap enough to buy again.

"Kazi" heavy lift helicopter (military Chinook CH-47D)

Excellent kit design, abysmal quality. Minifigs blatant copies of LEGO, but arms keep falling off. Hands are poor quality. Terrible brick fit, no quality control, unidentified organic substance found on one piece. Brand name is strangely apt. Awful. Will never get again, even if free.

"Sluban" 8x8 heavy transporter truck (military HEMTT)

Nice website, sets look professional, don't be fooled. Minifigs weird and rubbish quality with arms falling off, poor leg fit and un-grippy hands. Need mallet to assemble set. Sluban will be solely responsible for 100 million militaristic angry Chinese children with immensely strong hands. Horrible. Will not buy again.

"Little White Dragon" construction crane (M.Y imported ugly truck)

Uninspiring kit design, mediocre quality. Minifigs a bit like Sluban but with undead hue. Equivalent of piped musak. Have forgotten it was bought as brain has turned to mush, but wake up every night with nightmares of re-animated builders. Dire.

"Ausini" pizza van (Click 'n' Snap import)

OK kit design, OK quality. Minifigs like LEGO but with undead hue and disturbing expressions. Amusing Chinglish stickers. Price makes it good value but only applicable to playtime after sundown or the minifig might scream and turn to dust.

"PeiZhi" spaceship thing (Block Tech import)

Poor quality bricks that look dirty when new. OK minifig with arms and legs that stay on. Cheapest kits in the UK. Will not buy again unless cheaper. Probably better to source second-hand LEGO minifigs from car boot sales.

"Ligao" speed car (police car)

Mediocre quality bricks and poor quality weird minifig. A bit like visiting Woking. Not cheap enough by a long, long way. Home market has blatant minifig clones, but probable quality similar to Kazi, not a good sign. Wish had never bought in first place, and will actively inform others not to make the same mistake.

"Best-Lock" racing car and "Blox" (Wilkinson) fire engine

Laughably bad quality, quite possibly the worst LEGO copies on sale by some margin. Minifigs resemble zombies and have creepy moulded heads, sometimes disturbingly so. Blox fireman and construction worker are very, very angry. Combine harvester and tractor good design but atrocious quality pieces. Fire engine and SWAT cruiser atrocious design and atrocious quality pieces. Construction truck even worse. Chinese manufacturer not identified, and rightly so. Bought for comic effect only, so you won't have to. Don't. No, really. **Don't.**

Block Tech UrbanX Sport (IQ Block import)

Unique but pointless brick locking design that doesn't really work well with anyone else's. Set is OK but not really what's on the box. Minifig is OK for the price. Requires immensely strong hands. Very cheap but trounced by COGO. This is not a good omen. Bin fodder.

Block Tech Military justice (Jubilux Woma import)

Manufacturer Jubilux and amusingly a blatant Chinese copy of a Chinese Sluban copy of a South Korean Oxford Toy copy of proper LEGO. Quite good quality pieces and not a bad kit, but minifigs very weird. Nice olive green bricks. Big Gatling guns and quite dangerous firing darts. Might consider buying again, but minifigs are currently haunting every dream and forcing therapy sessions.

"Click Brick" tow crane (Star Diamond)

Mediocre set design, high quality bricks. Very good minifig. Click Brick sets designed in UK, which is frankly rather embarrassing, given the good job Character Toys do with Cobi bricks. Might buy again when kit design is competent. Possible job opportunity for militant Brickish member.

"Star Diamond" City Bus, 24H Delivery Truck, Ice Cream Truck

Good to excellent set design, very high quality bricks and minifigs, can be found occasionally for a competitive price. Apart from a few minor niggles virtually identical to the genuine article and have parts and colours not yet available. Definitely a competitor to LEGO if kits ever get exported in numbers, which currently they don't. Did buy again.

Conclusions

Star Diamond very good, all others very rubbish.

Some related websites

Chinese Brick (shop based in Thailand – stocks most of the Chinese clone brands)

http://www.chinesebricks.com/index.php?lang_page=e

AliExpress (import site for Chinese goods – search engine reveals the vast array of clone brands available)

<http://www.aliexpress.com>

Highly amusing US blog reviews of rubbish clone LEGO from a few years back, including some early Kazi and Little White Dragon

<http://www.reasonablyclever.com/boots/lego/index.html>

Excellent list of many clone bricks, unfortunately with many broken links

<http://www.freewebs.com/orrex/constructionclones.htm>

Oxford Toys (South Korean, not Chinese)

<http://oxfordtoy.co.kr/eng/index/index.asp>

Kre-O

http://www.hasbro.com/kre-o/en_GB/

Airfix Quick Build

<http://www.airfix.com/shop/quick-build/>

BanBao

<http://banbaoworld.com/>

Enlighten

<http://enlighten-brick.com/eng.html>

Kazi

<http://www.kaiyutoys.com/products3.asp>

Ausini building blocks (redirected from www.ausini.com)

<http://ausini.en.alibaba.com/>

K'nex

<http://www.knex.com/products/>

Sluban

<http://www.sluban.co.uk/>

Kimboli Toys

<http://www.kimboli.cn>

Little White Dragon and COGO

http://www.loongon.com/index_en.asp

Ligao

<http://www.wangetoys.com> [currently broken?]

LOZ

http://www.loztoys.com/profile_en.asp

Leyi (or whatever Shantou Megafun Toys Industrial Ltd are branding their bricks)

http://www.megafuntoys.com/productlist_30.html

Star Diamond

<http://www.lhtoys.com/en/aboutus.asp>

Click Brick

<http://www.fiattoys.com/Default.aspx>

Best-Lock

<http://www.best-lock.com>

Cobi

<http://cobi.pl/en/toys/> (Poland); <http://www.bricblok.co.uk/> (UK)

Character Building

<http://www.character-online.com/products/Character-Building/>

Blox (Wilkinson website)

<http://www.wilko.com/>

Score Table

Scored from 7 categories, 3 of which are double the importance (quality, fit and minifigs), to make 10 overall and thus scored out of 100. Note the LEGO cement mixer design was better than expected so scores more than 100%, making it even more unfair for the Chinese.

Company	LEGO	LEGO	Mega Bloks	Enlighten	Enlighten	Kazi	Sluban	Ligao	Little White Dragon	COGO	Best Lock	Best Lock	Blox	Blox	Blox	Blox	PeiZhi	Jubilux Woma	Jubilux Woma	Click Brick	M.Y	Star Diamond	Star Diamond
Model	Cement Mixer	Olivia's Beach Buggy	Baker Smurf	Diesel	Carriage	Chinook	HEMTT	Speed Car	Crane Truck	Pizza Van	Racing Car	SWAT	Fire Engine	Combine Harvester	SWAT Cruiser	Construction Truck	Space Cruiser	Military Justice	Star Fighter	Tow Truck	City Bus	Delivery Truck	Ice-Cream Truck
Quality*	100	100	60	80	80	50	60	70	60	60	Nope	10	None	Still none	Erm...	Missing	60	90	90	95	100	100	100
Value	100	80	40	80	90	50	90	40	50	100	40	50	30	70	30	20	100	80	70	70	100	60	60
Fit*	100	100	70	90	60	70	60	60	60	80	20	20	15	20	15	15	70	80	70	95	100	100	100
Compatibility	100	100	70	100	100	100	90	90	60	90	60	60	65	60	50	40	90	90	80	95	95	100	100
Minifig*	100	100	100	70	70	60	30	20	40	60	25	30	30	30	20	20	80	40	40	100	100	105	95
Design	110	90	80	100	90	100	90	50	40	70	40	30	20	80	30	10	50	80	80	80	90	100	100
Instructions	95	100	90	90	90	80	80	90	70	70	30	60	35	50	35	35	70	70	90	90	100	100	100
Total	100.5	97	74	85	79	69	65	57	54	73	28	32	24	36	21.5	17.5	73	74	72	92.5	98.5	97	95

Ranking	Company	Average Score
1 st	LEGO	99
2 nd	Star Diamond	97
3 rd	Enlighten	82
4 th	Mega Bloks	74
5 th	Jubilux Woma	73
6 th	COGO	73
7 th	PeiZhi	73
8 th	Kazi	69
9 th	Sluban	65
10 th	Ligao	57
11 th	Little White Dragon	54
DNF	Best Lock	29
DNF	Blox	24