BFG J Ssue 6. Fall/Winter 2006 people • building • community

THE EVENT ISSUE

Inside:

BrickFest®

LEGO® World

LEGO Fest

and

more!

Also:
Interviews with
Jørgen Vig Knudstorp,
Steven Canvin, and Knud Thomson
Building Instructions
AND MORE!

Women who Build with LEGO LEGO Inside Tour LEGO Serious Play Now Ath direction

Build A Firm Foundation for Your LEGO® Hobby!

Have you ever wondered about the basics (and the not-so-basics) of LEGO building? What exactly is a slope? What's the difference between a tile and a plate? Why is it bad to simply stack bricks in columns to make a wall? *The Unofficial LEGO Builder's Guide* is here to answer your questions. You'll learn:

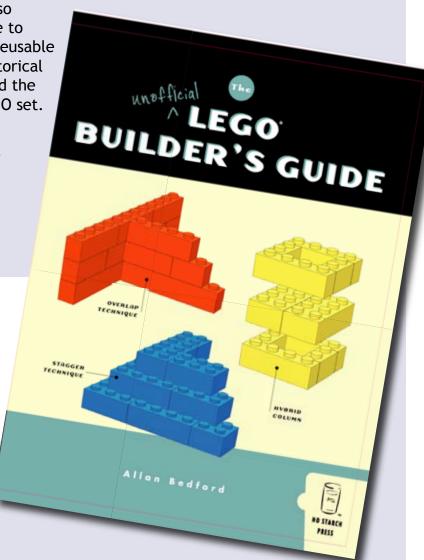
- The best ways to connect bricks and creative uses for those patterns
- Tricks for calculating and using scale (it's not as hard as you think)
- The step-by-step plans to create a train station on the scale of LEGO people (aka minifigs)
- How to build spheres, jumbo-sized LEGO bricks, micro-scaled models, and a mini space shuttle
- Tips for sorting and storing all of your LEGO pieces

The Unofficial LEGO Builder's Guide also includes the Brickopedia, a visual guide to more than 300 of the most useful and reusable elements of the LEGO system, with historical notes, common uses, part numbers, and the year each piece first appeared in a LEGO set.

Focusing on building actual models with real bricks, *The LEGO Builder's Guide* comes with complete instructions to build several cool models but also encourages you to use your imagination to build fantastic creations!

The Unofficial LEGO Builder's Guide by Allan Bedford No Starch Press ISBN 1-59327-054-2 \$24.95, 376 pp. AVAILABLE NOW

Available in bookstores everywhere or directly from the publisher at www.nostarch.com. Visit the author's website at www.apotome.com for more information.



Volume #1 Issue 6



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Publisher/Editor in Chief Joe Meno

Photography Editor Geoff Gray

Business Manager and Proofreader Carin Proctor

Copy Editor Allan Bedford

European Bureau Editor Melody Krützfeldt

West Coast Editors Todd Kubo Ashley Glennon

Writers:

Camilla Torpe, Joe Meno, Geoff Gray, Gary Istok, Melody Krützfeldt, Anthony Sava, Eric Brok, Megan Rothrock, David Perdue, Christopher Deck, Jared Burks, Erik Amzallag, Marco Chiappa, Jeramy Spurgeon, Jim Foulds, Holger Matthes, Maarten Steurbaut, Davide Cavagino, Alex Cordero, Luca Gianniti, Hogne B. Petterson, Sybrand Bonsma, Diana Wong, and Greg Hyland.

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About the Cover:

The new UCS Millenium Falcon is presented before New York's Toy Fair! Photo by Joe Meno.

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From the Editor:

It's an interesting time for *BrickJournal*. Not too long ago, I had a handful of staff in the United States working on stories and photography. Now we have a much larger staff with representatives from Europe and Asia. A European Bureau run by Melody Krützfeldt (who can be reached at mel@brickjournal.com) is becoming a very important part of the magazine, providing new insights from overseas.

BrickJournal's involvement with

the LEGO Group has grown, too – Where initially we only had some interviews, *BrickJournal* now is getting ideas and requests from the LEGO staff for articles. In fact, this issue features another interview with Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, the CEO of the company. Looking forward, we will be doing more with the LEGO Group to help promote the hobby and the brick.

The biggest lesson I have learned is that I cannot do everything. The reasons behind <code>BrickJournal</code> not having a consistent schedule can be traced to me trying to do all parts of the magazine. While I could do assignments and find leads on stories and do layouts on an issue before, things have become too busy for me. Issues began to come out late. The main reason was I couldn't focus the time and attention needed to work on layouts. In short, I was the bottleneck that I was trying hard to avoid.

So I made a call for some layout staff, and now have some people willing to help out with the next issue. I will have to step back on design and layout – and that has been a painful decision. But what is important is not for me to leave my imprint on everything, but to allow others to use their skills to help out. *BrickJournal* is supposed to be about the community, and that should be reflected in all parts of the publication.

I don't have all the ideas or solutions to the challenges *BrickJournal* will have, nor should I. But I won't shut down the magazine for that reason. I want it to become better, and that can happen only by being open to change.

Joe Meno Editor

P.S. Have ideas or comments? Drop me a line at admin@brickjournal.com. Or go to www.lugnet.com and leave a comment on their forums! I'm open to suggestions and comments and will do my best to reply.





Did you ever wonder how LEGO elements were made?

Or how sets are designed?

Or wanted to see the history of the LEGO Group?

Or wanted to see all the LEGO parts in use today?

Or go behind the scenes of LEGOLAND?

You **can** at the LEGO Inside Tour.



Through the Looking Glass: A Peek at the LEGO Inside Tour

Article by Camilla Torpe.

Photography provided by the LEGO Group.



LEGO fans can take advantage of an exclusive opportunity to learn and see the many aspects of the LEGO Group by going on the LEGO Inside Tour.

The Inside Tour has only been in existence for a short time, but already has been deemed a dream trip by those who have taken it. Only four tours have been offered so far, so there only a few people have gone - but there are three more tours set for 2007.

On these tours, there is unparalleled access to the LEGO Group, including meeting LEGO designers and even visits by the leadership team. This is one of many great surprises that happen in the Inside Tour.

The first day of the Tour is an introduction of sorts, starting with a visit with LEGO Designers. Guests can ask the designers questions, but there's also something else in store for the guests... they are invited to participate in a themed building event - so the guests get to build in the largest LEGO toybox in the world!

There's more on the next day. A visit to the Idea House starts things. The House is a closed facility that serves as a museum displaying the history of the LEGO Group, from its start as a wooden toy producer through its shift to a plastic manufacturer and creation of the LEGO brick. During this time, there's also a visit to the Vault that contains a copy of almost every LEGO set ever made. Guests can see sets from the late 50s to the present, and many spend a little time looking for the first set they got as a child.

Presentations are also given about the culture and values of the LEGO Group and its history. The best TV spots and commercials are also shown.

The showroom is also opened to guests, so they get a sneak peek at the sets that are upcoming!

From there, guests visit the manufac-

turing plant. It produces the thousands of elements needed for LEGO sets. The plant is almost entirely automated! The production of a LEGO element is traced, from the melting of the plastic, to the molding, to the delivery of the elements, to a storage warehouse that holds tens of thousands of bricks and plates and other parts - all done by robots.

The last day of the tour is devoted to LEGOLAND Billund, and guests are treated to a backstage tour of the park, with visits to the Model Builders, technical operations, and light and sound departments. Everyone gets to see how things are maintained and built in the park, and then get to play in LEGOLAND!

Accommodations are at the LEGOLAND Hotel. It is a four-star hotel that is literally a door away from the park. Meals are included in the Tour, so there's no worry about food. Breakfast is at the hotel, while lunch and dinner are elsewhere.

And what have guests said about the Inside Tour?

- "I was blown away to see and hear informatton that was private to the company. I came away with a deeper understanding of the LEGO Group."
- "We were so excited and surprised when we were given so many nice gifts..the LEGO bags, the chocolates and the lovely LEGO rose were all amazing!"
- "A dream! What a great surprise and much appreciated opportunity! I was blown away by the LEGO Groups's generosity!"

Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen's comments:

"As a company we can learn a lot from our guests, who have a passionate interest in LEGO products. Contact with groups such as these is essential."

You're invited to to be in the next group! The next Inside Tours are set for May 9th-11th, May 23rd-25th, and June 6th - 8th, 2007. The cost of the LEGO Inside Tour is 9000 kroner (about \$1500 US dollars) and include the Tour, accommodations and meals. Transportation to Billund is not included.

Spaces are very limited, so we hope to see you in Billund soon!

You can find out more information or make a reservation by writing to: LEGO Inside Tour, Attn: Camilla Torpe, 7190 Billund, Denmark or to LEGOInsideTour@europe.LEGO.com. You can also call +45 79 50 60 70.







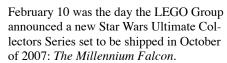
The LEGO Group: 2007 Sets

2007 Sneak Preview

International Toy Fair, New York City

Article and Photography by Joe Meno





The announcement was presented at a LEGO Collectors Party that was held the eve of the International Toy Fair. The party was also the place where a contest was announced that will take place in the summer with the Star Wars sets to celebrate its 30-year anniversary!

The party presented other new sets coming for the next year, inluding Batman, Spongebob Squarepants, Harry Potter, and Bionicle sets. BrickJournal will have an article with more coverage of the new sets coming. Until then, here are some photos from the event. Enjoy!













The LEGO Group

Building Teams and Solutions With the Brick:

A Look at



SERIOUS PLAY"

The power of play is something that has only recently been used in professional settings. The LEGO Group is using bricks and building in training and development sessions, and BrickJournal was able to take part in a demonstration of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY.

Article by Joe Meno Photos by the LEGO Group and Joe Meno

LEGO SERIOUS PLAY. These are three words that usually are not in the same sentence, but they make up a small but growing part of the LEGO Group. LEGO SERIOUS PLAY stimulates imagination and creativity to enable participants to create new insights and solutions in both professional and personal settings.

This sounds pretty pretentious, but it's not – it is the simple application of some things most adults tend to avoid: building and storytelling. LEGO SERIOUS PLAY uses LEGO bricks as a hands-on medium to build and tell the stories participants



A facilitator discusses a model

have about themselves and their work. By building a model of, for example, an issue, a personal aspiration or a scenario, a participant not only creates a visualization that others can grasp and understand, it creates a point of reference for others to explore and develop. This also empowers the participants to use their creativity, brain power and imagination in a more direct way than in other meetings – LEGO elements become a common language for everyone to use and share.

Children do this effortlessly when they are playing - they make cities with the LEGO bricks they have, and make up stories for the Minifigures that live there. LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is a place where that imagination can be used in a 'grown-up' context. With LEGO SERIOUS PLAY sessions, a group can learn to use each person's imagination to make decisions and develop adaptive strategies to deal with new challenges.

The best way to demonstrate this is to do a session. A LEGO SERIOUS PLAY session requires a trained facilitator and a selection of special LEGO sets. The sessions provide sets for each participant, and the LEGO elements are partly basic bricks and some specialty pieces and Minifigures.

A subject is selected for participants to build, and a time limit to build by. In my session, I was asked to make a model that represented BrickJournal—a model that is constantly evolving toward a vision that hasn't yet become crisp and defined. I initially protested building this, because how could I make an unknown into a model? But once I was told:"You have 5 minutes," I ripped open the part bags and began building.

One of the reasons that LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is so amazing is that it takes advantage of the action of building - there is a connection that a person has when creating or building that is unique. People 'think' through their hands when building, and there's a different level of insight that is used when putting bricks together. Part of this is intuitive, but part draws from an individual's experiences, and the time limit forces these processes into motion. The time limit also forces meaning to parts that ordinarily would not have meaning.



Models are made by groups as well as by individuals

When I reached the limit, my facilitator told me and asked if I wanted any more time. I actually was pretty happy with what I built – which was a true mess of parts. Unlike what I am used to building, this was a discordant model with rainbow colors and axles hanging out the sides. Two wheels spun in the middle. One on the top, one on the side. A couple of Minfigure torsos were on the top, one with a skull head, one with a smile. Another head was on the base, and a set of Minifigure legs were on the bottom. All of the heads had poles coming out of their tops.

So I was asked to do a show and tell and explain everything.

Storytelling is a very important aspect of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY. From making a story, various scenarios are created, and possibilities are explored. Using a model to play the story out, it becomes easier to see possibilities, including those that aren't obvious upon casual view. It's also safe, so strategies can be given a chance to play out. My story was very improvisational, but enlightening to me, because I gave meaning to all the things I built.

From the axles projecting out, I saw how *BrickJournal* is an outreach medium. From the Minifigures, I got different meetings – the skull represented the staff that went in different directions from the magazine and eventually left. The other parts in color were the diversity of the staff, and the Minifigure legs represented how everyone who is staff is from different walks of life, which got a smile from the facilitator. He noticed a row of slopes in the rear and asked about them, and I stated that there is a little organization in the mag, but not as much as I would like.

We discussed a little more about the model, and I was fascinated at how much it revealed by the design - or lack thereof.

Perhaps the most telling thing was that the model was tall and ungainly – as when I began BrickJournal, this model was rather fragile and not too stable. This is something I realized when I was trying to place it in its box – it didn't fit then shattered. This had a lasting impression.

Through LEGO SERIOUS PLAY, I was able to create a 3-dimensional model of what I thought the magazine was, and with that I could see its strengths and flaws in a very immediate and personal way. For groups, this is a great team-communication opportunity, as each person can see new things and bring ideas and solutions to the table. This also empowers participants to be a valued part of the team. The genius of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is the simplicity of the lessons – from making a simple model, scenarios can be spun, problems can be seen and solutions created, and a group of people become a closer team through building and storytelling.

The core beliefs of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY are:

- 1. There is vast untapped potential in the people in organizations
- Those people have the imagination to resolve most serious issues
- The meetings and techniques used in most organizations do not engage the people who could actually solve the problems they face.

The core strategy of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is to create a framework to deal with complex issues in real-time (the present – 'right now'). With my model, I was able to see possible flaws just by noticing that the model didn't use many parts and was tall, which is unwise building. Seeing it fall apart when trying to put in the box was an indicator to me.

In the month after I had the session I was able to act on what I learned about the magazine. I gathered more writers and created a European Bureau. While the idea of a European desk was actively considered, the demonstration confirmed to me that there needed to be a strong presence elsewhere from the US, so I quickly acted to make that happen. BrickJournal is now much stronger than it was before, and it's getting ready to go to the next level.

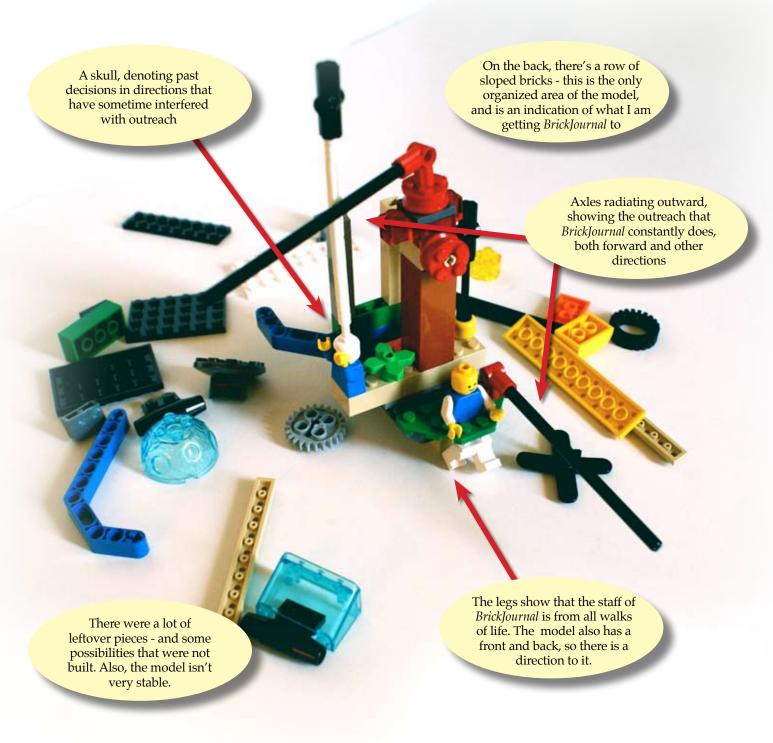
All because I built with too few bricks.



LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is a program that has been used by companies for strategy development, organizational development, innovation processes, mergers & acquisitions and much more. Workshops are available through the growing LEGO SERIOUS PLAY certified partner network that today counts 48 partners in 24 countries, and last 1 to 2 days. You can find out more about LEGO SERIOUS PLAY at their website www.seriousplay.com. Many thanks to Jesper Just Jensen and Anders Foss, my facilitator!

BrickJournal: The Model

While this is not the exact model built for the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY demonstration, this is indicative of what is done and discussed at a session. Craft is not emphasized at all, but creation of a model and a story are. As a result, building ability is not needed. However, imagination is - especially when the facilitator asks about the model!



The LEGO Group: NXT MDP

Developing What's NXT

Last year, the new MINDSTORMS NXT system was released to much fanfare - but before the system reached production, LEGO fans were involved with designing the set and software. BrickJournal talked with Steven Canvin, Director of the MINDSTORMS Development Program, about how the LEGO Group and the fans worked together.

Article by Geoff Gray



Steven Canvin with Alpha Rex, the 'mascot' of the MINDSTORMS NXT.

BrickJournal: So as the leader of the MINDSTORMS Development Program, can you give us a little insight into how the program came about and what your expectations were going into this?

Steven Canvin: Our experience with the first generation of LEGO MINDSTORMS, centered around the Robotics Invention System and the RCX microprocessor, was that an enormous community evolved after its launch, with thousands of passionate followers, not only among the children, who were the target group but also a sizeable amount of AFOLs, who literally split our various Robotics sets to pieces, hacking and cracking the hardware, software and firmware (the software for operating the RCX microprocessor), baring it all to the world. Since its launch in September 1998 numerous alternative programming languages have been created as well as home-made sensors for the set. Around 40 books have been written about LEGO MINDSTORMS by hardcore fans and technical writers, thousands of truly ingenious robotic inventions have been created, and I can only say that the buzz around LEGO MINDSTORMS is mind-blowing. I am awed by the zeal of the users out there and we have truly been inspired by them when considering how to continue the development of LEGO MINDSTORMS. We realised that the potential of actually putting all this invaluable insight and knowledge to good use was really big.

Hence the MINDSTORMS Developer Program, which came in succession to a 14-month process where hardcore users were invited to participate in the development of the new generation of LEGO MINDSTORMS. First, we created the MINDSTORMS User Panel, MUP for short, with 5 so-called MUPpets on board, working close with the development team, giving inputs on all aspects of the product. Later, the MUP grew to 13 MUPpets, each active contributors to the community, through building great inventions, creating programming languages, FLL and RoboCup, hardware and writing books.

The MUPpets added their knowledge, insight and creative input

to the product during development, collaborating with the team, and it was this synergy we hoped to maintain when we decided to create the MDP and invite 100 users inside for the beta-test. If we could have a quarter of the same kind of ping-pong and feedback with this larger group as we'd had with the MUP, we'd count it a great success.

BJ: The LEGO Group received over 9,000 applications for helping out. We know that this was way more than you expected. How did you manage to sift through all of the applicants and narrow down the team? What were some of the things you looked for on an application?

SC: To be precise we got 9,610 applications. We were hoping for 1,000 and were prepared to get up to 2,000. Luckily our database setup was capable of handling the big number of applicants. As we said in the application process we did split the group up into three subgroups. Those who wanted to focus on building great robots, those who wanted to write about MINDSTORMS NXT (books, reviews, blogs, training/teaching material etc.) and those who wanted to hack the product, develop new software, hardware or tinker with the Bluetooth connection. Then we tried to mirror the MINDSTORMS community regarding age and what country people were from. In the application process there was a blank area where you were free to write a comment or extra info. We read through all of these comments! And then we spent a lot of time looking at the database. First we narrowed the field down to 400, then to 200, then to 150 and final to the 100 chosen ones. So as you can imagine we did spend a lot of resources picking the 100 MDP's. We wanted to give everyone a chance and we did take every application very seriously. Out of the 9,610 I guess that appr. 8,000 people were very qualified to participate so it was tough to choose.

BJ: Once the team got started, did you think that the expectations of the LEGO Group were met? Were you able to get as much feedback as you had hoped for, and did the success of the team inspire

the LEGO Group to decide to create more teams like this in the future?

SC: I have to be honest and say it truly exceeded our expectations! Within the first week the NXT microprocessor was stripped of any secrets, the first try at an alternative programming language [from one of the newcomers] was made and we were really overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the members who jumped to the occasion and started giving the product an overhaul. We asked them to take the product to its limits and beyond if possible – and they did! We hoped to see 50 per cent of the new 100 members being active in the MDP, and had in many areas up to 70 per cent being active. Adding to this we had the 13 original MUPpets engaged in the discussions, sharing all their knowledge with the new members, helping us herd this crowd of very active users, by e.g. acting as moderators in the various discussion groups.

We got much more feedback than we had ever hoped to get, and thanks to the collective efforts of the 113 members of the MDP we got a very successful beta-test of the product, and not only did the MDP add the finishing touches, we also received a lot of inspiration for the future development of LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT...

User groups have been actively involved in other LEGO product development, but having a process where so many users were so deeply involved in the development of a LEGO product is unprecedented, but I believe it will not be the last time we do this.

BJ: Can you give us some of the stats from the program (# of posts, # of bugs, # of projects used by the LEGO Group, etc)?

SC: To start with we had 8 forums with product-related topics, in which the MDP pioneers could meet up and discuss and exchange info, programmes, pictures, video and what have you, but within two days after we started the newcomers had requested for 3 extra forums to be assigned for special topics!

In the $3\frac{1}{2}$ months the MDP ran the 113 members exchanged over 4,100 messages, hundreds of pictures and many videos (over 200 MB of files...), program and sound samples, listed over 150 bugs, of which many of course were known to us.

BJ: I know there was a lot of serious discussion on the bulletin board, but there was a lot of fun/humorous banter as well. What were some of your more favorite or memorable moments during the program?

SC: Well, one person stands out. I recall his inclination to constantly try and talk fellow MDP members (male and female) to go skinny-dipping with him... Do you know the type??? Hinting and suggesting to people to show more intimate pictures of themselves, and to go to secluded beaches with him...

OK, here it is ...:

It is true that most of the messages were about serious issues, but as the days and weeks went by the members started to warm up and make some serious fun, like sending funny pictures of models, giving them weird names, inspiring each other to go crazy with wild models. Some were sending photos and video of events they had been to with fellow MDP'ers, showing their robots beating each other up. At one time the German members started to write in a regional German dialect that was unintelligible for everybody else, I guess even for themselves! I'm still waiting for a translation.

Another funny incident was when we had a serious building competition, where the goal was to get a robot to get over a wall. That made for a lot of funny videos and comments – and model solutions. One that stands out was a robot capable of time travel – yes, time travel! It created a lot of comments from the other MDPers, who claimed it could not be done. I have only seen the video of the robot disappearing on one side of the wall to then reappear on the other side. I still have to see it with my own eyes to believe it.

I am very thankful that the MDP members also had so much fun to offer and seemed to really enjoy themselves in the process we had.

BJ: What kind of feedback have you received from the participants about the program?

SC: The members started sending thank you notes from the very start, but when the MDP session officially ended,I received many mails from members who thanked us for being allowed to be part of this, and they all felt that it was a truly unique experience, and they felt really involved and many wrote they were ready to do it again, asking when that would be. All in all, they believed it was big step for the LEGO Group to take, in a very crucial part of the product development, and many said that it is something we should continue doing. To which I can only add that with this buzzing community around us, it is definitely a concept we will use more in future projects.

BJ: Can you give us any insight into the next steps with the MINDSTORMS brand?

SC: Yes, of course. As you can see on the document with our plans for 2007 products we have a lot in store, but honestly, I am not allowed to tell anyone about it. And neither can you. I would have to erase your memory first...

One thing for sure is that LEGO MINDSTORMS has come to stay, and you will see much more of us in the future.

Can I have my 2007 document back, please? Now? No, don't put it on the website! NO!

You can find out more about MINDSTORMS at their website: http://mindstorms.lego.com/default.aspx

Geoff Gray asks a lot of questions and also is Photo Editor to BrickJournal.

BrickJournal does not confirm nor deny the possession of a MINDSTORMS document.



2006: The View from the Top

Interview by Geoff Gray Photograph courtesy of the LEGO Group 2006 was a year of change and surprises for the LEGO Group. Following last year's interview, BrickJournal once again talked to the Chief Executive Officer of the LEGO Group, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, about the past year.

BrickJournal: It's good to chat with you again. It's been a little over a year since we last talked to you. A lot has happened during that time. What do you think are the more significant changes to the company and your role in particular?

LEGO had lost its way. We are no longer in an identity crisis. We are all about creative building and creative role play within the unique LEGO System that is founded on the three core platforms of Duplo, Technic and LEGO. We give users the joy of building, the pride in creating and let children become the builders of tomorrow by essentially stimulating their imagination in a logical, systematic and yet extremely creative fashion. This allows them to become the builders of tomorrow as computer programmers, designers, architects, developers of all sorts, scientists and great social beings.

My main concern therefore has shifted to our integrity towards this clear identity: are we all the time living up to it? Is our quality good enough to deliver on this (thank you for all your inputs, keep sending them).

In terms of my role and the business, the business has turned the corner operationally. We still have a long way to go in terms of restoring operations and in particular effectively moving a large part of our manufacturing abroad. However, that said the business is operating much better than it did 2-3 years ago. This is why my focus is shifting from survival, stabilization and optimization towards the long term development of the business. And so my role is changing a great deal. One of the fundamental shifts in our long term development is the decision to be very 'open source', to open up our business and be transparent. This is a crucial principle for me. It is a very delicate balance of managing property rights and disintegrating our company. It is a process I will continue

to personally sponsor because it is so crucial and has become almost the hallmark of my management style.

BrickJournal: With the success of the Star Wars line, and the addition of Avatar, Batman, SpongeBob and others, the LEGO Group seems to be making a big push into partnerships. How advantageous has this been for the company, and do you see TLG growing this area, or possibly backing off in the future?

TLG will continue to seek long term licensing partnerships when they appear to have longevity and a good fit to the LEGO way of playing. The franchises you mention have that quality. We continue to say no to numerous franchises every year, the list of examples is long. From this year alone; superheroes, Fantastic Four, Cars (Pixar), King Kong, and so on. I think if you reflect on these you can see how the ones we have picked have longevity and a great fit with LEGO brand values and LEGO play.

When you say we are making a big push, it is actually not accurate. We do less licensing than we used to do. The future growth in the area will be minimal and we will take a very careful approach in the area.

The biggest surprise this year has been that SpongeBob has been very popular, Avatar less so. Batman did much better than expected and Star Wars on the back of what I thought was one of our best Star Wars assortments ever, did not as well as in 2005 (the movie year), but it still did very well and ended up being one of the best LEGO lines of 2006.

BrickJournal: When you look at licensing, how much partnering with other companies are you doing still for promotional purposes (Maersk, Shell, Nestle, Kabaya, etc). Is this where a lot of your partnering has occurred in the past?

We continue to do a great deal of licensing where it makes sense. We have very strict guidelines of what we can be associated with. There is a clear go/no go list of categories. Examples of what we will not be associated with of course include alcohol and so on.

We no longer do any work with oil companies such as Shell due to the potentially very controversial reputation of such companies (even though they in recent years have taken major steps towards improving that).

Every year more than dkk 2bn (2 billion Danish kroner, or about \$350 million) of sales (25% $^{\circ}$ of the current lego top line turnover) occurs as license retail revenues through companies like Nestle (or Life in the US) cereal, software games, board games and the like.

Kabaya is currently not being used as a partner in Japan but we are looking into new opportunities with this partner that we have a very long history with.

BrickJournal: In our previous interview, we discussed the company's push to reduce the number of unique elements, as well as reducing the color palette. How well is this going, and have you seen a positive impact so far? Also, what is the current unique element count? It seems as though we have seen a lot of new elements showing up recently.

This is a tough one. We continue to push the number down very successfully. I think what you see is more variety in the core platform of LEGO and Technic. Duplo and discontinuing lines such as Clikits are clearly falling dramatically. The number of active components (as we reference the combination of shapes and colors) is approaching 6000, well below our target of 7000. I think in the future, we will see about 6000 active components every year, with 1000 being new that year, and about 4000 being stable for at least 3 maybe even more years. So there will be a hard core, and then rotation on top of that. The introduction of Batman for instance made a number of black components necessary and also special elements that we had never seen before, including the minifigures for Batman. I think while everybody appreciates consistency in the unique LEGO System (nobody has quite something like it in terms of quality and reach, versatility, etc.), I think everybody also loves the special pieces that come out from time to time. This is an area where I really appreciate the second hand trading of special parts. In terms of economics we are seeing major, major impact on our financials from this significant reduction in complexity.

BrickJournal: When we speak of elements and colors, we have to also examine the manufacturing of these. The plans have been to move element molding to other companies, and to rework the molding machines so that the color is added at the machine instead of being built into the raw plastic. How are these initiatives going, and do they appear to be having an impact on the bottom line for the company?

They are working very well for us. It is not easy and there are major concerns but I have to say that our manufacturing people are doing a fantastic job here. Especially when you

"LEGO Factory continues to fascinate us. It is growing fast, and we are planning more things like the train special. So far we are concentrating on how to grow it, then later we will deal with the expensive and complicated logistics."

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consider many of them are losing their jobs. It is a testimony to the unwritten psychological contract between LEGO employees and the LEGO Group. It is very unique.

We are now reaping major efficiencies and we are seeing an impact on color variations, which we are monitoring. We have set up a special quality room, where I and other senior members of management, along with owner Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, get together to discuss quality issues and what is acceptable and not acceptable. We consider quality a priority only on par with creativity and fun, and therefore above all other concerns for our brand.

BrickJournal: You mentioned in your last interview that we can expect to see more of LEGO Factory moving forward. We have already seen the move to buying individual pieces, as well as the addition of the train line. How is this progressing, and how fast do you see the palettes and features growing? Is LEGO Factory meeting the company's expectations?

LEGO Factory continues to fascinate us. It is growing fast, and we are planning more things like the train special. So far we are concentrating on how to grow it, then later we will deal with the expensive and complicated logistics. I expect a lot of activity in this area in 2007 and beyond. It is headed up by Tormod Askildsen, who is well known to many fans and participants in events/brickfests, etc.

BrickJournal: There have been a number of stories circulating about the LEGO Group's shortage of sets for the holiday season. It appears as though several retailers were already well stocked, but the shortages are heavily seen on the Shop At Home sites. How has this impacted the company, and how has it impacted the relationships you have with your

"Companies around the world are dying to get the kind of interaction we enjoy with you every day, and I value it and I treasure it."

retailers? Also, has this changed any of your manufacturing or outsourcing plans for the future?

LEGO is experiencing a revitalization in terms of consumer interest. We expected this year to be one of decline, but in fact it became one of growth. It has overwhelmed us. And even though we have increased manufacturing it has been hard to keep up within CTTY, DUPLO, TECHNIC and MINDSTORMS. We are investing heavily in capacity now and expect to pick up during 2007. However, retailers are very concerned and are taking big orders in. We think they will have plenty of inventory for x-mas, but some individual products will unfortunately be sold out. When we look at sales out of stores, compared to last year, they are roughly flat (no or low growth). Shop at home is hit hard because it is seeing a lot of growth globally, and we cannot hold back stock that has already been promised to retailers that put in orders many months ago. It is a delicate balance between our own channels and those of the retail trade.

Overall our relationship with the retail trade is excellent but there are some issues regarding reliability of supply, but they are really liking the assortment and they are very happy with the LEGO business in terms of how it drives their overall business and profitability (which is their primary concern of course).

Now that we are building more capacity, we are leveraging our new suppliers, i.e., the outsourcing, so that process is very helpful to us in this respect.

BrickJournal: I understand the LEGO Group had a large presence recently at the grand opening of the Millyard project in the NorthEast United States. Can you comment on your thoughts about the project and the impact that it has on the company and the LEGO community?

This is a flagship project that has been going on for three years, or more. I am extremely proud of it, and I am very grateful that it was initiated despite all the difficulties we faced internally. Somebody had more foresight and vision than I did, and that is great. I think it is a real show case of what fans of LEGO can do, in collaboration with the company, and as such it is totally unique on a global scale.

BrickJournal: In terms of this being a showcase effort, does the LEGO Group have plans to release a publication on this, and what other ways are you pushing this project into the public's eye?

I don't think we have that right now but it's a great idea and I will feed that input back to our

community team and our PR team.

BrickJournal: The LEGO System of Play is truly a global toy and has the power to reach anyone with a little imagination. A lot of emphasis gets put into discussions with North American and European communities and the LEGO Group's relationships and offerings (S@H, LEGO Club, etc). Can you tell us what efforts are in progress to step up offerings to people in Asia, Australia, and other parts of the world where devoted fans reside?

Yes, it is being stepped up in Asia and Pacific as well. Last week I was in Sydney and earlier in Singapore, where I had a great meeting with fans of LEGO. In Singapore they gave me a really unique MOC of the Merlion, a signature sculpture of the Singaporean nation, like the Statue of Liberty to the US. We now have one LEGO ambassador, Diana Wong, in Singapore and we would like to see more ambassadors. The LEGO offices in Singapore and Sydney have great collaboration with local communities there. Also Japan is trying to step this up.

BrickJournal: What is your favorite set from the 2006/2007 lineup?

It is the Imperial Star Destroyer (the "small" version that was released this year), strongly followed by the Sandcrawler and then the Green Dragon (Creator) along with the Sentai Fortress in ExoForce. I realize with the Star Destroyer we could have done more for stability of the set (and we are learning), but it does not take away my fascination with the set.

BrickJournal: Once again, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. Do you have any parting thoughts for the readers?

Thank you for your sponsorship. You have really created what can almost be called an insurgency inside our company and I love it. I really enjoy myself very much with people like you and the shared learning we can have together is completely unique. Companies around the world are dying to get the kind of interaction we enjoy with you every day, and I value it and I treasure it. I am humbled by the duty of keeping this relationship intact, vital and refreshing for all of us, and I hope you will always let me know if you feel there is more we can do, or if our unique relationship is somehow challenged.

BREAKING NEWS

BrickJournal got the scoop on a new LEGO Factory Exclusive set coming out from LEGO Direct that has been on the mind of many builders, the LEGO Hobby Train Set! Here's the 6 Things You May Not Have Known About This Set:

- **1.** The trains have been designed by 10 Hobby Train enthusiasts from around the world
- **2.** The box contains 1080 elements and the age mark is 16+
- 3. It is an advanced building set
- **4.** 30 building instructions will be available for this set for 30 different inspirational train models (one set of instructions will be printed and included in the box and the 29 other instructions will be available online). They can build an indefinite number of trains with the amount of bricks available in the box
- **5.** The retail price is 99.99 USD
- **6.** The launch date is **March 19**, and you'll be able to get it at www.legofactory.com!



There's More...

There's also going to be **ANOTHER** set that's even more secret released from LEGO Direct -and *BrickJournal* will have stories on both of these sets in Issue 7, with behind the scenes info and surprises!

Including...

THE SECRET SET DRAWING

E-mail your name, mailing address, and age to admin@brickjournal.com, title Secret Set - you can win this unseen set! Entries must be received by midnight EST, March 31,2007 and have valid mailing addresses to be accepted. Good Luck!

History: The LEGO Group

Four Things That Most AFOLs Never Knew About LEGO



Think you know everything about LEGO sets?

Think again.

Article by Gerhard R. Istok.

Photography by Gerhard Istok, Eric Strand, and the LEGO Group Danish retailers sold children individual LEGO parts from these colorful retailer boxes. Note all the different brick colors available from 1949-56. Note there are even some "marbleized" bricks with more than one color.

1) The "ups" and "downs" of LEGO brick colors...

Today AFOLs (and children) are spoiled by the dozens of colors in which LEGO bricks can be found. This was not always the case. Most kids in the late 1950s and 1960s only had four major colors for LEGO bricks, namely red, white, blue and yellow. Clear was also available, as was black after 1961. But gray did not become a regular LEGO brick color until nearly 1980, with other colors coming online in the 1990s and beyond.

Most AFOLs would be surprised to know that from 1949-56 LEGO bricks were available in about a dozen different colors. These included red, white, blue, yellow, clear, gray, light blue, medium blue, dark blue, light green, green and orange-yellow.

Then with the advent of the non-slotted bricks in 1956, the number of colors was greatly reduced to only five colors (red, white, blue, yellow, clear). Black came online in 1962, with gray slowly returning from 1963-80, however not as bricks until the late 1970's.

LEGO Brick Color Availability:

1953 12 + LEGO brick colors.

1958 5 LEGO brick colors.

1963 6 LEGO brick colors.

1978 7 LEGO brick colors.

2007 40+ LEGO brick colors.

2) The LEGO set that came in all shapes, colors and sizes...

It is doubtful if any LEGO model set came in as many variations as the #236/#1236 Garage set, produced from 1955-70. There were eight different box design/size versions produced. During 1958 there were sometimes four versions being sold at the same time. This set was produced in either rectangular (parts loose in box w/o 1:87 VW Bus) or flat box (parts held in place by cardboard insert with a 1:87 VW Bus) versions. The rectangular box versions were produced from 1955-70, while the flat box versions were produced from 1957-65. Neither version was sold in USA or Canada.

Interestingly enough, the flat box versions (with the 1:87 VW Bus) usually sell for hundreds of dollars on the secondary market, while the rectangular box versions (except for the earliest) usually sell in the \$50-70 range. Although the 1:87 VW Bus adds value to the set, many early LEGO collectors seem to prize the sets with the parts nicely displayed in the cardboard cutout frame that holds the part.



This earliest version (#1236) was produced from 1955-56 in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.



This version (#236) was produced from 1956-58 in Germany, and 1957-58 in Austria.



This earliest flat box version (#1236) was produced from 1957-58 in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.



This version (#236) was produced from 1958-59 in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and Portugal, and in 1959 in France and Finland.



This version (#236) was produced from 1958-59 in Germany and Austria.



This version (#236) was produced from 1960-68 in Germany and Austria, and 1966-68 in the rest of continental Europe.



This version (#236) was produced from 1969-70 in continental European.



This version (#236) was produced from 1960-65 in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Britain and (1962-65) Australia.

3) Size doesn't matter, but shape does...

USA and Canada Samsonite LEGO made a very interesting set from 1963-65. It was known as #610 Super Wheel Toy Set. This set contained many large and small LEGO wheels, tires and accessories. This set was more of a basic set with many building possibilities. The main model for this set was a standard blue LEGO locomotive and connected coal tender.

There was however a major difference between the USA and Canada Samsonite versions of this set. The USA set came in a tall box, with the illustrations of the main model wrapped around several sides of the box. The Canada version came in a long flat rectangular box with the image of the main model on the box top.





Because the Canadian box version looks more like a model set, while the USA box looks more like a basic set, there are big differences in the secondary market price for basically the same contents packed in different box types. The complete USA version of #610 has sold for as low as \$18 on EBAY in recent years, while an incomplete Canadian version has recently been bid to as high as \$343.

Size may not always matter, but shape certainly does!

You're Invited to BrickFest!

This year the one and only BrickFest will be held in beautiful Portland, Oregon USA. This year's edition, brought to you by the Greater Portland LEGO Railroaders, along with AMH Productions, has the full support of the LEGO ® company, just as in years past. The focus will be on us, the AFOLs, with two full days of lively roundtables and classes where you can get and share ideas with other designers from around the world. There will be the obligatory Brick Bazaar, Dirty Brickster and Wacky Races and lots of other fun stuff. We will have the largest display area of any convention with over 30,000 square feet! So we can go nuts on awesome displays when the public Expo comes around on Sunday afternoon, which will be April Fools Day by odd coincidence! Portland is a very affordable city to get to, and even easier to get around in. BrickFest's single Expo day will give you an outstanding chance to see some of the beautiful and unique things that make The Rose City such a wonderful place to visit, and more importantly it gives you a relaxed opportunity to reunite and hang out with old friends, as well as make new friends. BrickFestivities kickoff Friday March 30th, and will wrap up Sunday April 1st. Registration is open right now at http://www.

brickfest.com. You can find a wealth of other details there as well. The last BrickFest in Portland was a runaway success, and we're for more of the same fun this year. We look forward to seeing you there!



4) When is a color not a color...



Around Christmas 1961 LEGO produced a new series of 1:87 scale LEGO cars with metal wheels. These cars came in a small plastic garage with a garage door that opened. These cars were first pictured in continental European catalogs (above) starting in 1962. From 1962 until 1965 the catalogs always showed a garage with a red door. Even the 1963 (International) version of Building Idea Book #238 (left) shows the garage door in red.

However in reality, only the prototypes and early production runs of these garages were ever produced in red. By the time these garages were introduced, the decision was made by TLG to produce the garages with a gray door. But all the artwork for the LEGO catalogs and idea books had already been finished. So children always got a garage with a gray door.

However, a lucky few did get these garages with a red door, and often with a white base and trans-pink tinted glass (the first tinted trans-clear LEGO items ever!). A few folks also may have gotten these garages with a black door and a gray or white base.

It seems that TLG released all of the red door and black door prototype garages into general circulation. So today there are none found in the Billund Archives. However, most owners of the surviving red garages don't know that they have such a rare item, since all the catalogs and idea books suggest they are common!

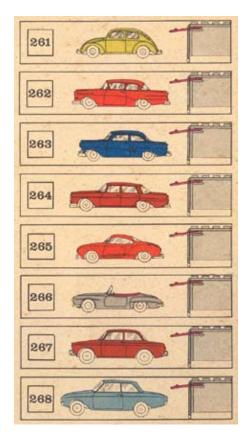






1:87 garage prototypes/early releases (left and right), and the common released version (middle).

Gerhard R. Istok is a LEGO historian and collector with a history of collecting going back over 45 years. He is also the author of the extensive 1,265 page reference guide THE UNOFFICIAL LEGO SETS/PARTS COLLECTORS GUIDE, available now on CD. This article highlights items from the LEGO CD.





The Farmer and the Brick

He's an AFOL, a member of the Danish club Byggepladen and a farmer! Knud Thomsen lives on a farm in rural Denmark. He has cows to milk and bricks to build. As you will learn, late last year he was involved with a Japanese TV show called 'TV Champion' – as one of the contestants, he built his awesome Viking ship which includes several Japanese icons. The event took place in Denmark and it really looks like they had a lot of fun. In addition to farming and general building, he also runs a town layout with trains running through a majority of it, visitors are also welcome, by request. So, let's see what this Danish farmer and 2 term LEGO Ambassador has to say for himself...

Article by Melody Krützfeldt. Photography by Melody Krützfeldt and Ina Nilsson.

Just over a year ago, in September 2005, you were a contestant for Japan's television show 'TV Champion'. I would imagine the experience was amazing and exciting! Can you tell us your experience with the show?

Overall, the experience was great! I thought it was a really great thing to make the model; from the beginning it was quite exciting! The crew arrived in August (2005) and they asked me what I would like to build. At first my suggestion was something to do with Space and Vikings 'Space Viking' A Model that changes from something Viking to Space, but the TV crew did not like it. The size of the model was rather limited, to begin with the size started out to be 1mtr x 1mtr. This size did not meet my requirements with what I had planned to build. The crew suggested putting a train inside the Viking ship (since I am a fan of trains) – sadly they did not like the space idea. Then, 1.4 mtrs was suggested, but you can't fit a train in that size, I needed at least 1.8 mtrs to fit a train, in the end they agreed. So after that I started to search for pictures of Tokyo Station to add to the train idea, I was also inspired to build some other icons from Japan, such as Mt Fuji and Japanese Rice fields, and of course I was inspired by the Japanese bullet train, the Shinkansen.

Who were the participants and what did they build?

Japan – Sachiko Akinaga – A Globe of the world with a moving elevator and a zoo rotating on a carousel inside. (Let's go to the Earth Park!)

Japan – Jumpei Mitui – A large Japanese Temple, one half included a Japanese City and the other half a Danish town (Copenhagen), also with moving objects. (Friendship between Demark and Japan) Denmark – Emil Tin – A Future City inside a giant flower with 5 opening petals. (Future City)

Denmark – Knud Thomsen – A Viking Ship with a moving Japanese train, a station, rice fields and Mt Fuji inside. (Viking Train)

So, there are 2 Japanese and 2 Danish contestants, how were you all chosen to be a part of the show? Did you have to audition for the part previously?

No auditions in Denmark, although the Japanese did have a few rounds to get to the final, shown on the TV show in Japan. Here in Denmark, we were hand picked and asked by LEGO to participate. LEGO Japan took pictures and the Japanese crew came to visit me to take pictures of my town/train layout and to build a profile.

Do you keep in touch with any of the TV Champion contestants?

No, I can't speak Japanese, so it made it hard to converse with the Japanese especially. And they were not able to speak a lot of English.

Have you ever been to Japan? No, not at all.

Was it hard to communicate with the Japanese contestants and filming crew? They seemed to be all having a lot of fun!

We spoke through a Japanese interpreter,

who actually is living in Copenhagen; LEGO hired her to help us for the show. Other than that, we used body language to express things. The Japanese host had a lot of fun, he is actually a famous Japanese comedian.

How many days was the show spread over? Was it only filmed at the park?

We started on Thursday, made the profiles then later drove to Billund to meet 2 of the Japanese people in the evening. Building started around 7pm on Friday night and we built again on Saturday from 8am to 8pm and again on Sunday from 8am to 11pm! We spent around 3 days constantly building and were almost finished at that stage... All the building you see on the show was built and filmed in Legoland.

The show gives the impression that a lot of the projects were built on the show, how much of it was actually built on the side? Only Emil's project was built on the show... We had rules to follow, 3 days to build, size restrictions... But three quarters could be built off the show and the final quarter on the show... however that rule was changed close to the shootings. We were then allowed to build all that we could prior to the show. I built one half of my ship before actual filming (over 5 days) and the 2 Japanese contestants built around 90% of theirs before coming to Legoland. Sachiko built some of the globe for the camera only and there were also assistants and family members to help us, we had around 2 people per building...

Was the show stressful at any time? Time restrictions, pressure? Builders' block?

There was only stress with having to build within 3 days and the planning stages...





Can you share with us any behind-the-scenes fun?

The Japanese host was at my farm and I had him milking a cow, which was pretty funny as it was his first time! I don't think he enjoyed it that much though at the time... But they were at my farm for around 3 hours, they took some pictures and had a little fun, I think.

In the end you came up with the awesome Viking Ship which has a train running through it, it looks amazing all lit-up and the train moving around. Was it previously planned what projects you had to build or did you and the other contestants come up with your own ideas?

It was our own ideas originally, with a few suggestions from the crew and they had to agree to a few changes along the way...

How long did you have to plan your projects?

Planning first started when they visited, 3rd or 4th week of August and then it was shot in early October, so there was around 6 weeks of planning for the project and a lot of sending information back and forth to Japan to calculate how many bricks were needed to be ordered. They arrived around 5 days before shooting...

How many hours did you spend on building your projects for the show? 5 days and an average of 5 hours a day and around 30 hours at Legoland with assistance...

How many parts did it take to build your ship? I can see loads of Viking Warriors, how many are there in total?

About 10,000 parts or so and around 200 minifigures, some of the TV crew helped to assemble them...

Did you have to supply your own bricks or did LEGO or the TV show provide them for you? If not yourself, did you get to keep your ship? What about all the left over pieces, what happened to them?

I used what I had and ordered the rest, I got to keep my ship in the end... The left-over pieces? Well...

Was the Viking ship the only thing you built or was there more? (That we did not get to see).

Yes, it was enough, I think.

Where is your ship now? Do you have it stored away or is it out for everyone to see?

Upstairs in my house... I have used it several times for events and displays, Skaerbaek etc. It is built in 2 parts (modular) so it is easy to assemble.

Will your ship stay together or will you ever dismantle it?

Stay together. I want to keep it up as it is a part of my experience with the show.

Tell us more about the winner from the show, how was she to work alongside? Fine, just hard to talk due to the language barrier...

What was the best thing about being part of the show?

The opportunity to participate and being able to get the bricks you wanted with no restrictions...

Since you are Danish, were you in any newspapers (re: the show) in Denmark? Yes, local papers...

Did you participate in any other media related activities regarding your ship? Other than the newspapers, not yet.



If another opportunity arose to participate in an event like the TV Champion, would you do it?

Yes, absolutely!

If yes, what would you build next time?

A working Danish Windmill with other models inside...

How long have you been an AFOL for?

Since... hmmm all my life really, ever since I received my first bricks, when I was around 6 months old.

Are you a collector of sets or do you prefer to buy parts mainly? Where do you purchase your LEGO?

I like train stuff and things for towns etc, whatever I need for my lay-out, so LEGO trains and whatever fits into my lay-out. I buy my LEGO from a local toy store and from LEGO...

Your interests include LEGO and trains. Is that LEGO trains or trains in general? A bit of both, I like both.

How often do you build, are you building anything at the moment?

When I have the time and some ideas, but I am building nothing at the moment, I am busy sorting bricks.

Your website has a large picture of a town and trains, how long did you spend building the layout? What is your favourite building?

I have spent the last 10 years building my lay-out, the room used to be an old hay loft and I converted it into a LEGO room. I would say my favourite building is the new church.

You are a member of Byggepladen (Danish LEGO club), how long have you been a member for?

I have been a member for around 3 years now.

If you had all the bricks in the world, in any colours or shape, what would you build? I would like to build a Legoland, in minifig scale, but preferably as an indoor park.

So, you are a long-time AFOL and a farmer, how long have you been farming for?Since 1985, so around 21 years.





Tell us a bit about your farm, what we can find on your farm and what your role is... I have 48 milking cows, a few fields for feeding the cows and several crops, grains, grass,

sugar beets etc - I basically take care of the whole place.

I see the TV Champion crew visited your farm, did they have fun? Oh yes, they had fun.

Do your farm animals (cows) also like LEGO? ;) Ask them ;)

Have you ever build a cow out of LEGO before?;) No, not at all.

Would you like to see LEGO produce a 'Farm' set? - (tractors, barns, hay stacks, farm animals etc).

It would fit nice with my train layout. So, yes!

Where do you see yourself in 10 years time? Still building with LEGO? I think so...especially if the 9 volt train continues...

Oh and in case you were wondering, 100 local Danish school children got to vote by stacking Duplo bricks on top of each other near the models they liked the best, this was the official form of voting! The 4 contestants demonstrated their models on stage while telling the children all about them.

Well, there you have it! Many thanks to Knud for his time and the invite to his farm! A very interesting experience!

Related links:

Knud's TV Champion, 2005 article in Danish: http://www.byggepladen.dk/artikler/tvchamp05/

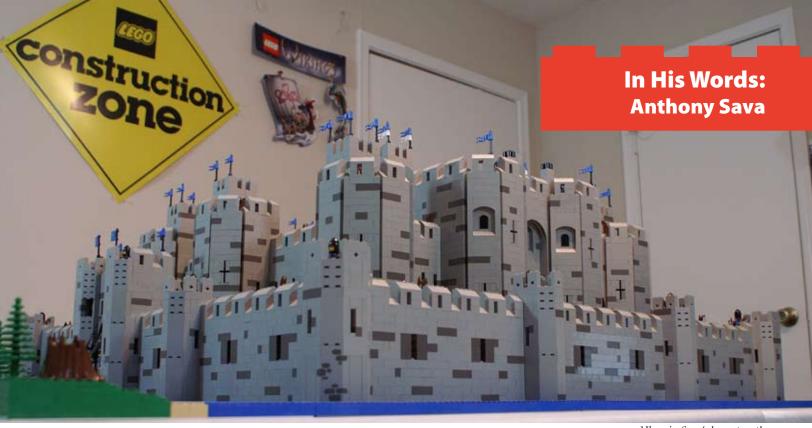
Knud's website: http://www.sitecenter.dk/legomodeljernbane/hjemmeside/

More pictures: http://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/tvchamp/051117/p3.htm More pictures: http://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/tvchamp/051117/under.htm

LEGO® Castle Tower Project Memorial for Joshua the Lionheart

As a dad who has gone through one of the toughest circumstances in his life, I have created a LEGO® set in memorial of my youngest son Joshua who passed in my arms on fathers day in 2005. I have created this project not to make any money but for every 4 sold, one will be given to a child who has experienced a heart condition. They are \$40 plus \$5 shipping and handling. The set is pictured to the right. If anyone is interested in ordering a set, please contact us via email: kelley01@visi.com (that is a zero and a one after kelley spelled with two e's). If anyone knows of any kids who have experienced a heart condition or would like to donate to kids getting one who have experienced a heart condition let us know. I am writing a letter to go with this set that shares my faith in GOD and my belief on my son who is in heaven. Thank you for your interest. Sincerely, Brian Kelley daddy of Joshua the Lionheart, Noah the Choopity, Andrew the Kiddo and Delaney Michael.





Ulmaris, Sava's largest castle

Epic Building: The Creations of Anthony Sava

One of the most well-known builders of castles and dragons is Anthony Sava of Classic-Castle.com. Here he talks about his building and creations in his words.

Article and photos by Anthony Sava



I am a story teller and a dragon tamer. I am a griffon rider and a castle architect. I am a tree herder and a community builder.

My name is Anthony Sava, and I am a LEGOholic. I don't mean the average "Yeah I like LEGO, it's what I do" sort of addiction, either. I am an obsessive-compulsive, up till 3 am in the build room, maybe I should make one more Bricklink order, jump out of bed in the middle of the night with a new idea sort of LEGO builder.

If I am known at all in the AFOL community, it is for four things: big stories, big dragons, big castles and big ideas. I'm a big guy, so I guess it's only fitting that's how I operate.

Certainly my biggest LEGO themed achievement is the completion of my illustrated medieval fantasy epic *The Chronicles of Ikros*. It all started in college, where I got the idea to write the 'Great American Novel,' and after a few brainstorming sessions with my roommate I had a brief outline and a sample chapter of a new fictional story. About that time I was also sucked into the great new fad - a personal website. My website was originally filled with jokes and riddles, moving later toward horribly written social commentaries and finally, somehow, a site devoted to the characters of the King Arthur legend illustrated in my old childhood toy LEGO. What gave me the idea to fuse the two, my novel and LEGO bricks, is anyone's guess. What I do know is I had no idea what I was about to start when I announced my little bare-bones website devoted to my new story *The Chronicles of Ikros* on LUGNET almost six years ago.

The Chronicles of Ikros has grown into not only the original 40 chapter epic, now called *The Immortal War*, but I've even started the sequel *Chaos Skies. The Chronicles of Ikros: The Immortal War* follows the newest knight of Ikros, Garalt, on his journey from trying to prove his worth to saving the entire kingdom from the greatest of evils. Every chapter seems to pile on more trouble for the Kingdom of Ikros, from a rampaging army of the undead, to secret a plot to overthrow the king, and finally an ancient and evil dragon bent on destroying mankind. But hope still remains for Ikros, and Garalt soon finds a small group of friends to help him on his way.



Formethean version 2



Encounter with a sleeping dragon



Stonebarrow Keep

I wrote the story chapter by chapter, and as I progressed I became a bit more proficient in my storytelling abilities. This has caused what is perhaps the most regrettable complaint about my story – the beginning is hard to get into. However, since I finished the story, I've started to go back and rewrite the entire story, in hopes that someday I might find a publisher.

I've been given a bit of press over the years, most notably being featured on the website Slashdot. I receive a lot of fan mail from young LEGO builders who have read my story as well as from older builders newly awakened to the greater world of AFOLs.

In order to illustrate my story, I needed MOCs, not only for locations but sometimes for characters too. I originally created my first dragon MOC after being inspired by a similar one by Pawel Nazarewicz. I called her Tel'Karak Zrahl, a baffling name derived from my want to include her in my story. While she was very large and impressive, the construction was primitive, at best and was impossible to pose standing on all fours. Most of the joints were simple Technic bricks and pins, held together with antennae or some other minifig accessory jammed into the hole in the pin. Nevertheless she was a hit and earned me instant notoriety as 'the dragon guy.'

My black dragon was the ultimate evil in my story, and she worked very well as a villain. A few months later I got the idea into my head that she needed some balance, and the masochist in me decided that she needed siblings. And so, urged on by my friends, I built three more dragons, all similarly constructed. The red and yellow dragon, Formeathan, was the first of the three and like the black dragon he had large, albeit rather lackluster wings. The second, Tempi Frei, was a blue and white seafaring dragon with a fishlike tail and a large dorsal fin. Finally, Vildegraas was a green dragon with a scorpion tail and large sharp scythes where wings would have been normally found.

So proud was I of my dragons that I took at least one of them to every meeting I attended and quickly learned that I needed to redesign them or stop taking them with me. My primitive construction techniques were my undoing and every setup turned into a marathon of desperately trying to pose the plastic behemoths while trying to prevent people from accidentally knocking them over.

It was around that time that I discovered Brian Cooper's Dark Gundams MOCs and Eric Sophie's MOC Rin Tin Tin Din Din. The construction methods in these MOCs were exactly what I needed for a stable easily-posed dragon, and so with some guidance by Brian and Eric, and a healthy donation of red and yellow plates by Troy Cefaratti, I began work on upgrading my red dragon Formeathan. I chose that particular dragon because he had always been my favorite, nicknamed the 'red toad' by some, and because red and yellow plates and Technic bricks were cheap.

After an amazing two month marathon build, I finished my dragon in time for BrickFest 2003, where he made his first public debut. I received some criticism for the fabric wings I had used, but it was the trade-off I made to make the wings larger without adding weight. I was finally successful in creating a dragon that was easy to pose, even if he does need a friction mat to prevent his 20+ pounds from ripping his joints apart. I liken him to Darth Vader; he's more machine than dragon. And to answer a question: no, I have no plans to rebuild any of the other three dragons.

Now that I had reached my personal apex of dragon design, I then turned my attention to my next building challenge – castles. After all, I had this story I was illustrating, and it was of medieval theme, but I had very little skill when it came to building a good looking castle. I had always wanted to do a gigantic concentric castle, but I had neither the skill nor pieces to attempt such a build. My previous attempts were quite colorful; so much so that their color schemes really detracted from the overall MOC.



Another view of Ulmaris

So I started small, focusing on terrain and trying for a castle built entirely without a plan. What resulted was 'Stonebarrow Keep,' one of my all-time favorite MOCs. It is a tower-like keep sitting on rough stony terrain with a river running through it. I then took a different direction, going for a castle built with design in mind, going so far as to draw up blueprints before I began construction. This castle focused on interiors, details and form, and later became the second iteration of Halcyon Castle.

Finally, I began design on my grand castle project – a truly concentric castle. I began drawing up plans on graph paper, taping the pieces together until I had the entire castle down. It took a good week to finish, but it was invaluable when it came to figuring out just how many LEGO elements I'd need to build it. It took six months, an advertising campaign promoting my future castle asking for orders in my Bricklink shop to pay for it, and a furious but frugal shopping spree before I could begin construction on my castle. That was just a few months before Brickfest 2005.

I modeled it after Beaumaris Castle in Wales, England, and taking that name into account, my wife dubbed it Ulmaris Castle. It was to have 9 large octagonal towers, (modeled after a similar design by Daniel Siskind) a giant inner gatehouse/keep, a moat, a drawbridge, and all manner of interior buildings. The castle would be built upon nine 48x48 baseplates. They woud be covered in a brick built moat and the outer curtain wall of the castle. The outer ward (the part outside of the inner curtain wall), the inner curtain wall and the inner ward would be built on a grid of 32x32 and 16x32 green baseplates, resting on top of a brick-built support structure.

As I constructed it, I took devilish pleasure in teasing the folks over at Classic-Castle.com, posting my progress in text and talking about the pictures I had taken of it, but never sharing those pictures. A few times I broke down and did post one or two pictures, but nothing that gave a lot of detail. This lasted for many weeks, until I finished the castle just in time to take it to BrickFest 2005, where I was able to show it off to Kjeld Kristiansen himself!

Along with my story, my dragons, and my castles, I must say that I am very proud of another accomplishment in my AFOL career — helping to found the castle themed community site Classic-Castle. com. I realize that for some people, the topic of C-C is a rather sensitive one, as we have been accused of 'killing' the castle section of LUGNET and helping to fracture the community. Some went so far as to accuse us of simply wanting to be big fish in a small pond.

Other Models by Sava

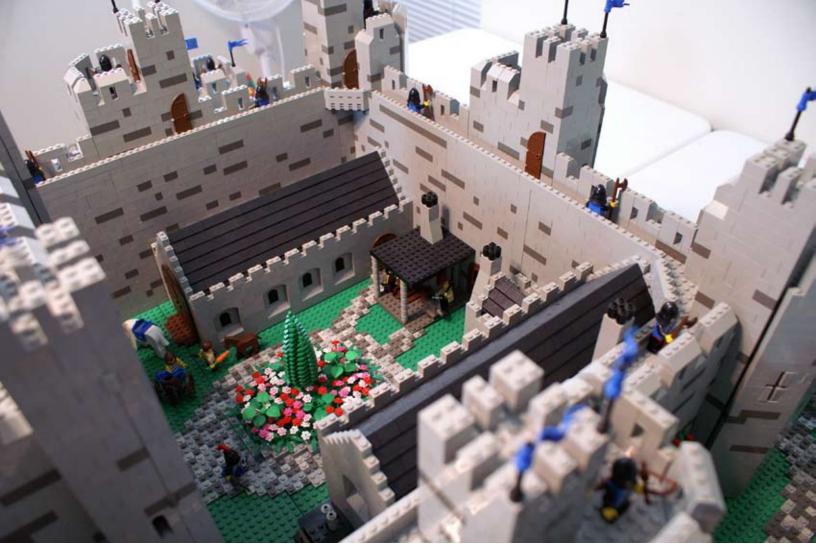
Anthony Sava has built models besides castles and dragons. Here's a sample of the trains he has built and continues to build.



The Polar Express



American 4-4-0 steam engine and tender



Looking inside of Ulmaris

But C-C has become a very important fixture in the AFOL universe in my opinion and it should be praised for its accomplishments.

The idea of Classic-Castle.com stems from a community-wide discussion on existing and new community websites. Several members were brainstorming and planning new and different castle themed sites away from LUGNET. I decided that a new, all encompassing castle community site needed to be created, and began contacting several members of the community privately. Kevin Blocksidge, Ben Ellermann, Lenny Hoffman, Benjamin Medinets, Alex Polimeni and I began discussing what a community castle site should be. With the help and funding of Troy Ceferatti we put Classic-Castle.com online. The current admin staff of C-C includes the original founders - Kevin, Ben E., Lenny, Troy and myself, as well as Bruce Hietbrink and Nathan Wells.

I wear many hats over at Classic-Castle. I am the site designer, graphic artist and webmaster. I am a forum administrator and forum moderator coordinator. I am also the administrator of the Story section of Classic-Castle that includes the very popular (but only sporadically updated) Picture Captioning. I help run and judge the various contests we host, including our crown jewel the Colossal Castle Contest. I've also written several articles for the How-To section, including many extensive collections of downloadable versions of LEGO's medieval torso and shield designs for minifig customization.

Recently I've begun delving into other arenas of LEGO building, including Trains, Space, Mecha, and I even own a healthy assortment of Pirate sets. But my first love is and always will be Castle. To put it simply: I am a fanatic, obsessed LEGO lover. I've got a pile full of bricks and I'm not afraid to use 'em. D

You can see Anthony's website at http://www.ikros.net, or visit http://www.classic-castle.com.

People: <u>Female Bui</u>lders

The AFFOL(Adult Female Fan of LEGO)

It is a world that seems somewhat dominated by the male fan and products that are more or less aimed at boys... Yet we are about to discover that the boys do not dominate entirely!

This is a great new section where female AFOLs unite! Over the next issues we will cover female builders from all over the world! Look and read what they have to say, what they build, what they do and don't like and basically, their opinion on the product and how they use it.

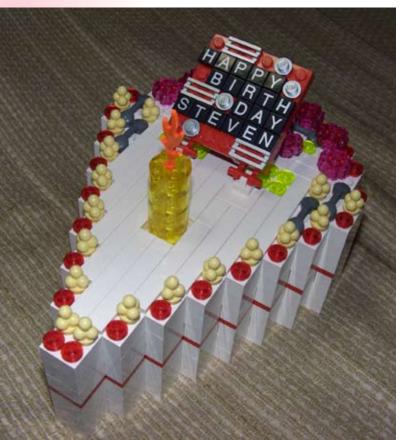
You will also notice that not all girls build just houses and cute things and that many are quite open-minded when it comes to what they like to create. These girls have talent and it is amazing and inspiring what some are building today as they let their imaginations go wild!

It is now time to lift that rock and see what is under it, let's meet some of our female AFOLs and check out what they have been building!

If you are a female AFOL, have a website, brickshelf folder or pictures of your MOCs and would like to show your stuff off, please email me at: mel@brickjournal.com



Diana



Name: Diana Wong

(also known as DVirus on the internet)

Age: 32

Country: Singapore

Hobbies: LEGO (of course!!), shopping (hey,

shopping is the next best past time

besides LEGO!)

Brickshelf Folder:

http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?m=dvirus

When did you start building?

I started with LEGO at around 6 when my mom bought me a bulk bricks set (there weren't any theme sets during that time) and that's how the passion started. I built houses, trees, people, and planes, played with my little sister when we created our own "LEGO story" using the limited bricks available. It was the endless possibilities that I can create using the bricks that keep the passion going. Much later when themes sets were introduced, more LEGO sets were purchased as rewards and gifts and that was the happiest time of my childhood. The favourite themes were Paradisa and Castle that were released during the 80's and 90's. However due to the need to focus on schoolwork and sports, I drifted away from LEGO during my teen days.

Why are you an AFOL?

My passion for LEGO rekindled when I saw the Star Wars LEGO sets in 2001 and hence started the craze to buy the Star Wars sets in 2002. Since then, I never looked back as I moved on from mere sets collection to building MOCs (my own creations). I love the idea of being able to create and play even as an adult. I love the sound of bricks knocking against each other when I am searching for a brick in a tub. I love seeing others creations and sharing my own with others. LEGO allows me to relax my mind, to refresh from my work stress and I feel fun and joyful when I am creating with LEGO.

How many hours do you spend building with LEGO?

I never counted! It must have been hundreds or thousands of hours. I have done projects with my own AFOL group and worked on creations for my friends, loved ones, etc. I seriously have no idea.

What are your favourite building themes (both what LEGO produce and what you like to build yourself?)

My current favorites have to be 9V Trains, Town, and Star Wars. I love sculptures though I am not very good at creating sculptures, but I am working very hard to learn to "visualise in a 3-D" matter for my future projects. I also love vignettes as Singapore is a very small country with limited spaces for houses. Hence there is indeed not much spaces for large creations and it's difficult to find large quantity of bricks here. So vignettes are the best solution!

What do you like most about LEGO and their products?

The cool "clicking" mechanism with hundreds of variety of parts and large range of colors available is what I like most

about LEGO. One can make HUGE creations of the mini/micro creations, and its all depending on our mind! And the best part is that bricks created 10 years ago still can be used now! You can never achieve this with electronic games. Games created 10 year ago will not work with current game devices, ha!

5 parts you would love LEGO to produce:

- 1. More trans-color/clear parts, today there is very limited range of parts for transparent parts.
- 2. More luminous/neon parts, today there is very limited range of parts that can glow in the dark.
- 3. More chrome silver parts, today there is more, but still limited.
- More chrome gold parts, today there is only a few available, which is so sad.
- 5. More minifigs accessories, like food, cups, plates, fruits, I know there is already a wide range, but I would love more!!! I would love to see orange, pears, grapes, popcorn, cotton-candy, chocolate, more types of flowers, leaf, plants, etc!

What is it like to be as a female in the AFOL world, which is dominated mostly by men?

I enjoy the attention, especially since is a male-dominated hobby.

What would you suggest to LEGO to make their products more popular for girls?

As a female, I love colors. LEGO has created many new color bricks like different shades of pink, cyan, lime green, purple, etc recently, which I think it is a wonderful direction. I love to see more variety of parts with all these new colors. I will love LEGO to bring back the kitchen set and themes similar to Paradisa. Clikits are cool but LEGO should consider using the Clikits part in sets, besides creating them for "jewelry".

Is LEGO doing enough to promote their products towards girls?

Nope. All the newer themes are very focused on boys, like Bionicles, Exo-force. Even though we see new Belville sets every year but there are hardly any promotions to promote them. Girls will love themes created with storyline or comics. I sure hope LEGO can consider putting more focus here.

What would you like to see from LEGO in the future in relation to girls?

I love to see more themes and products focusing on girls. Although many sets are "neutral", like town and creator, but a little more focus would be great. There could be a hair salon for a town set or a shopping mall for a town! That would be cool! How can a town be one, if there aren't any malls? It can't always be containing only police stations, fire stations or petrol-stations right?

Any other comments you would like to share?

There are too little female minifigs in sets today! There has to be more female minifigs around!!!







Sachiko



Hobbies: Building with LEGO & listening to

music

Web Site: http://www.letslego.com

When did you start building?

I first started collecting/building when I was 15 years old, when I saw LEGO in the toy shop for the first time. Then I bought a LEGO set because I was attracted to LEGO town and the Minifigure, which is so pretty. That was my trigger. As a child I had been playing with block-toys only between the ages 4 or 5 and 10. At the time those were not LEGO but Nintendo-Blocks. As a little girl I enjoyed building anything from my imagination. In my childhood, I often built rockets and ships. Maybe I didn't have Minifigs, so I didn't build the house or constructions. And at the time I had only white blocks. I don't know why. So when I saw the LEGO for the first time, I thought I would like to build a colorful and lovely LEGO-town for myself.

Why are you an AFOL?

I became a graphic designer, and I sealed up my LEGO for studying design. I intended to seal up it until I got old. But in 2001, when I got out my small things, I touched LEGO by mistake. Then I had an uncontrollable urge to "build something", so I broke the box seal easily. I now intend to play LEGO as a hobby for all my days.

How many hours do you spend building with LEGO?

On my holidays (days off) I play with LEGO for about 14 hours.

What are your favourite building themes?

I particularly like the LEGO-town series. And I like all series (train, robot, car, dinosaur...), because I can find out something new in all series. I think I would like to build anything that people get excited after they see my work. And I'm going to challenge various themes. Because, when adults and children who have never played with LEGO see my work, I wish they would also like to play with LEGO.





What do you like most about LEGO and their products?

Corporate logo design and high quality.

What is it like to be as a female in the AFOL world, which is dominated mostly by men?

I am not conscious about it. But I see a lot of works of AFOLs, and when I look anew at my work, I feel my work is feminine.

What would you suggest to LEGO to make their products more popular for girls?

I wish for the release of a vacation house, pretty buildings of letter-carriers that there were in old LEGO-town. (Those are my favorite sets). In the Town series I wish for a park, food-store etc, except fire department and police station. I wish for a house set that fit the size of Minifig like in the Belville series. I wish for a creator set that we can build a lot of various pretty animals. I wish for a happy view of the world of Minifigs with smiling faces. I wish for a set that we can use as interior accessory - (lighting stand, accessory box, etc)

Is LEGO doing enough to promote their products towards girls?

I think maybe LEGO isn't doing enough to promote. However, I think recently #7870 and #5475 are very good for girls. I think LEGO is doing more promoting sets like them.

What would you like to see from LEGO in the future in relation to girls?

I wish there were fascinating LEGO sets so the girls who aren't interested in LEGO would think "I would like to build with this."

Any other comments you would like to share?

I made my website because I want to tell a lot of people about the enjoyment of LEGO.

And if I built something, I would upload the pictures of work to my website for this purpose.

It's a great pleasure to raise popularity of LEGO-fun regardless of gender and age.

Of course, I think LEGO has a lot of fascinating products.











Ina





Name: Ina Hjorth Nilsson

Age: 39

Country: Denmark

Hobbies: My hobbies are of course LEGO but also painting,

kite-flying, gymnastics and writing stories...

Brickshelf Folder: http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?m=ina

Web site: http://www.ina.h.n.webbyen.dk

When did you start building?

Now I want to tell a bit about me and LEGO... As a child I often got to use my brother's LEGO... When I got my hands on it, I immediately started to build houses and small towns... When the towns were made I soon began to build a story and the play was on in no time... My other interests as a small girl were mostly drawing and painting but also making things out of paper and other materials and of course, gymnastics and horseriding...

Why are you an AFOL?

Because I have always loved to build and play with LEGO... And one of my best discoveries is 'Byggepladen,' a group of Danish AFOL's...

How many hours do you spend building with LEGO?

From 30 minutes a day to 20 hours... But normally about 2-3 hours a day...

What are your favourite building themes (both what LEGO produce and what you like to build yourself?)

LEGO's products..? Own themes are sure city, houses and buildings.

What do you like most about LEGO and their products?

The possibility to be creative and make my own designs...

5 parts you would love LEGO to produce:

Food for minifigs.

What is it like to be as a female in the AFOL world, which is dominated mostly by men?

It's great...I have some good male friends... But of course it could be fun if more women would be a part of the LEGO-world...

What would you suggest to LEGO to make their products more popular for girls? Give us some more details for minifigs like chairs, tables, food and playthings...

Is LEGO doing enough to promote their products towards girls?

I don't know... I have only boys' myself and I don't look at commercials either...

What would you like to see from LEGO in the future in relation to girls?

A small city with realistic houses, shops, and minifigs..... A bit like Building Bonanza but not as big...









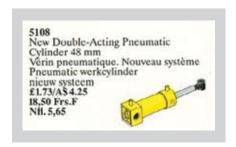
Article by Eric Brok. Photos by the LEGO Group, www.brickset.com, Jin Sato, Dirk Plug, and Eric Brok.



LEGO is not a hobby. It's like having ten hobbies at the same time.

You may find yourself photographing architecture, reading up on railway history, studying the structure of castles, discussing blueprints of spaceships, understanding car mechanics and experimenting with robotics issues. You may develop an opinion on building instruction design, sorting methods, system compatibility, shifting markets in the toy industry, internet communities, cultural differences, patents & copyright laws and production outsourcing. At parties, there's hardly any subject that doesn't have a LEGO angle to it.

And above all, you may meet special people, get to special places and experience special moments, as I was lucky to have in the past ten years.





Special moment: Renaissance

Like many adult LEGO enthusiasts, I have gone through a period we like to call The Dark Ages: not paying much attention to anything LEGO. But in 1995, at the age of 29, I was in a toy store. Something caught my eye. It was a rack of LEGO Service sets, including some pneumatic elements. These had not been available when I was a kid. With a mix of curiosity and nostalgia I bought some and on the train home, I immediately opened the bags, connected the cylinders and tubes and was childishly fascinated by the way in which they functioned. All this occurred in plain view of other commuters, to some embarrassment of my girlfriend. Fortunately she is still with me to this day.

My interest quickly widened from TECHNIC to Trains, then Town and ultimately included Duplo, Znap, Galidor, and even Scala doll houses, simply out of curiosity for how the system developed, for better or worse.

Special moment: Website award

In 1996 I first published my website 'LEGO on my mind', which was quite early in LEGO web history. In those days, www.lego.com offered hardly more than a simple placeholder home page. There were a number of personal home pages posted by LEGO fans, but only a handful offered substantial content, such as the Fibblesnork Guide and Pause Magazine. It was a special moment to have my website awarded the 'Cool LEGO Site of the Week' and receiving rewarding feedback. Back then, the one and only global forum about LEGO was the rec.toys.lego newsgroup. The LEGO Users group Network (LUGNET) went public in October 1998, to become the major LEGO

com/legomind

forum for several years. In 2006, 'LEGO on my mind' celebrated its tenth anniversary.

Special moment: Toning down

The 1998 retail catalogue made me jump with excitement. But it wasn't the release of the new Mindstorms robotic systems that made me happy. Rather it was the first Adventurers series and the introduction of tan bricks in useful quantities. This was a welcome change from the primary colors. Together with a growing assortment of dark grey bricks, this allowed for building in more toned-down colors. The 1997 collection already had shown a remarkable move toward the dark side, with Bat Knights as well as black leather minifigures and high hat voodoo skulls in the Time Twisters range. By the way, the flying bath tub in the Time Twisters was hilarious.

Special moment: Far away

On a morning in April 1998 I thought I had awoken in an alternate universe, or at least a galaxy far away. A press release announced Star Wars LEGO sets would be coming the next year. Up to that point, LEGO had consistently stayed away from licensed products, and now suddenly that changed. And since Star Wars was one of my movie favorites, this was simply too good to be true. I didn't get much work done that day.

I avoid calling myself a LEGO collector, because that implies buying sets to complete certain series. I always try to buy or not buy a set for its own individual merits. So while I never 'collected' LEGO Star Wars sets, I ended up owning almost each and every one of them, simply because they were all superb sets on their own. Also in that sense, I feel the Star Wars license has been a very good thing for LEGO.

Special moment: Robotics

The launch of Mindstorms in 1998 was a big boost to the hobby. The Dacta computer interfaces had been around for quite a while, but were very expensive and only known in the educational field. The Code Pilot had been released as a proto-Mindstorms device. It allowed control over one motor and sound, through programming by barcodes. It could respond to one input switch and one light sensor. It was a clever solution because many kids didn't have access to a pc yet to program such a device. But even the cleverest device isn't very useful if it controls only one motor. To me, the Barcode set was impressive mostly because of the clever mechanisms it used to to overcome the limitations of the electronics.

The Mindstorms RCX proved a very versatile and popular platform for robotics. Enthusiasts studied its inner workings to such an extent that individuals could write their own software tools, including new firmware. This process became an historic example in the industry of how users can extend the usability and thus popularity of a technology, if not restrained by the company who owns the rights. When TLG became aware of this, the company even published a developer's guide that went far beyond anything consumers 'needed to know'. Myself, I made a simple tool called 'Mind Control' that helped to program the RCX in its versatile inner language instead of its limited visual programming environment. But it was soon eclipsed by alternative programming environments, in particular NQC (Not Quite C).

Mindstorms was a huge success, but with the wrong crowd: mostly adults. So unfortunately, while most enthusiastic Mindstorms users were eagerly awaiting advanced expansions of the system, subsequent developments were targeting younger kids, making it easier for them to get started.



Set 5988 Pharoah's Forbidden Ruins (1998)



1999 model of the Star Wars Snowspeeder, one of my personal favorites in the movies

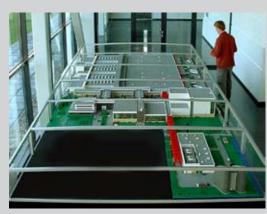


Left: RCX Programmable LEGO Brick (1998) and Scout Programmable LEGO Brick (1999)





Model of a former grain exchange market





Large 1:100 model of a brewery site, commissioned by Grolsch to De Bouwsteen

Special moment: A hunch

I experienced a great moment in the hobby in 1999 while playing around with the new Scout programmable brick from the Robotics Discovery set. When running some built-in programs, a little light flickered at seemingly random patterns, without any apparent function. Led by a hunch, I took the old Code Pilot and held it to the flickering light while in record mode. Then in play mode, the motor would run in accord. It was a striking discovery to find out that the flickering was in fact a motor command (later to be known as Visible Light Link), and actually matched the light patterns of the existing bar codes for the Code Pilot. This was a fine example of unexpected compatibility created by clever LEGO designers.

Special moment: An unexpected thank-you

In 1999 I attended the Mindfest event at the MIT Media Lab in Cambridge, Masschusetts, USA. The Media Lab had been partnering in developing LEGO Mindstorms. 'Mindstorms' actually is the title of a seminal book by Seymour Papert on robot programming by children. Besides being a unique event in a special place, Mindfest was one of the first events to meet people you only knew from the net.

For example, Richard Wright thanked me for helping him and his students out with some mechanical issues we had discussed through email. It was great to unexpectedly meet someone in person like that.

Special moment: Futura Walhalla

During 1998-1999 I did some low-key freelance design work from home, for LEGO Technic. To acquaint myself with the team and the job assignment, I was invited to LEGO product development (then Futura) in Billund, Denmark. All development teams, ranging from Duplo to Technic, were in one big hall, a former factory building, so it felt like floating trough Walhalla when I wandered along the workplaces to see what was being researched and developed. I also had a first look at the finished 1999 product line, and after the recent Juniorisation of Town, I was relieved to see that they took a different approach to Star Wars sets.

Another amazing moment: I had filled a very large cardboard box with loads of Technic LEGO pieces to work with from home and showed it to my supervisor. Then he asked: 'Need another box?'

Along the way, it proved hard to deliver a significant contribution to the design process from home. My ideas had to fit right into their ongoing line of thinking, while being something they hadn't thought of themselves. So after a while the collaboration was ended in good atmosphere. My supervisor said he had to terminate the contract due to budget cuts, which shows the kind attitude of these Danes.

Special moment: Community building

Since I joined our enthusiasts society De Bouwsteen around 1999, it has grown from about 50 members to about 800, fostering many friendships. The society has developed a close relationship with the local LEGO representatives, especially since 2001, when we helped out with the LEGO WORLD event for its first time. The event proved overwhelmingly successful and became an annual spectacle on globally unique scale.

De Bouwsteen has also involved me in several commissioned projects, like a town section to demonstrate VELUX windows, and a massive model of the Grolsch beer plant, which wouldn't have been possible without a team effort.

It has been very productive to sit down with a client and discuss the various possibilities (and challenges) of using LEGO to promote the clients company or its message.

Special moment: Without flying colors

To me, the single most ill-advised decision TLG ever made was the 2004 color change. In one big overhaul, all light grey, dark grey and brown were replaced by similar but different shades. The reason given was that the new shades simply 'looked better', as was tested in a panel group. While that in itself was a matter of taste, the incompatibility issues with prior production were dearly underestimated. Both in the consumer base and in the company, this change became a costly and ongoing nuisance.

For example, pieces in old colors had to be used in new sets, because there were production shortages in the new colors and overstock of the old colors. Reruns of existing sets were in newer colors. When buying second hand sets, you won't know if it has all the right colors. My LEGO room would need extra bin space and better lighting.

Ultimately, the new CEO Jorgen Vig Knudstorp wrote a public letter of apology, regretting the change. When I met him at BrickFest 2005 and thanked him for that bold letter, he mentioned that TLG would even have considered changing back, if they were not in dire financial straits at that moment.

Meanwhile, at my home I sorted the new colors into one big quarantine bin, undecided how to deal with those.

Special moment: On a towboat

In 2005 a marine towing company asked our society, De Bouwsteen, for a large LEGO model of one of their newest towboats. When I was asked to design the model, I visited the actual boat in the docks to make pictures. On the spur of the moment, the crew invited me to join them on a job that afternoon. So I unexpectedly was on the bridge of an operating towboat while it was docking immense ocean vessels. It was one of those moments I deeply enjoyed how this peculiar hobby gets you into surprising situations.

Special moment: Set development

By 2006, TLG had developed close relations with the 'fan' community, including involvement of fans in set design processes on several occasions, such as Mindstorms NXT and the new train sets. Also, some Ambassadors were invited to contribute in certain projects. So in October 2006, I spent a marvelous week at the development department in Billund. This time around it wasn't just meeting people, but actually getting to work, which gave me much insight in how set designers go about their job. And how they make great colleagues too.



Avonturia at LEGO WORLD 2006



Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen and me talking about Avonturia at LEGO WORLD 2006



The hobby in perspective

In 2006, my perspective of the hobby was changed by a health condition with a bad outlook. Suddenly, it didn't make sense anymore to buy sets or pieces that may become cute or useful in future years. So now I only buy select sets that I enjoy for their building experience.

Also, I had to start thinking of selling most of my collection, including how to rebuild over a thousand sets from assorted pieces. But after some doubts, I decided instead to spend a couple of months on a project for LEGOWORLD 2006: the Avonturia amusement ride. I figured, creating is more important than organising and selling.

And that's what the hobby has been about for me. Special people and special moments aside, the LEGO system itself is an evolving medium for personal expression. We all express ourselves in our own personal way, and the LEGO system offers a common universe in which to share and understand those expressions.

Do you want to learn more about the online LEGO community? Then swing by http://www.legofan.org. LEGO Fan is a web site dedicated to helping people learn about all of the great online resources available, and to help connect people with each other.



LEGO Fan - Your entry into the world of LEGO Enthusiasts.

www.legofan.org

In Their Words: Megan Rothrock

From time to time, BrickJournal calls on builders to talk about how they build and what inspires them.

This installment is with Megan Rothrock, who has a delightful building style. Here, she describes it in her words!

Article and photography by Megan Rothrock

I was born in New Zealand in 1972, and grew up among the redwoods of northern California.

The daughter of a schoolteacher and theater arts' professor, I was always surrounded by very talented and creative people. I've always had LEGO around me.

In 1978 my family moved to Exeter in England for the year. There I made a lot of friends who were all into building with LEGO bricks. They had a line running from their fourth floor attic to the garden. We used to challenge each other by building vehicles. We would hook them up to the wire and send them careening down into the garden! Whoever sustained the least damage won. The stakes where high - winner take all - for sweets! I shudder now to think about smashing bricks now -but at the time it was a blast!

My first LEGO set that was all mine (and not my older brothers') was the Big Yellow Castle! It was my Christmas and birthday gift I loved it! I still have it with its box.

After England we moved back up to Humboldt, California. I dreamt of working for Hanna-Barbara (to make Scooby-Doo cartoons) and spent many a day and night filling up sketchbooks and building with LEGO.

Castle and space themed LEGO sets were my favorites. I would go to my friends' houses on the weekend and we would build all weekend! Even at the age of seven, I was hooked on the glowing transparent pieces in the space sets. I started mowing lawns, pulling weeds and cleaning my mother's freaky Victorian house every Saturday for \$3.00 -anything to get more LEGO.

LEGO has been around me all my life. In high school my best friend Jayson had a massive LEGO city that engulfed his room. Visiting him was my first chance to have access to a lot of bricks to build with: he had far more then me. I featured his LEGO city in one of our school yearbooks and discovered that LEGO is indeed timeless. Everyone loves LEGO. After all we've all grown up with it. I've always focused on the arts. In school I would take every art class I could; anything to stay in the creative-zone and escape.

I hit my 'Dark Ages' in the mid 90's when sets started to become more juniorised and had too few pieces.

Fast forward to the year 2000 when I moved to The Netherlands. I got back into LEGO and began to pick up small sets, and started to build again. I then met and fell in love with Mark Stafford, also an AFOL. He introduced me in 2002 to the world's largest public LEGO exhibition LEGOWORLD here in Holland. I was blown away by how far LEGO set design had come- and how now I could build the models I had always wanted to!!! I got the Wild Collection Designer set (4101) and was hooked!

I've been building ever since . I exhibit models throughout the year with The Bouwsteen (a Dutch LEGO Club) going to Club Days and the big event of the year, LEGOWORLD. I enjoy meeting people and conversing about LEGO. I also post my models online at Brickshelf -

http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?m=Megs

For me LEGO is not only a great way to fire-up my imagination, but also a lifesaver.

I was in hospital 2 years ago, spending three weeks in a coma. Before I got out of ICU (after 30 days) I had managed to build with the Green X-pod. After two months in the hospital, I was finally home, but for some reason I unable to build or draw! I began slowly and tried to build sets from instructions. Over the next few months I improved and finally got to where I could build my own models again. I started building feverishly, with an entirely new and different perspective of the elements and approach to design.

Many people have asked me how I build.

To some extent I'm not exactly sure, but my philosophy is "there is a use for every element."

I like to build with the full spectrum of LEGO made elements. I use Technic, System, Bionicle, Clikits, and even Duplo. I have even used some of the BIONICLE box lids in some of my creations.

I start with an idea in my head. Then I work out a drawing or use reference photos to get the correct form, and shape. Due to my education in animation I build from the 'Inside-out.' I use a skeletal structure (either invisible or actual) and begin to form the structure with the bricks. I'm constantly keeping in mind:

How they would this creature move? Or would it move at all?

What are their character traits?

If it were real, what would it eat? Where would it sleep?

What is it's form and posture? How does it sit or stand? How does it move?

I use a lot of 'SNOT' (building with the Studs Not On Top) and other techniques to create the shapes as close to my original idea as possible. I draw inspiration from nature, machinery, science fiction, and odd or unique things.

In the future I'll continue pushing the building envelope! I have more Podagons, more train motor based uniqueness and a mini-figure theme (that I've never seen anyone else do) is also in the planning stage. I relish any feedback I get on my creations so please make comments when I post MOCs, I'll always try to respond! Long Live the Brick!

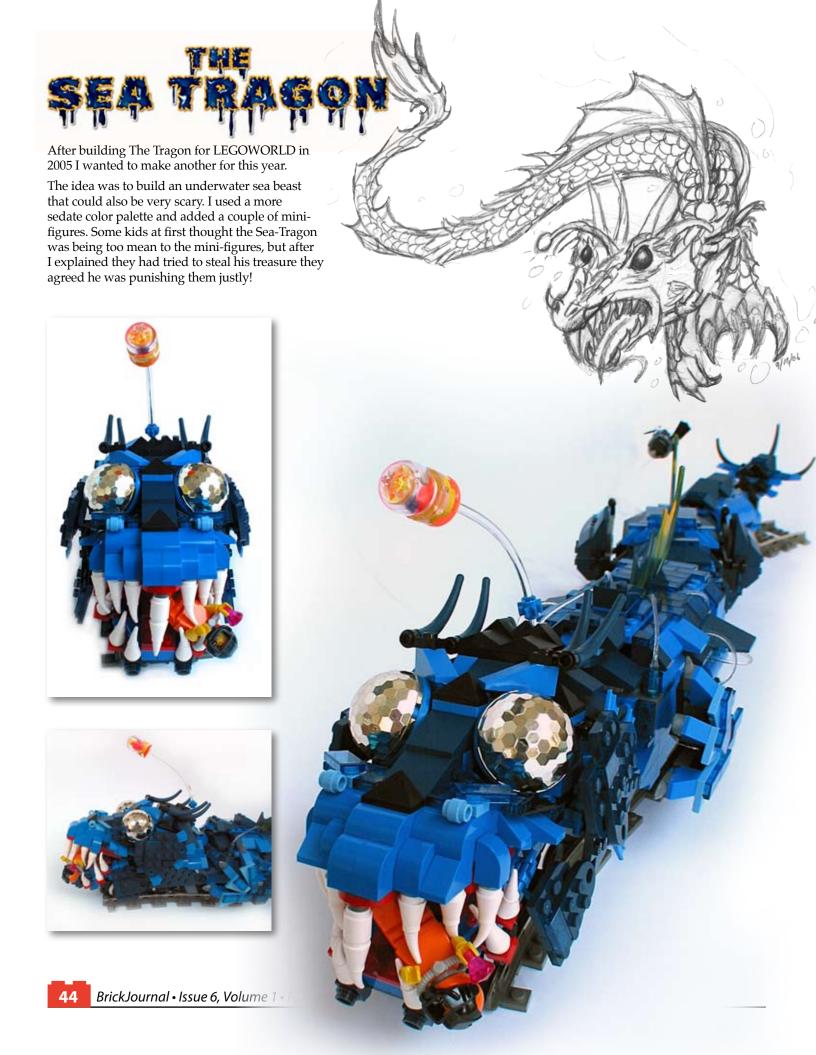




This was my first serious build. I wanted to build a cyber-craft of some kind and I have always liked the nautilus sea creature and thought 'hey I can build that'. Well, that was easier said than done. After much research, and many hair-pulling nights he was just about done. Then tragedy struck when I was in hospital for 2 months - Draak my 3.5 foot long green Iguana leaped onto my building table maliciously smashing The Nautilex 5090 is bits! After I was back home and finally able to build again I rebuilt him. Now he is strong enough to toss up in the air!









The Podagons are some of my favorite models.

They are cute and fuzzy on the outside but tough as nails on the inside. You can't always judge a book by it's cover and each one has a taste or obsession that is unique to them, but not immediately obvious when you first see them.

They start out as a sketch and then I begin to build them. I work very hard to capture the same character and personality that's present in my drawings. I push the bricks to translate the fun organic energy seen in each Podagon sketch. I feel they truly represent "The Animator" in me.



You Can Build It: NXT

Goodbye RCX, Hello NXT: The Arrival of LEGO MINDSTORMS NXT

For many, the MINDSTORMS NXT is a major leap over the previous robotics system, but for many more, it's a daunting set to play with. BrickJournal contacted an NXT builder to introduce us to the set by creating a model and a program.

Article and art by David J. Perdue

Staring in amazement at my computer screen, I couldn't believe what I saw when I visited the official MINDSTORMS website. The LEGO Group had redone the website to accommodate a forthcoming product: the MINDSTORMS NXT set. A short movie revealed the robotic toolset's powerful capabilities, but there were relatively few details on the site. However, there were enough for anyone to know that after several years of waiting, the LEGO community finally had another MINDSTORMS set in sight.

That was in January 2006. The NXT set has since been successfully released, and a horde of eager NXT inventors across the world are busily building, programming, and developing. The NXT set is still a new product, however, and a lot of people will have received their first one as a Christmas gift—in my opinion, a great gift!

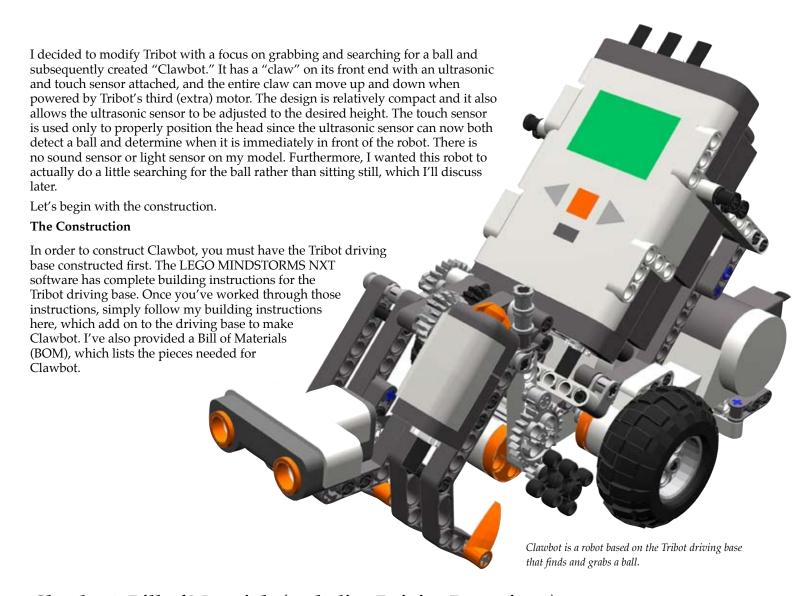
Long before the NXT set, many people—including me—had become avid users of the MINDSTORMS Robotics Invention System (RIS), the predecessor of the NXT set. As a result, numerous MINDSTORMS fans are accustomed to the building and programming characteristics of the RIS. However, while bearing certain similarities, the NXT set is considerably different than the RIS, which means that some longtime RIS users will face a measure of unfamiliarity when first working with the NXT set.

For example, in the RIS the main structural pieces were TECHNIC bricks. In the NXT set, beams are the main structural pieces, which demand studless building techniques since they don't stack and snap like bricks. However, beams are, generally speaking, more compact than TECHNIC bricks and give creations a more realistic appearance. On the electronic side, the NXT microcomputer (simply called the "NXT") offers four input (sensor) ports, whereas the RCX had only three. Additionally, the NXT set includes four sensors: touch, light, sound, and ultrasonic (distance). The RIS only had three sensors: two touch sensors and a light sensor. Another feature of the NXT is an LCD display that is huge in comparison to the LCD on the RCX microcomputer of the RIS. Still another feature of the NXT is Bluetooth technology (wireless communication), which the RCX didn't have at all. Finally, although both the NXT and RCX have three output (motor) ports, the NXT set includes three servo motors, motors with built-in rotation sensors.

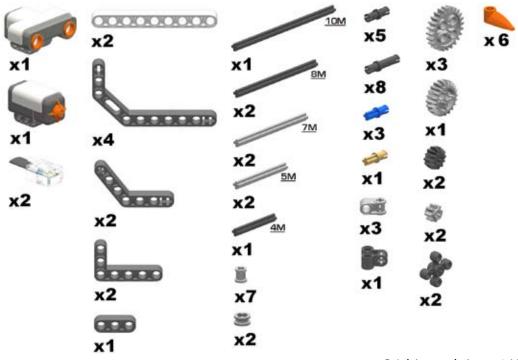
Fortunately, the increased robotic capabilities help to offset any difficulties encountered as a result of unfamiliarity. Nevertheless, many current MINDSTORMS users, not to mention new ones, will be spending some time acclimating to the building and programming characteristics of the NXT set. For those in the middle of that process, my advice to you is this: Before launching an ambitious, "from the ground up" NXT project, consider modifying an existing model into another creation. In other words, take one of the projects presented in the NXT set and modify it by adding and removing pieces to achieve a unique creation. This process can assist in solving "builder's block" and effectively teach you how to work with the NXT components. I am in no way discouraging a resolute determination to begin by building something from scratch, but I believe that many people will find this initial approach helpful. The following project is an example of how to put this approach into practice.

The Challenge: A Modified Tribot

One of the projects provided in the NXT set is Tribot, a three-wheeled vehicle. Among the six challenges presented in the NXT software for Tribot, one of them is to equip Tribot to "see and react to an object in front of it." The user is instructed to accomplish this by outfitting Tribot with an ultrasonic sensor, a touch sensor, and some TECHNIC pincers that can deftly grab a ball (the object). Using the graphical NXT-G programming environment included with the NXT set, the challenge then instructs the user to program Tribot to remain still until it detects movement with the ultrasonic sensor, move forward until the ball presses its touch sensor, and then grab the ball after hearing a handclap with its sound sensor. Finally, the robot turns around and scoots forward, dropping the ball once it detects a black line with its light sensor.



Clawbot's Bill of Materials (excluding Driving Base pieces)



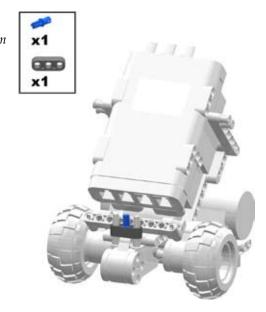
1.

Creating the Tribot driving base is the very first step.



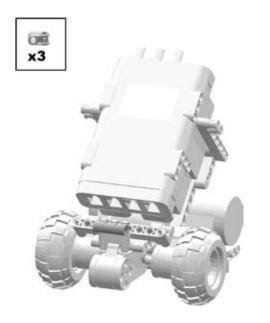
2.

Add a 3M beam and a friction axle peg.



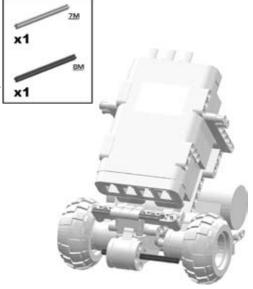
3.

Add three crossblocks.



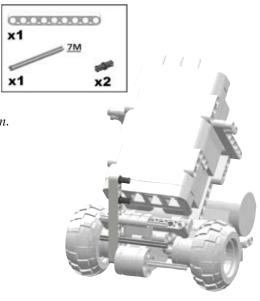
4.

Add a 7M and an 8M axle. You will secure these axles over the next several steps.



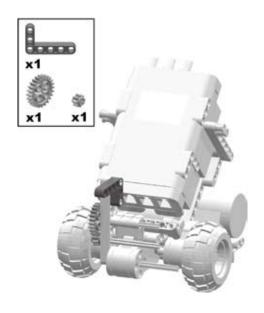
5.

Add a 9M beam, a 7M axle, and two friction pegs. The axles might slip around a bit, but you will lock them in place soon.



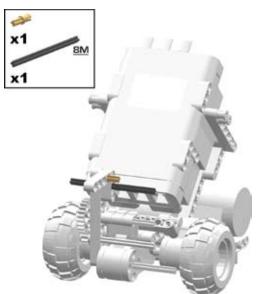
6.

Add a 7M perpendicular angled beam, a 24t gear, and an 8t gear.



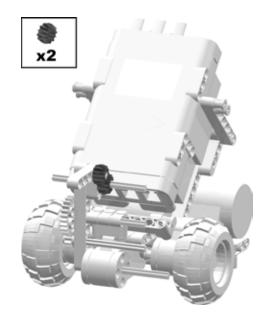


Add an 8M axle and an axle peg.



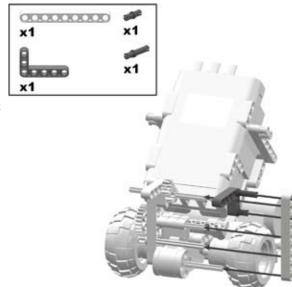
8. *Add t*

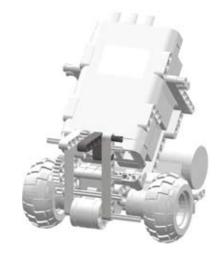
Add two 12t double bevel gears.



9.

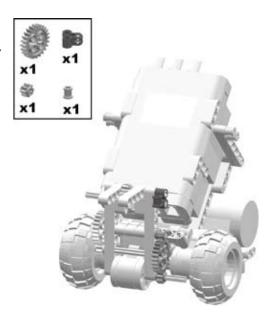
Add another 9M beam, 7M perpendicular angled beam, a friction peg, and a 3M friction peg. If you attach the 7M beam with its pegs to the 9M beam first, all of the pieces will attach to the robot easier.





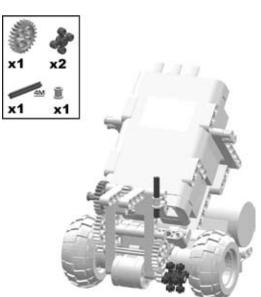
10.

Add a 24t gear, and 8t gear, a double cross block, and a bushing.



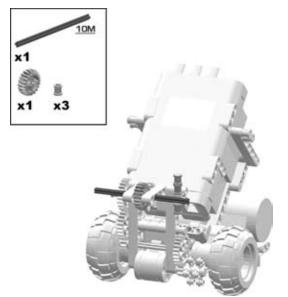
11.

Add another 24t gear, two knob wheels, a 4M axle, and a bushing. You're halfway finished!



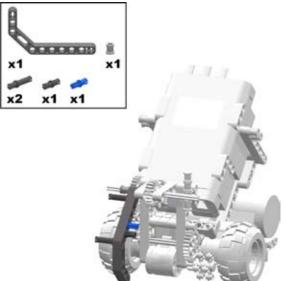
12.

Add a 20t double bevel gear, a 10M axle, and three bushings.



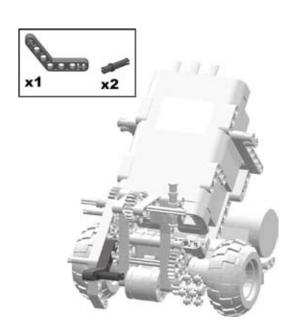
13.

Add an 11.5 angled beam, a bushing, a friction peg, two 3M friction pegs, and a friction axle peg.



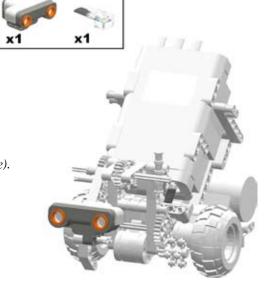
14.

Add a 7M angled beam and two 3M friction pegs.



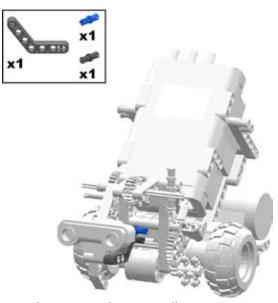
15.

Add the ultrasonic sensor and connect the sensor to the NXT input port 4 with one electrical cable (the "cut off" cable is representative of a complete cable).



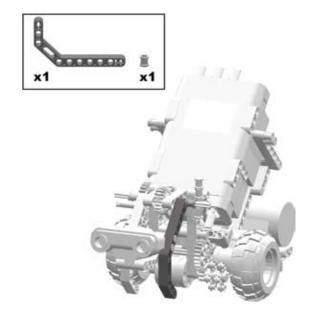
16.

Add another 7M angled beam, a friction peg, and a friction axle peg.



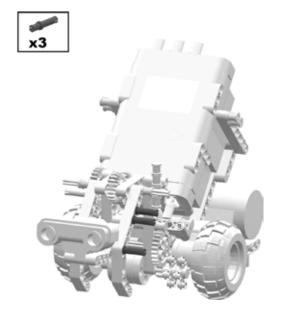
17.

Add another 11.5 angled beam and a bushing.



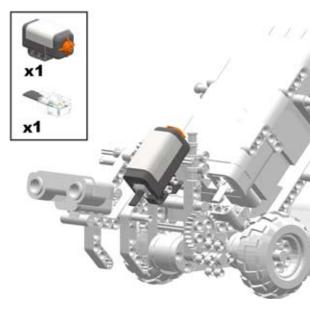
18.

Add three 3M friction pegs.



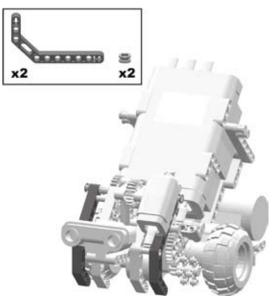
19.

Add a touch sensor and connect it to the NXT input port 1 with an electrical cable.



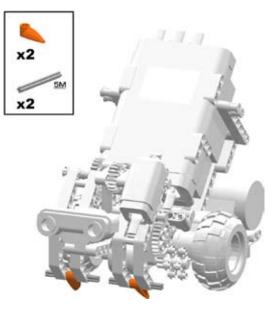
20.

Add two more 11.5 angled beams and two half-bushings.



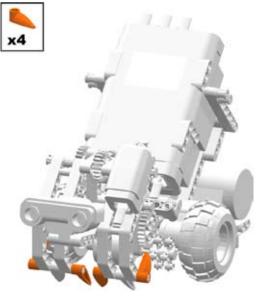
21.

Add two 5M axles and place a TECHNIC tooth on each one. In order to do this, you must position a tooth and then slide an axle through it.



22.

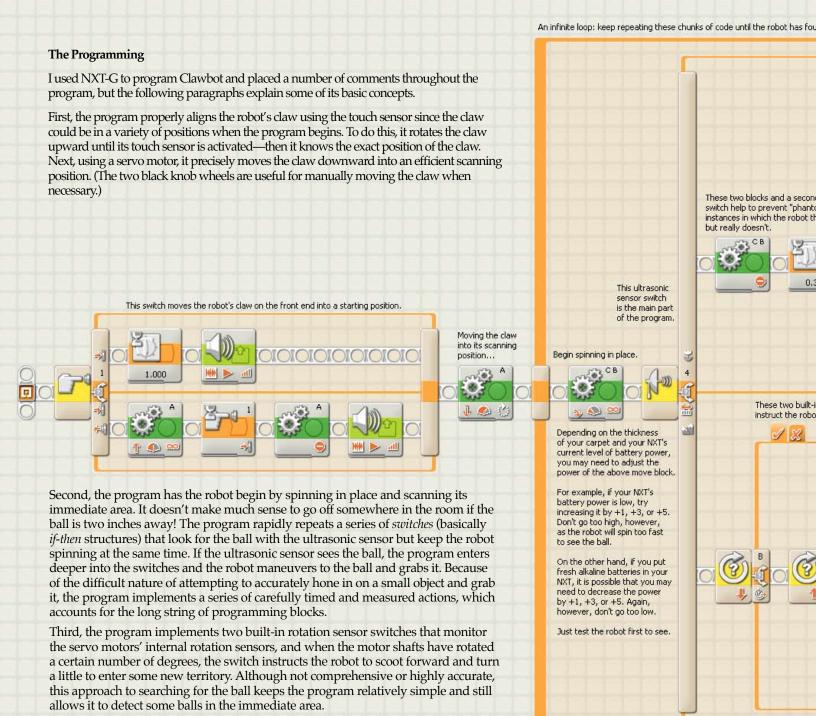
Add four more TECHNIC teeth, and you're finished!



The Programming

I used NXT-G to program Clawbot and placed a number of comments throughout the program. You can see the program and my comments on the following pages.

continued >>



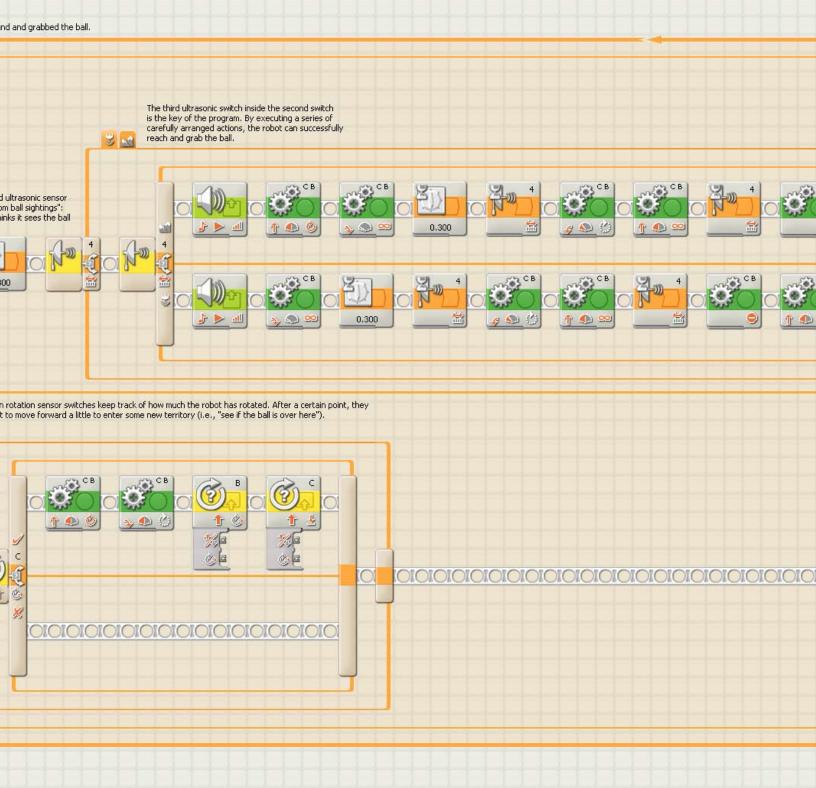
The Testing

Once you've built Clawbot and downloaded the NXT-G program to it, you should set up an appropriate environment in which the robot can perform. First and foremost, note that Clawbot must perform on carpet because the plastic balls in the NXT set will roll around on hard flooring.

Second, place Clawbot on a spot in your house with a radius of five to six feet in which there are no other objects besides the ball. If there were other objects in the area, the robot might detect those instead of the ball.

Third, begin by placing one of the NXT balls about a foot or less from the robot anywhere around it. Run the "Clawbot" program on the NXT, step back a couple of paces (you don't want it going after you!), and watch what happens. When the robot has detected the ball, it should maneuver very close to it, stop, open up its claw, move forward, and close its claw around the ball. After giving a triumphant beep, the program ends. Take the ball away from the robot and position it one-to-two feet away somewhere in front of it, preferably more to its front right side (the robot tends to travel in this direction). Again, just run the program on the NXT, step back, and watch.

Clawbot can't detect balls that are farther out than a few feet, and its program leads it to spend most of its time in areas to the front and right of its starting point. For this reason, you should place balls relatively close to the robot, but experiment and see what results you can achieve. In addition, Clawbot sometimes unsuccessfully attempts to grab the ball, doesn't properly maneuver to the ball, or simply doesn't see the ball. If these instances occur, simply stop the robot and start over or in some cases wait to see if the robot will

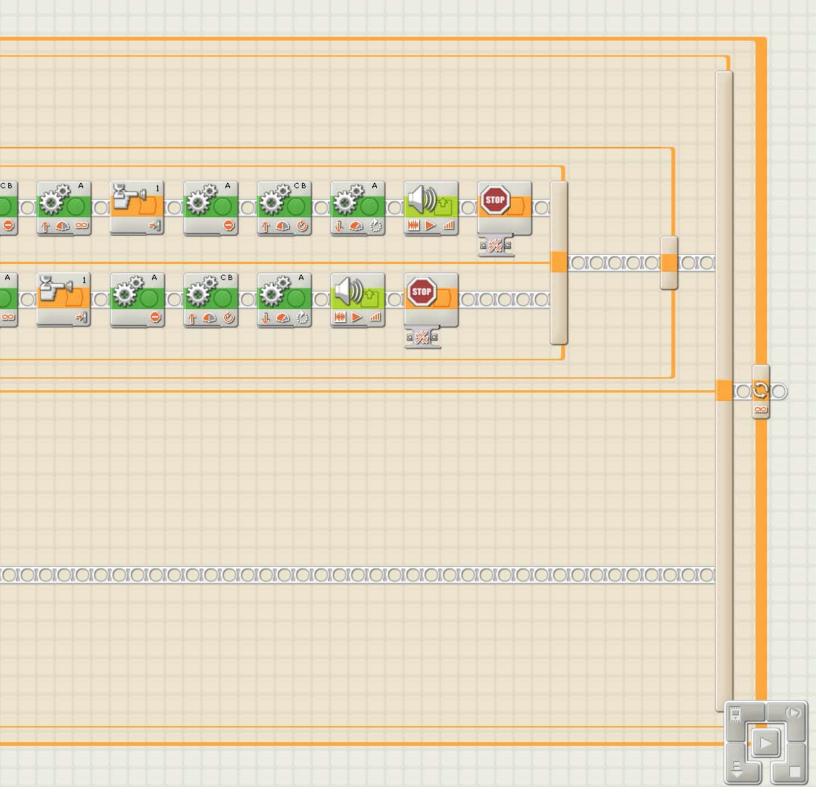


detect the ball at a later point. Also, the level of battery power in your NXT can affect the robot's performance (see the program itself for more information).

Going Further: Maximizing Clawbot Performance

Like most projects, Clawbot is a complete yet unfinished project. In other words, there is always room for improvement. Specifically, there are several areas in which great potential lie, and I encourage you to investigate these possibilities:

- Transporting the ball. Once Clawbot has found and "grabbed" the ball, moving the ball somewhere else would be a nice feature: for example, carrying the ball back to the robot's starting point or dropping the ball off at some other specified location.
- **Grabbing other items.** The ball included in the NXT set is actually difficult for the ultrasonic sensor to detect. It is round and relatively small, and both of these factors make ultrasonic sensor detection more difficult. What other relatively small objects could Clawbot find and grab? You could redesign the claw on Clawbot to accommodate another item's shape.



• Searching for an item with advanced techniques. Finding an object can be a difficult task for an NXT robot, but it is accomplishable. Employing additional sensors (like the new compass sensor) and advanced programming are ways in which Clawbot could more effectively search for a ball in a room.

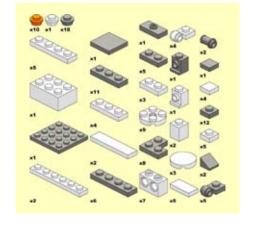
What Will You Make?

In conclusion, you've seen an example here of how to modify an existing MINDSTORMS creation into a unique and functional invention. Now it's your turn. Whether you decide to modify a creation or make your very own invention, what will *you* make? The LEGO community is waiting to see more great NXT robots, and you can post your inventions at the NXTLOG on the official MINDSTORMS website. Good luck on your robotic projects, and remember the most important objective: have fun!

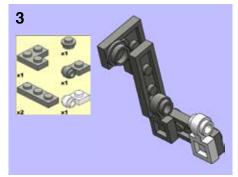
You can download the NXT-G prgram for David's robot by going to: http://www.davidjperdue.com/files/ clawbot.rbt

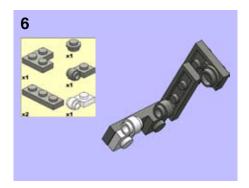


Parts Needed



Arms





NXTeeny: A Smaller Bot!

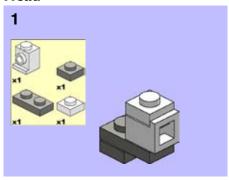
Model by Joe Meno.
Instructions by Glenn Nilsson.

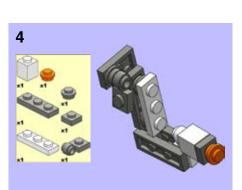
I got an NXT set and have been tinkering with it since the summer. It's been a constant cargo, going with me to my place, to my parent's place, and even to a couple of events that I have been involved with. However, I wanted to make a mini version of Alpha Rex, the humanoid robot since I built it with the NXT.

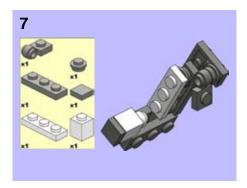
The biggest challenge was sizing down the components of the NXT set - motors, NXT programmable brick, and sensors. The first sensor I built was the ultrasound, as that would define the scale of the model. From there, the rest of the model was easy - the motors actually became neat little models in their own right when I finished them. The end result is not only a model of Alpha Rex, but can be broken down to the NXT parts, so could be possibly used to rough out simple NXT designs.

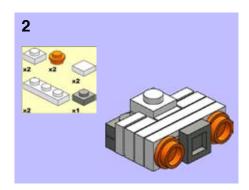
There is one model I completed that was given to Michael Brandl, an NXT builder, at Bricking Bavaria last year. Now anyone with the parts can build it - so enjoy!

Head



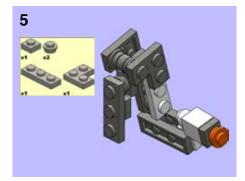


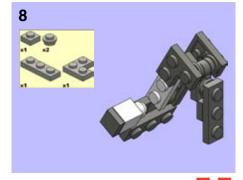




You Can Build It:

Mini NXT





If you want to find out more about NXT building and programming, you can go to the following blogs:

The NXT Step:

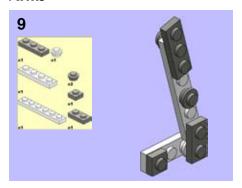
http://www.thenxtstep. blogspot.com/

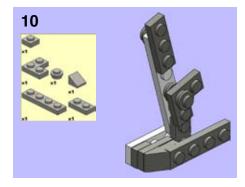
NXTbot.com

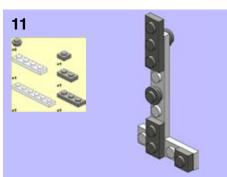
http://www.nxtbot.com/

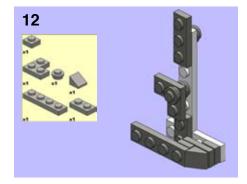
NXTasy.org http://www.nxtasy.org/

Arms



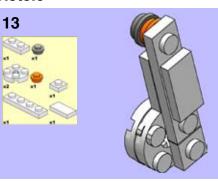


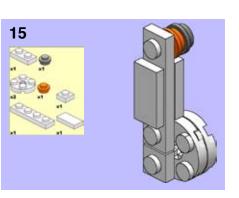




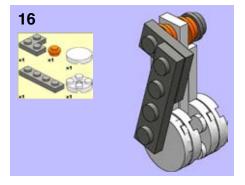
Motors

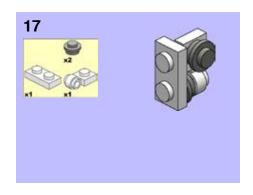


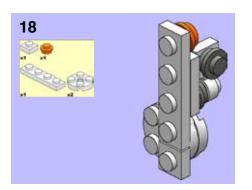


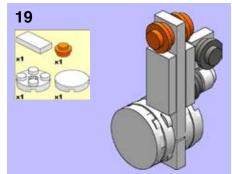




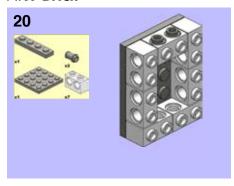


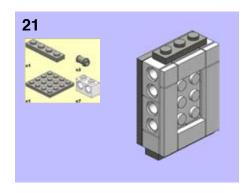


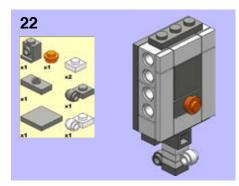




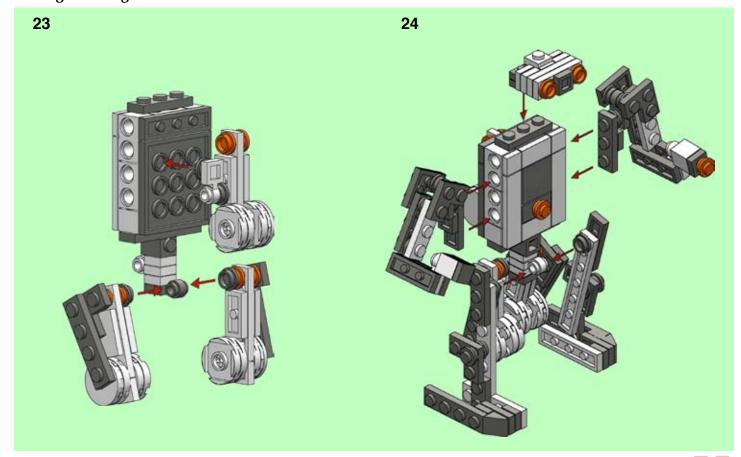
NXT Brick







Putting it All Together



You Can Build It: Battlestar Galactica

Colonial Land Ram

Model and Instructions by Christopher Deck. Renders by Glenn Nilsson

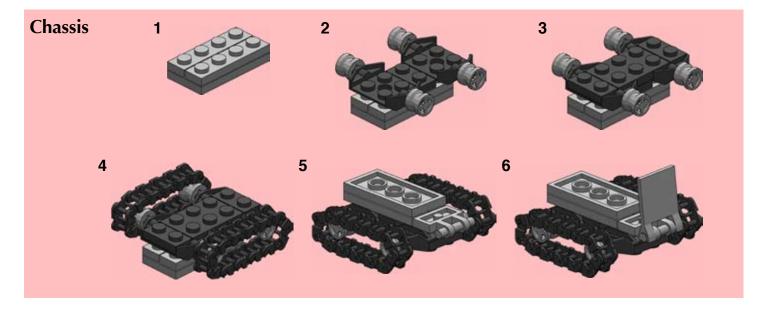
Hello again, dear fellows!

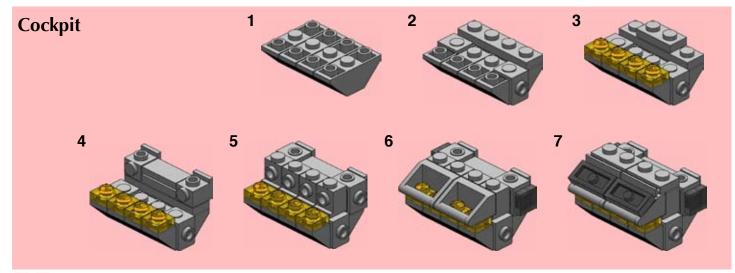
Some of you might already have wondered if this crazy mini builder only built starships from the Star Wars Universe. This is a reasonable question, as there are usually more ships than land vehicles in a Science Fiction series, as Star Wars is currently my main building field. Hence I decided to show you something different this time. A side project of mine focuses on the classic Battlestar Galactica series. The few official vessels are well-known, such as the Colonial Viper and Battlestar, and the Cylon Raider. You can already find these models, complete with instructions, in my BrickShelf folder (http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?m=Legostein).

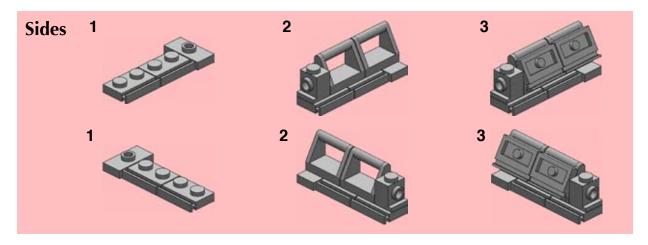
One of the very few land vehicles of this series is the Colonial Land Ram, a solid and sturdy tracked vehicle, which is what I am presenting to you here. Here are some general thoughts: a key piece of this model is the modified 1x2 tile with handle, a really great part for creating angled structures, as you will see.

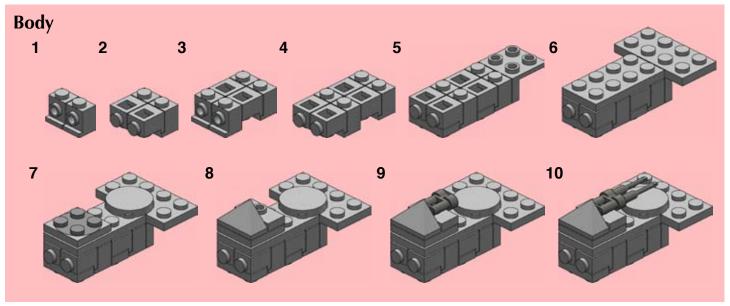
If you use those pieces flipped like a SNOT brick, this will lead to measurements which are difficult to smooth in that scale, such as half plate heights. The cockpit section of this vehicle shows a solution for using 1x2 handle tiles in a SNOT way. Also, the treads really work!! I wish you happy building and see you next time!

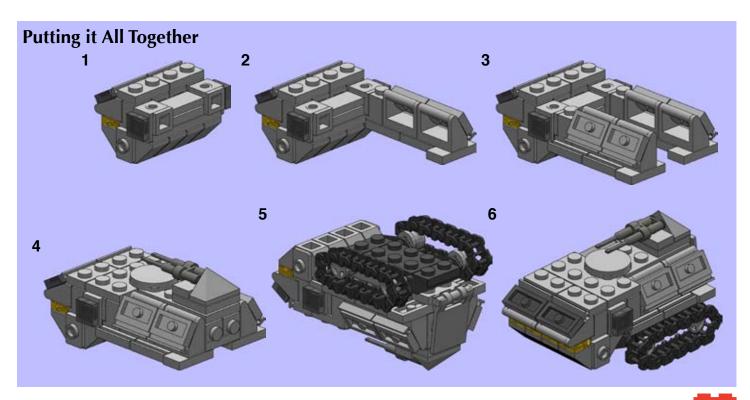
— Christopher Deck











Building:Minifig Customization 101

Macro Digital Photography

One of the toughest challenges for a minifig builder is photography. Here, Jared Burks takes a look at how to make photos that 'pop'!

Article and photos by Jared Burks



Figure 1 – Macro Photo: *In this figure we find two custom figures sparring. They are sporting custom made sabre hilts made by Deathstickman of FBTB and MCN. Notice the clarity of the photo and the reduced shadows. When you take a picture be sure to examine the details.*



Figure 2 – Camera settings: 1. Note the location of the automatic settings as denoted by the A. To select this setting turn the dial to the A. 2. Note the location of the macro setting. Typically it is activated by depressing the button next to it twice, which results in the presentation of the flower icon on the LCD screen.

Having followed the information in the last two editions of *BrickJournal*, you have successfully created your own custom Minifig. Now it is time to share that creation by photographing your finished figure. Typically we share these creations online; digital photography lends itself to this task. Photographing any small objects require that we think about a few important concepts and that we have a basic understanding of our digital camera. With a few simple tips you can dramatically improve the pictures you take with your camera. This article is directed at *macro* digital photography and is by no means an all inclusive guide to digital photography. The point of this article is to help the typical user improve their digital photographs using a basic digital camera, so if you are a camera buff you might pick up a trick or two, but this is likely to be a review. In this article we will break down digital photography into 3 major sections:

I Digital Cameras

II Photo Studio

III Picture Editing (The Basics)

I Digital Cameras

Every digital camera is slightly different, but they all have a few common elements; a lens, digital storage media (film), and typically a flash. Not all cameras use these three elements in the same way, so it is important to know how your digital camera works, especially as they all have unique or proprietary features. If you can't find your camera's users manual check out either the manufacturer's website or these quick guides (www.shortcourses.com/guides/guides.htm). I know what you are thinking: "Why do I have to read some user's manual if you are about to teach me how to do it?" You will need to know how to turn on and off the special features we are going to discuss for your camera. The quick guides' site has an extensive database about digital photography and I highly recommend it if you have additional questions (www.shortcourses.com).

The greatest piece of advice I can offer when using your digital camera is that if a photo doesn't turn out as you had hoped, just delete it and take another picture. Take advantage of the power of digital photography, instant feedback; learn from the way you take your pictures. Don't be afraid to experiment, the pictures you publish will represent your work; make them as nice as your custom figure. With the instant feedback of digital cameras, a photographer should NEVER display a poorly lit or blurry image.

This article will assume that you are using your digital camera on the automatic setting, meaning the camera is choosing the exposure time, aperture, focus, and white balance. If you don't know how to set your camera to the automatic setting, please refer to your user's manual or the guides listed above, but in most cases you will turn the dial on the top of your camera to the A setting, see the figure to left.

Macro

When photographing a Minifig you should get the camera as close to the Minifig as possible, with few minor exceptions. The reason for this is that the figure will be larger in the final image, and after all that is what you are trying to take a picture of to share with others. The minimum focal distance of your camera determines this distance; if you get too close the picture will be blurry (This distance is likely in the user's manual for your camera). There are two ways to get close to the figure; one is to use your zoom lens, which has its drawbacks, and the other is to use the camera's macro setting.

Remember that digital and optical zoom are not the same. Digital zoom sacrifices pixels, which translated directly into image quality and resolution. Optical zoom uses magnification offered by a lens to increase the size of objects while not affecting the number of pixels collecting data. So if you decide to use the zoom options always and only use the optical zoom. The macro setting uses a lens to reduce the minimal focal distance of the camera, allowing you to place the camera closer to the figure than normally possible. The macro and zoom lenses can be used in conjunction with one another and we will go into the advantages and disadvantages of these options shortly. By getting closer you can fill or nearly fill the screen with your figure. Remember if you can't fill the screen with your figure you can always crop out the unwanted region of the image, however this will make the final image smaller.

I am sure that you have all seen those three little icons next to one of the buttons on your camera; the mountain, flower, and clock. This button is used to activate the macro setting for your camera. The macro setting, represented by the flower, is toggled on or off with the other settings depending upon the number of times you depress the activation button. When the macro setting is activated, a flower icon is typically displayed on your camera's LCD. By using this feature you can now place the camera closer to the subject, filling the capture area with the subject.

Depth of Field

Depth of field is the distance between objects in focus in your photograph. I am sure you have seen photographs where you have a long depth of field; meaning objects in the foreground, background, and everything in between are in focus. Conversely a shallow depth of field will only have the central object in focus and the foreground and backgrounds will be blurry. The depth of field is controlled by the aperture of the lens/exposure time, how close you are to a subject, and how much the lens is zoomed. Not all digital cameras have the aperture iris, thus they control depth of field with exposure time.

The lens aperture is the opening in the lens that allows light to pass through, it is controlled by an iris inside the lens. Since your camera is set to automatic, you don't have direct control of the aperture setting and thus depth of field. To check the f-stop, look at the f# on the LCD screen; the larger the number, f22, the greater the depth of

field; the smaller the number, f2.8, the smaller the depth of field. Many digital cameras don't allow you to alter the aperture; however, you can affect the depth of field by controlling the amount of light on your sample figure, which is why I bring it up. The more light you have on your subject the smaller the iris will open (the larger f#) the greater the depth of field; however, you can wash out your figure with too much light so be careful. When the subject figure is not well lit, the iris opens more to allow additional light to enter the camera (the smaller the $f^{\#}$), which narrows the depth of field. This means the objects in your figures hands might be out of focus while the main body of the figure is in focus.

There are three ways to combat a narrow depth of field when photographing figures; one is to make sure that the figure and any thing they are holding are in the same plane of focus (Line them up in a straight line such that they are all about equal distance from the camera lens), the second is to use a wider angle of view (don't zoom in), and the third is to increase the lighting. Proper lighting can solve many of the depth of field issues; it will be addressed in the photo studio section shortly. You can take your camera out of automatic mode and adjust the aperture more precisely than by altering the light levels, distance to subject, or level of zoom; to do so please refer to your user's guide.

Conversely, a shallow depth of field can be used by the photographer to isolate subject matter or make part of a photograph stand out to the viewer, so this is an area where experimentation





Figure 3 – Depth of Field: Note the difference in these two images of the same vignette. In the photo on the left look at the two regions circled. These are the closest and furthest items in the photo, and they are out of focus and blurry. In the second image the lighting has been altered and a longer exposure time was used resulting in a larger f-stop, which increased the depth of field to bring these areas into focus. Depth of field can get so small that an entire Minifig isn't in focus. Be careful of lighting as this is the best remedy for a narrow depth of field.



Figure 4 – Narrow Depth of Field: This figure was made for a special Houston TEXLug event, where it was photographed by Anthony Sava in a well lit area. Anthony demonstrates a narrow depth of field in this photo, which removes the distracting background by blurring it in the image. The depth of field in this photo can be seen by examining the corners of the black box the figure is displayed on; notice the near and far corners are slightly out of focus. This figure is sporting a custom gun from BrickArms. Photo used with permission.







Figure 5 - Resolution: This series of images demonstrates what happens with the various resolution settings of your camera. This custom figure has been cropped out of a 640x480, 1280x960, and 2272x1704 images; which results in several different sized images. When we post online we need a figure of approximately 400 pixels tall. This means that the 1280x960 would be a good starting size for our image, when we crop out the figure it is 614 pixels. This allows us to resample and resize the image to make it easier for others to download and view. This figure sports a custom sabre hilt by Deathstickman of FBTB and MCN.

is encouraged. Think about your photos before you take them: decide what you are trying to capture; use them to show off or highlight your custom work.

Insufficient light/aperture opening can be one reason you get blurry photos. If the camera can not open the aperture wide enough to get sufficient light in automatic mode, it will extend the exposure time in order to get the additional light. When the exposure time is greater than 1/60 to 1/30 of a second you will detect motion in either or both, your subject and/or in your hands as they hold the camera, thus blurring the image captured. If you can't get sufficient light on a subject figure, consider setting your camera on a stationary object or a tripod and using the timer feature. I suggest the timer feature as the act of depressing the button can cause camera movement and continue to blur your images on longer exposures.

Resolution

This is a tricky subject and one tends to think the higher the resolution the better the image. After all, cameras with more mega-pixels have higher resolution and are more expensive, so they must be better, right? This is not necessarily true depending on your how you are going to display or print your photographs. Most of the time we use our digital photographs to post online or email to friends, we don't need a 2272

x 1704 pixel image to put on the web. We need a small image of approximately 400 to 600 pixels high. If you capture your image at the highest resolution your camera can capture, details not visible to the naked eye will be visible. This is because you have essentially placed the figure under a microscope. You are magnifying the figure by using the resolution in combination with the macro features. If you merely shrink this image to a smaller size this "magnified" view will still be visible, as well as the larger file size. You will need to resample the image as you resize it in order to reduce the magnification effect and to reduce the file size. Another solution is to take images at a lower resolution. I suggest something in the 1280-1024 pixel size as this is a middle of the road resolution and will not create the "magnified" views as easily. Thus when you crop your image to the 400 pixel size it will appear as close to the lifelike item as possible.

Flash

There are advantages and disadvantages to using your flash. The flash will increase the light falling on your subject and thus increase the depth of field by using a smaller aperture (larger f#), which is good. The flash will also help remove any motion that might appear in your image from camera movement,

which is also good. However if you want to minimize the shadows created from the light placed on the subject figure a flash isn't good. A flash will create a very hard/dark shadow region from the flash hitting your figure. Also if you are taking a picture of a subject with flat surfaces the flash could reflect off these surfaces and wash out your image. If you are going to use your flash make sure the light from the flash hits these surfaces at an angle so the light reflects in an angle away from the lens.

II Photo Studio

A photo studio is made of a few elements; light source (typically 2), background, camera, and possibly a diffuser or reflector. The studio is fairly simple to set up and can be created on any desk or tabletop.

Desk lamps work well as light sources, it helps if they are the same type, but this isn't critical. Merely place the light sources on opposite sides of the figure and angle the light such that it falls on the figure at 45 degree angles. This helps reduce the shadows as the two lights interfere with each other minimizing the shadows each light creates.

A seamless background can be created by using poster board or a sheet of colored construction paper. Merely find a tall object like a coffee can and attach the paper or poster board so that it drapes from the top of the object to the table top with a slight bend forward to form an L shape. You can change the background color to accentuate the figure. White and Black work well, but as there are many LEGO® elements in these colors, therefore a neutral light grey or blue might be best, feel free to experiment.

Light diffusion is the next trick to work out for your studio. There are commercially available diffusers called Light Tents (check eBay), which will give you professional results. However you likely have all the tools in your house to make a diffuser. If you have a 1 gallon plastic milk jug lying around, you have the perfect diffuser for a Minifig or anything of like size. Start by cutting the bottom off the jug, then cut off the handle, making a flat open side, and finish by cutting a hole in the lid large enough for your camera lens. Make sure you remove any labels. By laying the jug on its side you can place your camera on the table and slide the lens into one end and the background into the other. Then shine your lights through the jug and onto the figure, diffusing the light and eliminating shadows.

One last comment on composition, even though you are taking a picture of a figure in a static environment doesn't mean you shouldn't "pose" the figure as if something is going on around it. Make it have bold action, turn its head, place items in its hands, breathe life into your figure and your photograph.







Figure 6 – Milk Jug Photo Studio: This is a great and inexpensive light diffusion system that allows for well lit pictures. In this setup I have used two different fluorescent lights to light the figures. It might be better if two halogen desk lamps were used, but I used what was on hand. The milk jug cut in half works well to diffuse the light and minimize the shadows. By using a piece of colored construction paper a seamless background is created that allows for easy photo editing. Remember you can pull the edges of the milk jug together to make the interior space taller to allow larger items, however the milk jug setup is really too small for anything much larger than a Minifig.

III Picture Editing (The Basics)

Now you have captured a few images of your favorite new custom figure and you really want to make sure the pictures are the best you can share. Load them onto your computer from your camera and start editing. Editing is where a lot of experimentation can occur; to convert your color image to black and white, to darken the image, to crop out excessive background, it is all possible and only limited by your imagination. There are many programs on the market for photo editing, with the leader in the field being Adobe PhotoShop, followed closely by Corel PhotoPaint.

These are very high end programs; however there are several freeware/shareware programs that can be used as well (Check www.tucows.com). One that I particularly like is called Irfanview (http://www.irfanview.com/). This program is very small yet very powerful.



Figure 7 – Advanced Photo Editing: This photo by Ace Kim of FBTB demonstrates photo editing at its best. Notice how well he has captured Boba Fett with this simple yet imposing pose; Boba is sporting a Little Armory Blaster and looks ready for action. The lighting and pose capture Boba's arm and leg decoration. While we will not be getting into this advanced photo editing, it is good to examine these photos for creative ideas. Photo used with permission.

Cropping

It will allow you to crop your images by merely drawing a box around them and then using the crop command under Edit > Crop. One of the nice features is that you can resize the box instead of having to redraw the whole thing.

Enhance Color Options

Under the enhance color options you can adjust the color balance, brightness, contrast, gamma correction, and saturation. This will allow you to fix any imbalances in your photos caused by the lighting you use. Without a long explanation, the colors we see are directly affected by the light that shines on them, so if you use fluorescent light, tungsten (incandescent), or candle light you will get very different shades of color; this is a way to correct the colors in your photo. This area requires experimentation and deciding what looks best to you. If you need additional information on these different image settings I suggest this article: http://www.shortcourses.com/editing/index.htm

Resize/Resample

Of course the minimum editing required is resizing or resampling. When you resize an image you merely make it larger or smaller, however when you resample you change the number of pixels in an image. Upsampling uses interpolation to increase the number of pixels; where as Downsampling throws away pixels to reduce the size. It is best to resample your images when you resize them, making the file sizes smaller for faster load times. It is always better to shrink or downsample an image than it is to enlarge or upsample. This way you are removing "extra" information as opposed to having to use interpolation to create information.

Irfanview doesn't stop there, it has many additions that can be installed allowing you to not only alter the image by converting it to black and white or sepia tone, but gives you a wide variety of photo alterations. Play with your pictures and see what you can











Figure 8 – Basic Photo Editing: In this series of photos we can see the progression of photo editing. In the first image we see the initial photograph. This image is then cropped, balanced for light, color, and then the image is extracted in Photoshop. With this custom figure extracted he is ready to be overlaid on a special background, to make a custom image. Note that this rapscallion is sporting a chromed Little Armory Blaster.

create. Just to remember to be polite when you post your image, much of the world is still on dial up modems and it can take them some time to download your 1200 x 1500 pixel image. Keep your large original image for printing purposes, but share a smaller file that makes it easy for all to enjoy.

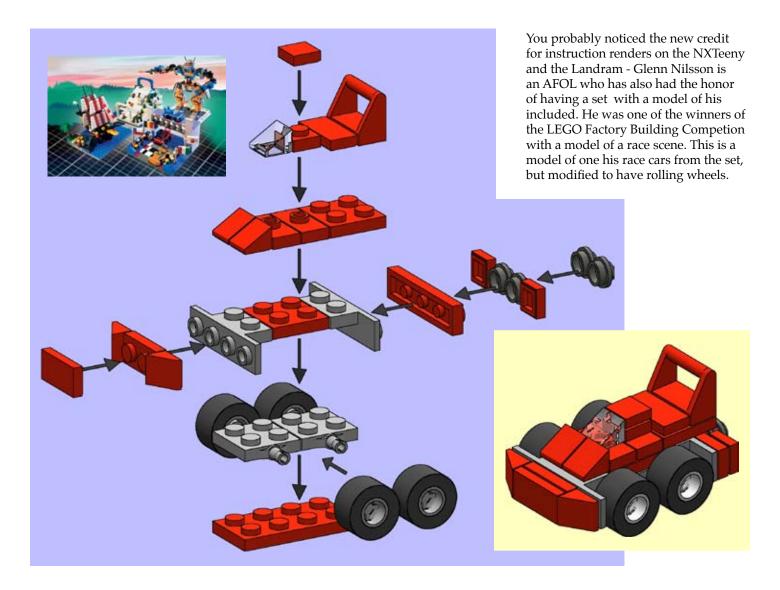
Next Time:

Minifig Customization 101 – Custom Accessory Creation through LEGO Element Modification

Micro Car

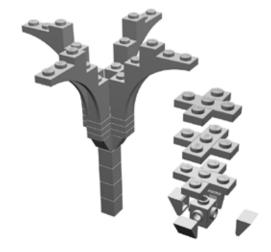
Design and Renders by Glenn Nilsson

You Can Build It: Micro Scale



Bricks for Thought

Archway from Erik Amzallag Render by Geoff Gray



Event:LEGOFEST XXII

The Brick Goes to Ballabio!

In Italy, there are more than a few LEGO expos - BrickJournal has a report from a summer event!

By Marco Chiappa Photos by Gaetano Chiappa





Where is Ballabio?

Ballabio is a small town very close to Lecco in northern Italy. Lecco is 50 km north of Milan and is on the right bank of the famous Como Lake. Ballabio is 5 km from Lecco and is surrounded by high mountains in a very evocative place. Some people from Italy and from Europe come to Ballabio for holidays.

Why a LEGOfest in Ballabio?

Some people asked why a LEGOfest had to be in a small town and not in a big city. The answer is simple: the location choose ItLUG and not vice versa. In the winter of 2005, a member of Pro Loco of Ballabio (an association of volunteers that help the municipality to organize events and shows for inhabitants and tourists) asked me if I want to organize a LEGO meeting. I posted the question on the ItLUG forum and I had some good answers.

The first official meeting between Pro Loco and I happened in the middle of January 2006 and I was astonished because the space that they offered me was big and beautiful: an entire gymnasium (500 square meters) and adjoining rooms. ItLUG never had a space like this for a LEGOfest! The logical consequence was that I should plan for a great show, not to a simple meeting between friends.

How was the LEGOFest organized?

The practical organization was divided in two parts: the show and logistics. ItLUG had to think about the show and Pro Loco guys had to think about the logistics (room, tables, fences and so on). We set the date for the first and the second of July, a weekend: Saturday for setup and Sunday for the open exhibition.

The excitement of ItLUG members reached the sky in a few days and members started to build or rearrange their existing building for the show. Pro Loco and I had a meeting every Tuesday from February to the end of June to organize all the details. I remember the days when I was afraid to leave empty spaces (the worst thing for a public exhibition) but in the end, ItLUG members repaid me and Pro Loco for all the work that we did.

For the first time in Italy, ItLUG had institutional support, in fact the Lecco's Province gave support to us.

We prepared flyers for shops and public sites and we sent mail to all local TV, newspaper, friends, firms and everyone we knew.

Two weeks before the show we had another great surprise: LEGO Italy was to take part in the event. ItLUG awaited this news for too long, in fact Ballabio is the first place where we had TLG with us. LEGO Italy came with a Ferrari F1 in scale 1:1, some sculptures and a playground for children. At this point we decided to use a nearby room (about 150 square meters) for the children's playground.

How was the show?

The exhibition was divided between the big room (the gymnasium) and the "mirror" room for the children's playground.

The big room had tables all around for MOC displays and two separate spaces in the center: one for great ball contraption and one for Ferrari F1 in scale 1:1.

The work of ItLUG members was simply great! They dreamt of a great LEGOfest and they did everything possible to make

it come true. The Technic dockyard caught some attendees with 1:20 scale excavators, bulldozer, trucks, crane and other machines - all working. The dockyard was 10 meters x 2 meters and made by only three AFOLs: Fabio Sali, Paolo Panzone and Cristian Sala.

For the first time ItLUG presented the city's diorama, a modular system with standard connections. Some people are involved in this theme and we saw some new MOCs: the huge theatre of Gaetano Notaro, the university of Mario Ferrari, the square of Ezio Maino, the railway station and the trains of Carlo Ottolina and the house of Luca Giannitti.

On the other side we had a huge collection of 9V trains by Roberto Milani. Marco Chiappa for the first time presented the belltower of San Nicolò (1.92 m high), some train engines and a town layout. Luca Giannitti showed the fantastic station Sassi-Superga, busses and streetcars. Alex Cordero presented a F1 pit-stop. Cristian Sala, Arianna Rossi, and Luca Zaccari had a huge collection of sculptures: maxifig, Simpson in miniland scale, shoes, motorbike and others. Gabriele Biffi showed a collection of Star Wars sets next to a collection of helicopters by Luca Zaccari.

A little space was dedicated to the MINDSTORMS next to a display with old sets from the seventies.

Dino Baldi presented a huge spaceship, the complete collection of Tiny Turbos and a complete collection of Adventurers sets. Gaetano Notaro presented a fantastic medieval bridge and by it you could find the F1 cars of Luca Rusconi (especially the Lotus John Player Special). Antonella Carabelli presented an Ice Planet diorama completely covered by a black sheet and illuminated by a ultraviolet lamp. In the center of the room you could see a fantastic model of a Ferrari F1 in scale 1:1 offered by LEGO Italy and an incredible Great Ball Contraption. The GBC was a blast! The public crowded the stand all the day. Mario Ferrari, Stefano Ferrari and Luca Zaccari estimated that 13,000 balls passed in the machine.

In the adjoining room we had a children's playground: tables with LEGO Sytem, LEGO Duplo and soccer fields. Children filled the area all the day and demonstrated again that children like to play with LEGO. In a corner of the room some children presented some buildings in a contest with prizes offered by Teorema Giocattoli (a shop of Lecco).

The show was a blast! 2000 visitors on Sunday and 200 visitors at the Saturday's inauguration was a great success. You have to know that Ballabio has 3000 inhabitants: how can anyone imagine a success like this at the first attempt?

What's in store for next year?

The work for the next edition of LEGOfest in Ballabio is in progress. The space will be much larger because we'll have the entire school, so there will be 4 times the exhibition space. With this space we want to push the event to the next level, an international event. Every AFOL from around the world is invited.

We are working towards putting some selling points in the show and other services like a bar or restaurant. We are negotiating with nearby hotels, camping and restaurants because we want the exhibitors to have the best at good prices.

Like next year, LEGOfest will be the main event of all the summer in Ballabio and nearby towns

Stay tuned on: http://www.itlug.org.







Event: NMRA 2006

All aboard!

The "L" gauge comes to NMRA 2006

Article by Jeramy Spurgeon Photography by Geoff Gray

or the second year, the International LEGO Train Club Organization (ILTCO) was invited to display at the National Model Railroaders Association's National Train Show (NMRA NTS). This year's show was held in Philadelphia, PA during the first weekend in July. The National Train Show is the single largest train display in the United States and having an AFOL presence there is important for the LEGO Train Community.



Many trains fans crowded around to get a good view of LEGO trains

Steve Barile of the Greater Portland LEGO Railroaders (GPLR) was again the lead coordinator for this event. Jeramy Spurgeon was tasked to head up the layout coordination, with the help and guidance of last year's layout coordinator, Paul Janssen. In total, we had nine active/affiliate ILTCO member clubs make the trek to the City of Brotherly Love. These nine clubs included DelvaLUG, GardensLUG, TCLTC, PennLUG, MichLUG/LTC, WamaLUG/LTC, IndyLUG, COLTC,

and SHSL. For many the journey was a long one, but the excitement of such an extraordinary LEGO Train exposition was the driving force for us all.

Wednesday, the first day of set up: A few clubs began to trickle into the Philadelphia Convention Center, most weary after their long drive. We piled out of our vehicles and gasped at the sheer immensity of our allocated 90 foot by 100 foot space. We began marking out individual club areas and tables started coming together. The Convention Center had Union contracts for labor and we were lucky to have two of the nicest, hardest working guys helping us with whatever we needed. By the end of the first day, we had several clubs in the showroom and lots of tables up. We all retired to our hotel rooms, exhausted from this first day.

We arranged a room block at a hotel near the Philadelphia airport, about ten or so miles from the Convention Center. This proved handy for several reasons. First, it was a LOT cheaper to stay on the outskirts of town. Secondly, what better way to commute back and forth to train show, than by train? Matt Bieda helped us all grab a weekly pass on the SEPTA and we happily let our vehicles rest for a week.

Thursday sailed on a lot smoother now that we all had our beauty sleep. Again, with the help of the two Union Contractors, by the end of the second



A city panorama

set up day, most clubs were ready to go. Friday morning we bustled around positioning minifigs and planting flowers. By the time the show opened, we were all practicing the answers

"We piled out of our vehicles and gasped at the sheer immensity of our allocated 90 foot by 100 foot space. We began marking out individual club areas and tables started coming together."

to all of the inevitable questions we would receive, "Yes LEGO makes trains!", "About 1 million bricks", "I'd say around 6 months", "Yes, 100% LEGO", "Nope, not a drop of glue". I'm sure anybody that has displayed at a public event knows the questions to these answers.

This year's layout was split into two sections. This helped the flow of traffic through our nearly 1850 square feet of LEGO cities. The crowd seemed light at first, but soon began to grow into a steadfast wall of onlookers.

Friday ended and we all headed back to the hotel. The only restaurant near was a Ruby Tuesday, and luckily they have a full bar. John Neal brought a case of freshly made ILTCO shirts



A scenic waterfall

commemorating the event. Many of us tried them on right there in the restaurant. We hung out until the wee hours of the morning talking LEGO and having a laugh.

Steve Witt flew into town to hang out at his first LEGO Train event. I think we showed him that trains are just as much fun as "Space". Saturday proved to be another busy day, and many started to get hoarse from talking to so many excited patrons. Steve Barile spread the ILTCO word by appearing on a local TV station with a special gift,

a miniature of the studio designed and built by Paul Janssen. Steve Witt and LEGO provided a festive pizza party on Saturday evening, with organization help from Chris Forbes-Nicotera, Christina Hitchcock, Geoff Gray, and Denise Jadud. Kevin Salm drove down from New York with a car load of goodies for a riotous Dirty Brickster game, MC'ed by Larry Pieniazek. Many of us, again, headed to Ruby Tuesday for a night cap.

The last day had arrived. Many of us were ready to go home, but at the same time, were reluctant to leave such good friends. However, in the end Philly had beaten us, "ILTOC 1 - Philly 43"; a running joke about some of the crazy mix-ups and local Philly hospitality. The show turned out to be a great success. We had a total of 59 AFOLs in attending to the nearly 21,000 visitors that passed through our layout. Next year's show had already gained some momentum, even before the Philadelphia show had ended. Many clubs were eager to do it again, and the 2007 show will be held in Detroit, MI. We already have more clubs interested in displaying than in 2006. This will definitely be one train show not to miss! More info can be found here: www.iltco.org and here www. nationaltrainshow.org.



Even in LEGO cities, skyscrapers dominate



Girls and Their Robots

Teaching can be challenging, but teaching robotics is something different... or is it?

Article and photos by Jim Foulds

During the third week of July 2006, the Girl Scouts of Freedom Valley, Pennsylvania held a day camp to introduce girls to the science and engineering of robotics using the LEGO® MINDSTORMS™ robotics system. I was privileged to be one of 18 adults who volunteered their time to work with the 15 Girl Scouts, ages 9-11, who participated in the week-long program. Very few of the scouts had any prior experience with the Mindstorms system, so it was our job to help introduce it to the rest. This was a challenge as just a few of the volunteers had any real experience with the Mindstorms system themselves.

With the help of FIRST LEGO League, the Girl Scouts were able to acquire three complete mission challenge sets from last year. The challenge from 2006 involved oceanography, so all the missions were themed on some form of ocean exploration. The girls were divided into three teams which they named: Eco-Sounders, Dipsy Divers, and Foogleys. The first day of the camp was spent introducing them to the concepts of building the robots, programming them, and explaining how they will work in completing the mission challenges. We also answered lots of questions such as, "How come this won't stay together?" or "How do I make it do this?". The volunteers worked hard to not just give the answers to them but rather help the girls identify the problems and come up with solutions. At first there was a lot of frustration, but as time went on, it turned to understanding and pride that they figured it out for themselves.

When I returned Tuesday morning, one group took me over to their work area and showed me what they'd done. I was surprised to see that they had taken the basic

concepts and expanded on them to make the robot do a dance.. So with the basic understanding of the robotics system, the girls were ready to focus on how to accomplish the challenges. Tuesday was mostly spent going over different ideas and approaches to the missions. Some rudimentary robots were built to see how they would move about the mat and interact with the missions objects.

Wednesday arrived and with the learning curve behind them, the groups were in full swing developing their robots to complete the missions. Bits of discussions could be heard... "Do you think we should have the motor go for five or six seconds?" or "Should we have the robot turn here, so it can hit this, or should it do that then come back?". Choosing which challenges to attempt caused much debate in the teams, including the possible points earned versus the complexity of the missions. The oceanography theme definitely



struck a chord with the girls. There was a lot of sympathy for the trapped dolphin which was the most popular mission among the teams. Second was 'bumping the shark', which required the robot to move a shark from its position without moving any other fish.

Thursday came and the pressure to fine tune their robots to complete the challenges was rising. The frustration of repetitive testing was wearing on the girls. "Why doesn't it work!?" or "It did it the last three times, why didn't it do it this time!?" could be heard repeatedly. This is where the volunteers really showed their worth as we helped keep the girls focused and eased their frustrations by offering ideas as to what to try or change.

On Friday, the last day of camp, the competition area was set-up and each team was given time to practice and make any final adjustments. In addition to working on their robots throughout the week, the groups were instructed to create a short presentation on any topic related to the ocean. So between their robot sessions, the teams spent time researching and creating their presentations.

In the last hours before the finale, the girls hurried about to finish everything up. All too soon, the parents were arriving in anticipation for the big event. The teams gave their first presentations - and did well - so we moved to the competition part of the gathering. Three judges were selected from the volunteers to keep score. It was decided that each team would have two attempts to complete as many challenges as they could and the scores from each attempt would be combined for a total score. In the end, the Dipsy Divers won, but in truth all the girls won that day.

The camp was a huge success for all those involved. The girls were introduced to the world of robotics and engineering. The volunteers got a chance to help out and some time away from work. The Freedom Valley Girls Scouts were able to generate enough interest to sponsor three teams for the First LEGO League. Of all the things that I learned from this, I share this thought: You can't just call it a robot, you have to give it a name. Hence, the Eco-Sounders had 'Crash', because it never seemed to do exactly what they expected and had a tendency to crash through the objects on the mat. The Dipsy Divers had 'Roomba', because their robot reminded one of the girls of the robotic vacuum that she had in her house. The Foogleys had 'Elgoog', because well, I'm not sure, I never did quite get the riddles that they always asked me.





The Tradition Continues!

Germany's largest LEGO fan convention was in Berlin, and BrickJournal was there!

Article by Holger Matthes Photography by Sascha Broich It seems to have become a tradition: Again, in summer 2006 the 1000steine-Land was held in Berlin. And again this year it was the biggest event organized by LEGO fans for LEGO fans. More than 170 registered members and more than 3500 visitors were counted at the front desk.

This year the date was chosen late in summer. The TSL – the short form for 1000steine-Land – was overwhelmed by "the" big event in Germany in 2006. We, as LEGO fans building MOCs for this event, had to realise that most of us are also big soccer fans when the FIFA Worldcup is held in our country. The official motto was "A time to make friends" … but all LEGO bricks stayed untouched in their bins.

It was hard to get rid of all soccer enthusiasm, but eventually the weeks just before such a big event like TSL become grueling weeks for LEGO fans planning to present a new model. But what German AFOL could get up from his comfortable seat in front of the TV while watching a thrilling quarter-final match to work at his LEGO building area? For example, I did not complete Dresdner Frauenkirche until the last day before the event. Last bricks were added and transport boxes were made just hours before departure.

General Arrangements

Like the previous year the general arrangements for TSL were cleared very early. The venue was the Seeterrassen in Berlin-Tegel. We also kept the same format of one non-public day as AFOL convention and two public days with exposition. We added Thursday for setup and Monday to tear down and clean up the place.

Arrival and Setup

The event and the models shown seem to become bigger and bigger every year. So it was a good idea to have a whole day for setup at the venue. The citizens of Noppingen.de needed a whole day to set up their huge city with houses, train tracks, industrial and harbour buildings and a whole representative palace. A grain silo collapsed while getting it out of the box, delaying setup a bit. But luckily it wasn't too hot and sweaty like last year. The air-conditioning worked and the late summer offered some really comfortable temperatures.

The later the evening, the bigger the trucks which arrived carrying models. A Bavarian team with the *Harry S. Truman* aircraft carrier, mountain with inside train loop and many blinking fire trucks were loaded in a mid-sized 7.5 ton truck. The guys had some trouble to carry all the models to their final destinations.

Visit from Billund

A big surprise for most of the LEGO fans was we were welcomed by LEGO CEO Jørgen Vig Knudstorp! He and the owner of the company, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, were accompanied by upper management staff and the design department from LEGO headquarters in Billund/Denmark. With pride the LEGO fans could observe how the ladies and gentlemen from LEGO felt comfortable while discovering the great enthusiasm among fans and their great models. After his visit, Mr. Knudstrop dedicated a whole page in the employee's magazine "LEGO Life" with a picture gallery and a "Postcard from Berlin".

Official Part

A presentation was given on the "LEGO Hobby Train Set" – a universal building set developed in cooperation with 10 LEGO fans. Paal Smith-Meyer from LEGO went through the slides with Tim Gould and Holger Matthes who represented two of the fans involved. Tim and Holger showed their train prototypes which were built only with the approximately 1000 elements in this set. The "LEGO Hobby Train Set" is a LEGO Direct product and will be available in spring 2007.

The morning was fully packed with presentations and discussion groups. The LEGO employees talked about the development of the new IR-train-system and questions concerning quality issues were discussed among fans and the LEGO Group. Fans gave presen-

tations and talks covering topics like "Photography and LEGO", "Usage of Electronic equipment" and "A Modular Concept for Train-layouts".

The high concentration of simultaneous activities went on during the day. There was a "2x4 brick throwing" competition, the speed building contest which featured the #8285 LEGO Technic Tow Truck, and attendees everywhere setting up their models for the public expo in the following days.

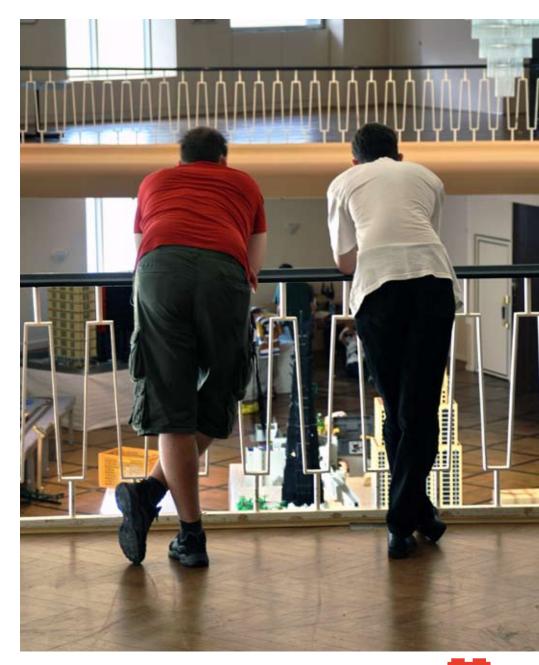
During all this it was very relaxing to lean at the gallery and observe everything from a bird eye's perspective. Such a break included the chance to meet other fans and to have a lively chat with them.

Our special non-public day ended at a nearby seafood restaurant with a buffet for everybody til the food ran out. For most of us AFOLs attending this Friday ended up with some (?) drinks in the Irish Pub near the hotel.

Public Event

After weeks and months of building several MOCs, after a safe journey to Berlin and a well-done setup of everything, the doors were finally opened to the public. From the early beginning a large number of visitors entered the venue and our barriers were tested. Overall the visitors didn't break the rule and they were only looking with the eyes, not with the fingers.

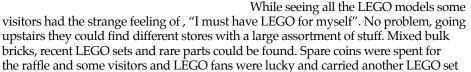
The excited visitors quickly discovered an endless number of fan-created LEGO models. To name just a few impressive MOCs: Batman's Gotham City and scenes from Lord of the Rings. Just a few steps ahead were realistic looking old hanseatic (North German) houses, a huge church with brilliant SNOT (Studs Not On Top) - walls and a minifig procession





out front, a fair, Berlin's Anhalterbahnhof, New York with Empire State Building in the 30's, and the Frauenkirche in Dresden after its rebuild. Next to that was Amsterdam and another leap in time to the beginning of civilian aviation. All was covered by the city of Noppingen, a giant Duplo castle and various trucks and construction machinery in 1:13 scale.

The next room offered something to "touch" and "make". Train racing and the Candy Crane from Holland were just waiting to be tried out and the instant coffee machine was for our Dutch friends who drink coffee all the time. Brickfilms were made onsite and the play tables were busy the whole time. And there were more incredible MOCs to be seen: A huge mountain with an inside train-loop, skiing area and an Asian temple on top, fair rides and a Ferris wheel made of 1 x4 plates. Also, there was an ICE-train-station with European high-speed trains, a modular built train-layout with many lovely details and a complete zoo.



home.

But there was still more: At the upper level of the Seeterassen a gigantic Moonbase was set up. While walking along the endless Moonbase corridors and stations you really could forget to see all the other smaller models like the chain bridge from Budapest built by a Hungarian LEGO fan. Just in front of the final staircase you could see sculptures of minifigures and others. Reaching the final platform the visitors were overwhelmed by other masterpieces in model making with LEGO: Palace Noppingen offered it's wide orchard and gardens for a rest, but the kids' eyes were all stuck to the position lights and spinning propellers of 15-feet-long *Harry S. Truman* Aircraft Carrier.



Event Hours

Friday, 18th August 2006: Open only for 1000steine-members and members of other LEGO User Groups.

Saturday, 19th August 2006: *Public expo from 9 am till 7 pm*

Sunday, 20th August 2006: Public expo form 9 am till 6 pm

Berlin-Tegel, Seeterassen

Entrance fees/Prizes

3 Euro/kids

5 Euro/adults

12 Euro/familiy (max. 2 adults and all own kids)

 $19\,Euro/1000 steine$ members including dinner.

1000steine-Land 2006 was a big success! Hopefully you will join in 2007 as well?

Further information at www.1000steine-land.de and www.1000steine.com





Event: BrickFest® 2006





A Photo Album

BrickFest 2006 was a incredible weekend for AFOLs and public alike, as the Washington DC event packed the house with displays and presentations. Here's some thoughts and photos from the event!

Article by Joe Meno Photography by Calum Tsang and Jeff Elliott





For three sweltering days last summer (August 25-27, 2006) LEGO fans converged to enjoy the largest convention of its type to celebrate their hobby. BrickFest took place in Tyson's Corner, a suburb south of Washington, DC. It was hosted at a hotel and convention center; a change of venue from the college campus that hosted it for the past several years.

Over 400 LEGO builders from across the country and Europe came and displayed models and gave presentations about different aspects of the hobby, from minifigure customization to brickfilming (making stop-motion movies using LEGO elements and minifigures). Other presentations included Mindstorms challenges and building technique seminars. Friday, day one, was devoted to the AFOLs, while Saturday & Sunday were open to the public.

The models themselves were among the best in the United States, from human sculptures to 7 foot skyscrapers. There were minirobots that could fit on a finger, steam-powered spaceships, and cranes 10 feet tall! An amazing 2' tall dragon took up the length of a table and nearby a Mindstorms set was playing tic-tac-toe. There were modern trains, a drawbridge that worked, and a moonbase module shaped as a geodesic dome. A pneumatically controlled, life-size, Star Wars Battle Droid rose



from a 3x3' box to stand at 6' tall and in the corner quadrant, Great Ball Contraptions dropped, loaded, hauled, and catapulted LEGO soccer balls in every direction.

All the creations were in the same display area – a large ballroom - so everyone could see almost all the LEGO themes together. It was great to just stand in the doorway and see LEGO MOCs rising above the crowds everywhere you looked.

The LEGO Group also was present, with 30 executives and employees arriving from Enfield, Connecticut; Slough, United Kingdom; and Billund, Denmark. They also took part in the event, providing the Keynote Speaker - Tormod Askildsen of Community Development and presentations by LEGO Set Designers, Jamie Berard and Tim Ainley. LEGO Set Designers also competed to bring moonbase modules to BrickFest, which were later put up for auction. The CEO of the LEGO Group, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, held a brief question and answer session after the keynote.

Over 3200 people visited the display on the public days, and the reactions were universally those of amazement and wonder. Whether it was a train layout, a spacecraft, a Mindstorms robot or the Great Ball Contraption, something impressed and inspired everyone.









One of the guests at BrickFest was a member of the LEGO contingent. Cecilia Weckstrom filmed the event and was often spotted with digital video camera in hand. Here's her thoughts on BrickFest:







The 2006 Brickfest was the first-ever LEGO fan event I attended. There has been much discussion and rumours in the Company about the amazing creations, energy and enthusiasm present at fan events, but I must say - it truly is one of those that you need to experience for yourself, before you really understand what people mean.

I arrived on Thursday afternoon to the Hotel in Vienna, Virginia, USA, hosting the event and the air was thick with anticipation. Fans were beginning to stream into the building with boxes of all sizes and shapes, things in bubble-wrap - tables inside were being arranged, models receiving last-minute love and care. There was excitement, many people seeing each other after a year-long break and spontaneously giving each other bear hugs and recounting last time of meeting - it felt like a coming together of a long-lost family.

As I watched the models emerge and the exhibition room take shape, I forgot all vestiges of jet-lag and tiredness and couldn't help but get infected by the energy shared by all, running around feverishly trying to film as much of it as possible, for it felt so unique I didn't want my colleagues back at LEGO to miss a single thing.

Saturday morning it was opened up to the public. I emerged bleary-eyed to breakfast to notice even more things had gone up after I eventually scampered off to bed and the room was buzzing with activity. Tons and tons of people were pushing and shoving to get closer to the models and fans stood patiently by explaining to all inquisitive minds about the intricacies of building models. It was an amazing feeling to see everything finished. I couldn't help but marvel at the talent and skill collected in this ballroom, filled to the brim with models, some of them big enough to dwarf the average 5-year old.

Watching it all I was simply humbled. Having spent 5 years at the company as a front-end concept developer and designer, building countless models myself, I could truly appreciate the craftsmanship, ingenuity, experimentation and expression that goes into the models. These models are a testament to - and a celebration of - true talent, creativity, inquisitiveness - all the things that have spawned the many inventions of mankind, the furious pursuit of perfection in design, the refusal to surrender to a seemingly insurmountable problem - yes, they are LEGO models you say, but in reality, they represent a lot more. They represent the true power of creativity.

And that's the best way to explain BrickFest 2006: it was simply an incredible celebration of the brick and its builders.

And what a celebration it was!

















Event: Belgica 2006



A small replica of the sorting centre in Ghent (very realistically detailed)

Going Postal in Belgium

The Belgian LEGO Users Group has a special connection to the Belgian Postal Service. See how they 'built' it in this article!

Article and photographs by Maarten Steurbaut



Preparation with the BeLUG-crew

Part one:

The Belgian Postal Service "De Post" built four new giant sorting centres in Ghent (opened May 2006), Charleroi X (opened August 2006), Antwerp (opened scheduled late 2006) and Liege (opening scheduled early 2007). In Ghent and Charleroi X an official opening ceremony was organized for the entire staff of "De Post" with their relatives. The slogan of the entire event-campaign was "building a future together". To illustrate the term "building" the DUPLO brick became their event-image (in collaboration with the LEGO Group):

- Hosts and hostesses who helped out during the event all wore a T-shirt with the event-slogan on the back, and a bunch of DUPLO bricks on the chest.
- Everybody who attended the event got their picture taken with a Polaroid camera: the largest border of the picture also had these DUPLO bricks imprinted.
- The band "The Incredible Time Machine" had their name painted behind the stage in a LEGO-like font, but according to the bandmembers that was a sheer coincidence ;-).

The event organizers had something big in mind: they wanted real interaction with the public (it was intended to be a family event after all), so they came up with the idea of "building" something big with DUPLO. The Belgian LEGO Users Group, BeLUG, was contacted to help them out. I don't really know who it was, but somebody finally came up with the idea of building a huge mosaic representing the logo of the Postal Service. To ensure public interaction, every visitor would receive a DUPLO brick at the entrance. After a guided tour through the entire building the visitors would get the chance to place that brick on the mosaic: everybody would "build (a future) together".

There are a few mosaic conversion-programs out there, for example Bob Kojima's Bricksaic or LUGNET Mosaic Maker. But there are two good reasons why they couldn't be used:

• The mosaic had to be built with only 2x2 and 2x4 DUPLO bricks. Rescaling the image is always necessary before you can use these programs.

• Nobody wants the mosaic to fall apart while building, therefore it's very important to maintain a brickwall-structure wherever possible. Neither of these programs take this brickwall-structure into consideration (I recently added a new module to my program especially for this brickwall-structure).

Because I have quite some experience with mosaics (from LEGO or from ministeck), and of course because I had my own mosaic conversion-program, the BeLUG-committee asked me if I wanted to lead this project.

While I ran the logo through my conversion-program, some members of the club also joined forces to make a small replica of one of the sorting centres. It was on display during the entire event.

The mosaic had to be 3 metres high and 4 metres wide. That would require approximately 11,000 DUPLO bricks. 20,000 bricks were ordered to make sure there were plenty of bricks on hand. The mosaic had to be pre-built partially to give even the first visitors an idea of what the mosaic represented. And there was more: the organizers wanted a finished mosaic every day, so we had to take it (half) apart again every evening, to start all over the next day. At each location the event would last two days: a Friday-afternoon and an entire Saturday (Ghent: September, 29-30 / Charleroi X: October 13-14). To move from one location to another we had to take it apart completely...

Two weeks before the event, I got together with fellow BeLUG-members to prebuild approximately two-thirds of the mosaic. We decided to play safe and prebuild two-thirds instead of half the mosaic, because I read about what happened with Eric Harshbarger. I wouldn't make the same mistake of miscalculating the time required to finish the mosaic (apparently I had been too cautious: it never was a problem to build half the mosaic in one day...).

Because the backing for the mosaic was 3 metres high it turned out to be impossible to transport it in one piece to the different locations. So we had to build the mosaic up in modules. Building instructions were made for a brickwall-structured mosaic, which hampered dividing it in modules: pyramids and inverse pyramids seemed to me the best solution. We assembled all these parts to make sure that no mistakes were made. We even placed the inverse pyramids one stud forward to be able to take them apart easily for transport (after all, this was just a final rehearsal).

On the first day of the event, we quickly realized that there were a few flaws in the organization:

- We only had one small step-ladder to build up the wall. If everybody had to climb up that ladder with one brick, it would have taken us several days to finish that wall.
- At the entrance the bricks were not distributed in the same order as they were required for the mosaic. Many visitors simply ended up throwing their brick in a big box instead of the intended interactivity.
- And last but not least: as you all know LEGO is a popular toy. Most of the visitors just kept their brick instead of helping us finishing the wall.

We had to come up with a solution quickly, before it all turned into disaster:

- We literally had to beg the people who distributed the bricks at the entrance to give us quickly all the material we would need to finish the wall (they had plenty to distribute).
- I kept building in modules so I only had to climb the step-ladder occasionally.
- We let the visitors build their own wall with the (leftover) bricks that were distributed at the entrance.

The total number of visitors in Ghent was approximately 4500, Charleroi X had almost 4000 visitors (and I think at least half of them



The finished logo; it's huge... and it has "only" 11.000 pieces



Part of the BeLUG-layout



The finished mosaic. If you take a closer look to the upper white part: I was a bit embarrassed I had to use really old bricks. We didn't have enough white bricks



The DUPLO wall was built a fifth time. I was too busy with the logo of Belgica 2006, I got help from BeLUG-colleagues Jean-Marc and Ludo

took their brick home). According to the event-organization it was a success, because it will be repeated early 2007 for the other two sorting centres.

More pictures can be found on my webpage - http://www.maartensteurbaut.net/De_Post.htm

Part two

Apparently, they were quite pleased with the result of the DUPLO mosaic. On very short notice, BeLUG was again contacted to participate in another event: Belgica 2006, a World Philatelic Exhibition (with the Belgian Post as co-host of this exhibition). This international exhibition took place from November 16th to 20th, 2006 at the International Convention and Exhibition Centre, "The Heysel," in Brussels.

They needed someone to build a mosaic again, by now they knew who to turn to: me...

No surprises about the representation of the mosaic; the logo of the event. However this time there was another restriction: because everything was decided on very short notice, it was impossible to order bricks from TLG. The current brick-supply of LEGO Benelux was checked: for the most part 2x4 bricks. If I wanted the mosaic to look good, I had to come up with something new. I decided to use the smallest side of the 2x4 bricks to obtain the best resolution, resulting in a four studs wide mosaic. By maintaining the brickwall-structure, the sides of the mosaic would be "unfinished". It turned out to be a good idea: it looks a bit like a real stamp, and thus fitting well in this exhibition...

It soon became very clear to me that building with DUPLO bricks is much easier than building with standard LEGO bricks. The DUPLO bricks simply click onto each other, while force is needed to click LEGO bricks together. I had five days to make a mosaic of approximately 27,000 pieces: an average of 6,000 bricks to be clicked together every day to have it finished by noon the final day. That is approximately the same amount of bricks that went through my hands in one day to finish the DUPLO wall. Building the DUPLO wall was easy, this was hard labour.

On the weekdays there were lots of schoolchildren on a day trip. They were all very much attracted to our layout (18 metres long). Even the people from the organizing committee told me that BeLUG had the most beautiful display of the entire exhibition (if that's not a compliment...).

Especially the first day I had to explain over and over again what I was doing. After all I was starting from scratch, no semi-finished model this time to give the visitors an idea of what was going to be represented. The following days it became easier for the kids to guess.

The total amount of people who attended this exhibition was roughly estimated at 50,000. That is much more than the LEGO Festival that was organized a few years back on the same location...

Epilogue:

It may be a cliché, but I'd really like to build a mosaic on commission one day. I truly envy people like Eric Harshbarger, Sean Kenney,... They get paid for their creations. I attended to these events as a member of BeLUG. It's all done on a voluntary basis. Volunteers have to take a day off from work, and all they get is a small traveling allowance (hardly enough to buy a new LEGO-set).

We all do it because we like LEGO and we want to show the people what can be done with a little bit of imagination and lots of creativity.

Bricks In Italy: LEGOFest 2006

BrickJournal visits a LEGO event in Turin - and finds a lot of fun!

Text by: Davide Cavagnino, Alex Cordero, and Luca Giannitti

Pictures by: Didier Enjary and Luca Giannitti

The Winter Olympic Games host city, Turin, hosted on 23rd and 24th of September 2006 an ItLUG LEGOfest for the second time. It was organized by the same people of the 2005 LEGOfest (brothers Luca & Andrea Giannitti, Diego Rosati and Gianluca Morelli) and it took place in the same hall of the previous year.

Appromately one year later, the LEGOfest came back to Turin, after the successful event in Ballabio (July 1-2, 2006). The show was open not just to the ItLUG members, but, as the previous year, to the French AFOLs of FreeLug and to the AFOLs from other nearby countries (Switzerland, Germany...). The LEGOfest in Turin is the largest international event of ItLUG.

More than 20 AFOLs came from Italy, mostly from the northern part of the country, but there were also people from southern Italy that traveled for over 1000 Km in order to reach Turin! From abroad came people from France, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark: from France there was the presence of LEGO Ambassador and FreeLug member Didier Enjary, the FreeLug members Loys Bailly and Ronan Poirer; from Switzerland Beat Felber, Beat Schuler and Alessandro Corti; from Germany came the 1000steine member Wolfgang Mok (aka "Womo" on the 1000steine forum) and, last but not least, Jan Beyer from Denmark, project manager of LEGO Community Development!

Thanks to the positive experience with the LEGO fest in Ballabio, the LEGO Group was again involved in the event.

The first day of the exposition was the setting-up day for the AFOLs, while the second day the show was open to the general public. About 400 visitors attended the event: it can seem a small number of visitors, but the total available area of the LEGOfest was quite small and from opening up to closing time, it was filled with visitors and sometimes people had to wait outside the hall.

Entering the corridor that led to the exposition room, a visitor could immediately get the AFOL comics booklet and the LEGO catalog, but, moreover, he could see a man sized Knights' Kingdom figure made out of LEGO bricks (it was the blue Sir Jayko). This figure was brought by people from the LEGO Group, coming from Milan; the LEGO Group gave an important contribution to the show bringing many flags, some big minifigures and also a Harry Potter (about 60 cm tall) fighting a big Basilisk, all made of bricks.

The exposition hall contained many tables, each one having mainly MOCs displayed and some other standard LEGO sets. The purpose was to show mainly personal creations and not just official LEGO sets, because the potential of the LEGO boxes doesn't end with the model shown outside the cover box, even if they are very nice.

Event:LEGOFEST XXIII



The real bus used on Saturday evening for the AFOL transportation



The LEGO model of the bus



LEGO fest exhibitors see the station Sassi-Superga made out of LEGO showed into the real station



A French Loco made by Loys Bailly



One of the impressive vehicles displayed into the Technic building site



The belltower of the LEGO Ambassador Marco Chiappa



A shooting of the ItLUG town diorama

To the left of the entrance, a large table had many LEGO TECHNIC® MOCs (some models were made by the guys from Switzerland), ranging from trucks to excavators, silos, and a two meter tall crane. There were models motorized and controlled through wired-pneumatic control made of LEGO pieces and RC radio units. Many other TECHNIC® models were shown on another side of the hall: they were mainly motorbikes and Formula 1 cars.

In front of the entrance, a very detailed model of the belltower of the church San Nicolò in Lecco (Italy) caught the attention of the visitors: this model was 1 meter and 92 centimeters high.

Near the TECHNIC® table, there was a city model from the FreeLUG guys: its main subjects were a big fire department with a helicopter and trucks, and a two ring railway with trains, motorized switches and custom made train semaphores (these recalled the good old electric sets of the 12V line, and could give a suggestion to the LEGO group to build the same sets for the 9V line!).

On the Star WarsTM theme, one layout showed the battle on the EndorTM moon and other exhibitors showed many official sets, among which was the impressive new Death Star II.

There was also a display of many space models, from the Eighties LEGO product line. Remaining on the side of the official sets, the airplane 7893 from the new LEGO Airport Series and the Metroliner 4558 were also shown.

In other areas the complete Pirates sets collection from 1989 was presented, as well as a fast food and a circuit for Tiny Turbos cars, an Atlantikwall World War II bunker and a Grand Prix Formula 1 pit stop. Near the Atlantikwall bunker, many other military vehicles were displayed: a copy of the German Tank Tiger VI Sd. Kfz. 181 made by Andrea Giannitti and a lot of present US Army tanks (like the Abram) and other military related vehicles. One display area was devoted to a MOC representing the HogwartsTM castle: the over 150 cm long creation was made by Giuliano Beduglio and his whole family. Other MOCs represented some of the Harry PotterTM characters in a maxifig scale (about 30 cm tall).

The show continued with some MOC buildings in Belville® style, with houses, horses, and many figures.

And again, more transportation vehicles were presented with MOCs of trains (six- and eight wide) and Turin GTT buses and tramways. These were located in some new town models built according to the new Italian standard (by ItLUG members) for city modules.

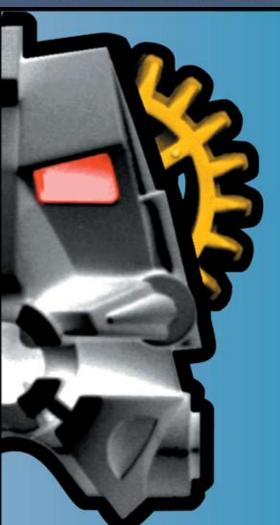
The impressive Sassi-Superga layout, already shown during the 2005 edition of the LEGOfest Torino, wasn't in the hall because it is being displayed in the real station of the Sassi-Superga, between the museum of the public transportation company of Turin and the restaurant located into the station. That restaurant was chosen for the collective dinner on Saturday evening but it was far from the LEGOfest hall, so a bus (like the one reproduced with the LEGO bricks) was rented for the event. This bus is one of the only two buses in Turin with a red/white livery and it is used only along the Sassi-Superga line.

Last but not least, the presence of the LEGO Ambassadors Didier Enjary (FreeLUG) and Marco Chiappa (ItLug) opened many starting point sfor discussions on future developments of our hobby. But more importantly, the friendly and "always available" chief of the LEGO Ambassador program, Jan Beyer, from LEGO Group, once more let us know that LEGO is a great company made of great people!





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White Bricks - Not Snow - Blanket Norway's Capital

Imagine three metric tons of white LEGO bricks dumped in front of a museum. Then imagine the person responsible for dumping them telling everyone and anyone to come down and play and build whatever they feel like, whenever they feel like. Sounds like a fantasy? For two weeks in September of 2006, that fantasy was very much a reality in the city of Oslo, Norway.

Eager children and adults alike were ready when a truck, filled to the brim with bricks, dumped its load on a huge wooden deck built outside the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design. A huge table, shaped like a horseshoe, was located nearby. It didn't take long before the table was turned into a display island for numerous creations of all sizes and shapes.

It was a bizarre - but beautiful - sight to see the open area, once a parking lot that for years stood out like an open sore in downtown Oslo, turned into a playground for children of all ages. The project (named "the Collectivity Project") was initiated by the Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson as a forerunner to the exhibition "Art in Turbulent Times" currently on display at the National Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition includes a few of the creations built during the two weeks the project ran and also includes video of LEGO architects and builders in action.

Over the course of the two week event nearly two thousand people dropped by often sitting for hours on the ground in all kinds of weather, day and night, while constructing models to their hearts' desire. As the days progressed these casual builders created skyscrapers, towers, cars, abstract figures, animals, robots, churches, houses, mathematical models, castles and constructions you'd never believe if you didn't see them. The monochromatic works evolved and grew; eventually covering the display table. It was a joy not only to see people rediscover their love for LEGO bricks, but also to see how creative they could be. You'd never dream that there are so many talented builders out there. And a lot of them made really advanced constructions with very basic bricks. On the last day people had to literally scrape the asphalt with their hands to find more bricks to play with. Almost every single brick was used.

Article by Hogne B. Petterson Photography by Asle Naess



The Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* talked to 22-year -old Patrick Grung while he was engrossed in the construction of a tower. He said he felt like he was ten years old again. He had also called home to say that he would be a little late. Grethe Moe, a teacher at Lilleborg School in Oslo told the paper that she was taking children that were refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan with her to build. "They've never been able to play with LEGO. We'll build something nice."

Kari Greve, a conservator at the museum, says they lost count of exactly how many models that were created.

"There were a lot!" she exclaimed via email.

"We only included four pieces in the exhibition. The artist didn't want to preserve any of the models, because it was the creative process itself that was important to him, not the result. But some of the models were so beautiful that we didn't have the heart to take them apart, so we shipped them to the Museum of Modern Art, although we do not consider them as works of art! They might have been taken apart and used for totally new creations – I haven't been there for a while to check. You see, the models that aren't on display are available for anyone to tear apart and build new things with. It's part of the vision of the artist that they shouldn't be static. When the exhibition ends on the 25th of February, we will send all the bricks back to the artist. He will then use them again in somewhere else in the world and give people the opportunity to create new and original works. A few years back he did a similar stunt in Trirana, Albania."

It's clear the artist's goal was to make the viewer actively take part in the artwork itself. And one can conclude that this goal was more than achieved. Making thousands of people gather around and collectively create something that was free, enjoyable and beautiful is truly a political, artistic and playful triumph.

You can find Hogne's website at http://www.elfworld.org









Back to Skærbæk!

From September 29 - October 1, there was a big time had in a little town in Denmark!

Article by Melody Krützfeldt and Christian Krützfeldt









The 'LEGO Fan Weekend' is a great multi-day event that is held at the recreational centre - Skærbæk Fritidscentre (see link 1 at the end of the article). Skærbæk is a little town located in South West Denmark – roughly 45 minutes from Germany, little over 1 hour away from Billund and around 30 minutes from Esbjerg Airport with daily flights to and from the UK.

This year's event stretched over two and a half days – with the set-up on Friday and public shows on Saturday and Sunday. Approximately 70 AFOLs including children attended from all over Europe including: Norway, France, Germany, Holland, and of course Denmark, (oh and Australia, if you include me;)). Many AFOLs displayed their MOCs in one of the two sports halls while in the other hall, children's activities were held, such as jumping castles, large tables where building competitions took place, a Dirt Crusher pit and a large projection screen.

The event, organised by Jan Beyer (LEGO Community Development Manager) and Danish club, Byggepladen, was very well planned. On Friday, the exhibitors were supplied with a plan to show where to arrange the tables and markings were mapped out for each set-up. Useful items such as tape, cloth, barriers, etc. were also provided.

There was a nice range of themes represented; some of the MOCs on display were moon base modules, Scala houses, a large DUPLO castle, town and train layouts, architectural buildings, mosaics, a micro-scale city, trucks, several ships including a large Viking ship, a Maersk-freighter and port and even a massive aircraft carrier. A speed building event also took place on one of the days.

However, no event is completely fun without being able to buy some LEGO. A small, official LEGO store selling sets, gear and bricks (poly bags and pickabrick tubs), and a couple of private stores selling more specialised LEGO parts were also there.

On Friday, after setting up and eating dinner, one of the cabins held a party: a tradition for the event. It started reasonably early and finished around 2am. Surprisingly, the cabins don't pick up a lot of outside sound, so it is possible to sleep while next door has a party or two.

On Saturday and Sunday the event was open to the public for a small fee. Throughout the days the public came to view all the MOCs and let their childrens' imagination go wild. It was not overly crowded, but there were plenty of visitors in the hall and therefore it didn't look empty. Some visitors from Saturday returned again on Sunday to enjoy another look. Since Saturday was the last night for most people staying in the area, a party was held in another cabin until the wee hours of the morning.

Eating breakfast, lunch or dinner (incl. dessert) is also possible at the centre with the use of prepaid vouchers (in this case for the event). The meals are served as buffet style in one of the conference rooms. As many liked to party in the nights before, getting up early for breakfast can be quite difficult for some. The food isn't the cheapest food available, but somewhat reasonable with the inclusion of more than a few drinks (soft drinks, slush ice, coffee and tea). However, bringing your own drinks and snacks into the halls is not allowed since the centre sells their own.

The event itself was not massive, but was a load of fun and with all the activities the centre has to offer and people to meet and greet, there is definitely plenty to do. Make sure you don't forget your gym gear or swimmers if you want to plan some extra activities during your stay. Several days stay is definitely recommended for any visitor.

Although Skaerbaek is only a small town, the recreational centre is also an excellent holiday choice for other activities within the centre and close by. The centre alone boasts several large halls, one where AFOLs display their MOCS and another where children's activities are held. The centre also has its own Gymnasium, conference rooms, free internet, café/restaurant, 10-pin bowling alley, pool tables, an indoor swimming area with a water slide, arcade games, indoor ball park for children, sports fields, and outside a children's playground with a blow-up 'mound' (for the children to jump around on), and many other fun activities. Also close by is the island of Rømø (see link 2 below) where an awesome collection of sand fields lay by the beach.

One of the other great things about the location of this event is the centre also has a decent amount of small holiday cottages/cabins close-by (several metres away) that sleep up to 6 people. The cabins are fairly clean and tidy and the facilities are decent (see link 1 for pictures and prices). You can hire your own bed linen and towels or bring your own.

More pictures from the event can be found on Brickshelf.com under the search term "Skaerbaek". The next Fan Weekend for 2007 is already planned for the last weekend in September. **We hope to see you there!**

Link 1 - http://www.kursus-fritidscenter.dk/

Link 2 - http://www.romocamping.dk/gb/romo.htm















LEGO World 2006: an Impression

Zwolle, the Netherlands is the setting for the largest LEGO convention in the world. Here's a report from a participant!

Article by Sybrand Bonsma Photography by Dirk Plug In October 2006 the sixth LEGO World was held. This event, with over 50,000 visitors in six days took place in De IJsselhallen in Zwolle, The Netherlands. As in previous years the event was organized by LEGO and Libema exhibitions (that also owns the IJsselhallen) with support from Jetix (a Dutch television channel for children) and De Bouwsteen, the Dutch LEGO community.

LEGO World 2006 started for myself the year before, which is the same for many of the other participants of 2005. During the fifth edition of the event, I got many ideas from the creations of other AFOLs; I discussed with others how to build certain parts of my display and got a lot of useful comments from both AFOLs and visitors.

During and after the event I'd spent some time thinking how to put all ideas in a new creation. I'd ordered the bricks that were needed and then started building again, and made small but steady progress throughout the year.

Finally Wednesday, October 18 arrived. This day was used to put all our exhibitions together before the start of the event on Thursday. In the morning I had to put all my LEGO in my car and drive to Zwolle. When I arrived at about 11:00 am, already many people were there and setup had started. First all tables were put at the right places. As the floor plan had some last minute changes, it took some time before the tables for my exhibition were placed.

In the afternoon most people started to set up their displays with LEGO, but I want to specifically thank those volunteers that set up the decorating and the fences. Small fences are used to keep small hands from touching our LEGO without asking, but everybody, including the children, can still easily look over the fences and see our displays. Other decoration material was put in the halls, like LEGO banners. This year our hall was also decorated with city items: traffic signs and street name boards. All these street names had to do with LEGO (for example LEGO CTTY plaza, Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen Promenade and De Bouwsteen-straat).

I also started unpacking my Fabuland collection and a custom creation in the same style. This spring a number of members of De Bouwsteen made MOCs to be displayed in the LEGO museum in Billund. These models were brought back to the Netherlands just before LEGO World, so I put the model I displayed in Billund at my display. This was just a small portion of the LEGO shown at the event. By the end of the day the hall had undergone a severe transformation. Where it started as a large, empty space in the morning, in the evening it was full of LEGO.

Not only were there many people showing LEGO, many members also helped out as volunteers at the building contests or to show how some new LEGO products work or which hidden features they have. The event would not have been possible without the help of these volunteers and while I like to be part of the audience around the current LEGO sets, I signed up as volunteer again. However, my display was next to a display of another volunteer and as we both liked to have somebody keeping an eye on our collections, we decided that I would stay at our displays while she volunteered.

It was the first time in the six years of the event that I was actually at my own display. So this time I had the opportunity to answer questions of the audience and promote Fabuland. There were different kinds of visitors. Of course there are the AFOLs. They do know a lot of LEGO in general, (and often almost everything on a specific theme) and often had very specific questions, such as in which sets specific parts appeared. Then there are the regular adults. Many of the adults I spoke did know the theme from their own childhood (they often owned Fabuland themselves) and their children were now playing with the old LEGO sets of mum and dad. This meant a lot of recognition. The parents were looking for the sets they once had,









but also many of the children were trying to find out which were the sets they had the parts to. They often asked me if the sets can still be bought, but unfortunately this is no longer possible. The third group was mainly the younger children. They were usually very interested in the things that were moving, so for them the main attractions on my display were the windmill and the train. Of course they tried to identify which animals were riding in the train and it is amazing how much details these younger kids noticed in the displays.

This year there was again so much LEGO to see and, in my opinion, of much higher quality than in previous years.

I will try to give an impression of all that was shown by AFOLs, although I'm afraid I will forget many people. There were a number of collections shown, including Scala, Bionicle, Belville and the blue rail train era. Often these collections were combined with MOCs in the same style, including some very interesting ones, such as a car and a house built with all bricks upside down. Also there was a complete Technic collection, an overview of vintage LEGO starting with the first plastic models, some rare items such as LEGO fries, and also an overview of more recent LEGO sets.

There were some demonstrations such as Mindstorms, LDraw and Menno demonstrated his walking animals.

Space was well represented. There was a large Moonbase layout, a nice StarWars layout, a display with MOCs from various space themes such as Blacktron and M:Tron and a huge spaceship.

Other items were the SpongeBob display (unfortunately the SpongeBob sets are not released in Europe, so that they have to be ordered in the USA), a series of full-scale working LEGO clocks and number of great fantasy models using colors and parts that others often find useless.

There was a digital train track and a series of well-made Dutch trains. A much larger version of the Maersk boat was present and of course Leo's big castle. This castle, that is getting bigger each year, is on a scale of 1:25 and measures 2 by 3 meters. This year a well-decorated chapel extended the castle.

Our two youngest exhibitors had a large Duplo layout that changed almost everyday (sometimes helped by their parents).

Another great display was Aventuria, a theme park attraction where Technic figs were moved in carts using monorail through many different worlds. It contained a lot of cool figures, for example a Clikits frame with lights, built into a floor plate at a rocket lance platform.

There were large Technic cranes and more large-scale buildings including a traditional farm and an Austrian Town.

Of course there was also very much to see at minifig scale, such as a real Lunapark, the Watergate of Sneek, a large display of a fire brigade with a real fire engine as the background, and huge display from Dutch and Belgian AFOLs.

This displays contained a zoo, a working canal lock, an airport, a large mountain, many trains, some bridges, a town center, the Dutch tulip fields and much more.

In addition to our Belgian friends from BeLUG, there were also displays from FreeLUG (France) including 70s space sets and a nice globe, and ItLUG (Italy), which showed a motorized, Technic construction area and some nice maxi figures of Harry Potter, Batman, Spiderman and the Smurfs.

In addition to all the LEGO shown by AFOLs also LEGO itself brought a lot to see. Of course they showed much of the current product lines; there was a huge Exoforce area, a room for Bionicles, Duplo, Clikits, Belville and StarWars were present.



They transformed one hall into a LEGO jungle, with trees, bushes and a lot of full-scale LEGO animals. They made many models of famous (Belgian) persons, using interesting choices of materials, e.g. the use of snakes as hairs, and some models of well-known buildings like the London Tower Bridge and the City Hall of Bruxelles. From Billund came a display (approx. 2×4 meters) in LEGOLand style, meaning the figures were about 10 cm high and built from a large number of bricks.

It was also possible to buy LEGO and this opportunity was well used by many people. The toy store had many of the current LEGO sets in large quantities (although not always in large enough quantities; Mindstorms had been sold out a couple of times), whereas older sets, second hand sets and loose parts could be bought at a number of other places at the event. Not only AFOLS used the latter opportunities, also other visitors that wanted to make their own sets complete once again, buy the set they were looking for already a long time or because they became inspired by all the creations that were shown.

LEGO Shop at Home was present and well visited by looking at the fast decreasing amount of catalogues. Some LEGO designers gave talks to visitors about their work. A Dutch designer was present so children could ask questions in their native language, but most of the designers got asked questions in English.

There were also many things to do. Children could build at a number of places with Duplo, Belville or Technic, or participate in the large building contest. They could also play LEGO computer games or race with RC cars.

Then there were the shows of Jetix. These shows were two times a day and each time a number of the Dutch artists, well known by the children, less known by many AFOLs, were present for a music show, which thrilled many of the children attending.

As an eye catcher a 5-meter high Eiffel tower was being built throughout the show. Also a record attempt took place, where 5 of our members built the black tow truck in a new record time of 1 hour 15 minutes and 9 seconds..

On Saturday evening we had the traditional Chinese buffet. About 140 persons stayed to have a joint dinner at the cafeteria of the IJsselhallen.

After dinner we had two presentations from LEGO employees. The first was about quality control. One fascinating topic was the molding process. To obtain the best filling of the molds so no cracks occur and so the brick is cooled down as uniformly as possible, simulations are done with various mold layouts.

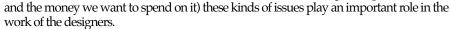




Also the brick color process was explained. They used the red Ferrari with different red colors in the engine as an example. There are different materials used for different kinds of bricks, depending on their uses and properties, like their flexibility. Although the same pigments are used for coloring these different materials, their combinations yield slightly different wavelengths. The eye is very sensitive for small wavelength variations in the red region (much more than to other colors such as green or blue). This becomes more evident for red models than for green or blue models.

The second presentation was about the design process. As an example a small new vehicle was used. They started with an idea, gathered a lot of information about this type of vehicle and started thinking about a model. In this case wheels of two different sizes were necessary and since there are only a limited number of wheel sizes available, it would not be possible to build the model on the scale desired. Therefore they modified the vehicle and managed to get a nice model of the right size. However, testing it with different age groups revealed that the model was too complicated for the targeted age. So they simplified it a little. In addition, some parts had to change colors because of the availability.

It was very interesting to see what kinds of restrictions the designers of LEGO have to deal with. Where we as AFOLs can build what we like (depending on our interests



Monday was the highlight of the event, at least for the AFOLs, many important people from LEGO arrived. In addition to members of the management team, Jorgen Vig Knudstorp and Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen visited the event. They were picked up from the airport by members of the board of De Bouwsteen and brought to the event.

They talked to visitors, but especially to the volunteers and exhibitors. They also posed for many photos with people and situations. Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen put the top of the Eiffel tower in position which finished the building of this large structure.

Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen was very interested in the comments of the AFOLs regarding LEGO, including on much of the older sets. He took a lot of time to talk to everybody, but of course for us it is always too short.

After this marvelous Monday we still had one day to go, before it was time to pack all our LEGO together and return home. The last day was sold out and over the six days of the event, more than 50,000 people had visited. It was seven (including set up) long days, but it was once again very nice. Much LEGO to see, many impressions and new ideas to build in 2007 and fun to talk to so many people about our great hobby: LEGO.





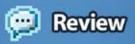














Event: LEGO Family Days

Meeting the LEGO Family



On October 28 and 29, 2006, a special event took place at Billund, home of the LEGO Group. BrickJournal's European Bureau Editor visited and as you will find, had a great time!

Article by Melody Krützfeldt, with Inger Buhl and Askel Krabbe Nielsen Photography by Melody Krützfeldt and the BrickJournal Image Bank. Maps by Christian Krützfeldt

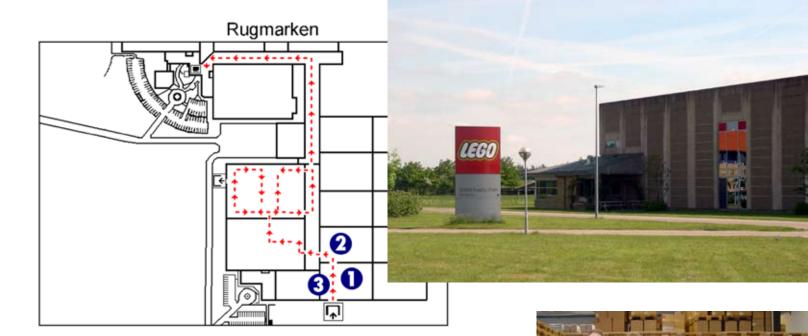


Every four years LEGO Billund opens their factories and centers for the LEGO employees and their families. The event takes place at the LEGO factories and offices in Billund, Denmark. The event is not open to the general public but is restricted to those to work within the LEGO facilities in Billund. This year was the first year to hold the event inside the Rugmarken Centre. In the past the event was held in the Auditorium. During the two days videos are shown and participants get a tour of the factory. This year it was extended to the Rugmarken Centre where, for the first time, LEGO fans held a display to show the employees how fans use the products they help produce.

Let's look at what goes on at the event, and then we'll have a quick chat with Aksel (a LEGO employee) who was also present at the event...

What is the idea of the event?

It's to allow the LEGO workers and their families to take an inside tour of the factories and surrounding buildings. This lets the employees show their families where they work and what they do. While certain areas are closed off for obvious reasons, the workers were still able to see where their co-workers spend their days and show their children how things function in the centers and in the factories. It takes between two and three hours to cover all the tours where they could see behind the scenes, how the bricks are molded, gathered and packed and to gain a good experience and understanding of the product.



So, what goes on at the event?

Rugmarken:

1&3. The families entered the Rugmarken Centre where they collected coloured vouchers for food and drinks and another ticket to choose a LEGO gift from the gift table. They proceeded over to the large projection screen where both old and recent television ads were shown and a small presentation was held (a presentation was held every 30 minutes). There were seats for the guests and the screen was surrounded by some fabulous LEGO sculptures and figures on either side.

2. In another room, adjacent to this area, LEGO AFOLs displayed their buildings,

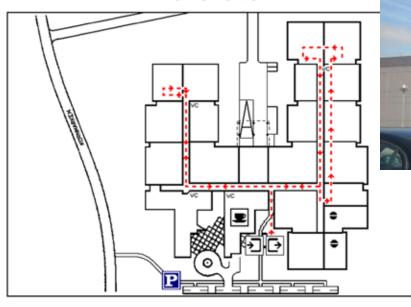
vehicles and layouts. The idea was to let the LEGO workers and their families see how their products are used everyday and what can be done with the elements produced. While there are many opportunities to see what fans build online, this display gave them a rare chance to see these models in person. The guests were also able to participate in building the wonderful, giant mosaic of Hans Christian Anderson. Five of the new LEGO NXT robotic systems were also on display; each programmed and built differently to show just a few of the various activities the NXT is capable of.

The groups then toured the factory starting through the Rugmarken Centre, they were able to explore and venture through, seeing how the packing facility is in production. This

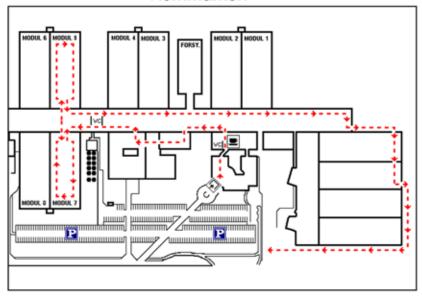
area is the Packing Department for products distributed all over the world as well as repackaging products and placing them into what we call 'poly' bags and then putting all together into boxes.

continued >>

Havremarken



Kornmarken



Idé-Huset



Havremarken:

This group of buildings contains offices for Administration, Building and Creating, Marketing, the Sales Department and even a few Model Builders.

Kornmarken:

Here, in these buildings, the moulding takes place. 800 machines working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week! There are 500 employees working in 52,000 sq m and the machines work to fill more than 424,000 storage boxes! WOW! What an impressive area! This place is where all your dreams come true and more. If you ever have the chance to go on a factory tour, this place is like 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory', just in bricks! Yum! - Maybe you will even be lucky and have Aksel as your tour guide!

Ide-Huset (Idea House):

Another fantastic building where loads of Historic items are kept, like a museum for LEGO. The Vault is also in this area. The workers and their families were able to look around and see all things LEGO, from today and back to the past.

Who attended the event?

Over 4,000 LEGO Billund employees and their families attended, as well as Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen, Jørgen Vig Knudstorp (CEO), Lisbeth Valther Pallesen (Executive Vice President

Community, Education & Direct Division), Jan Beyer (Community Development Manager)...

A Few Words with Aksel Krabbe Nielsen,

one of the tour guides of the event...

The employees seemed to have enjoyed themselves at the 'Family Days' event, have you had any feedback in regards to the day?

We have only had good feedback.

Was the event as successful as TLG expected it to be?

Yes.

How many people showed up in the end?

4300.

Have you attended many of these events yourself in the past?

I think this was the 5th time we did this event.

What would you suggest was the most fascinating area for those who attended the tours?

The LEGO fans site and moulding plant, Kornmarken.

The next event will take place in 2010; do you think many things will have changed regarding the event by then?

Many things will be changed till then, but still we don't know how it will look.

From what I have seen, a lot of employees have been working for TLG for a very long time, how long have you been working for TLG yourself?

284 months - nearly 24 years.

What is your role within the company today? I hear that in the past you had a rather interesting job working for LEGO, what exactly was it?

I started in LEGOLAND back in 1983 as a cowboy, I have worked in Marketing dept. in LEGOLAND, been Education Manager in LEGOLAND, Visitor Manager in Communication Dept and now in Stakeholder Relations.

Which direction would you like to see TLG go in the future?

The direction we are going now is fine!

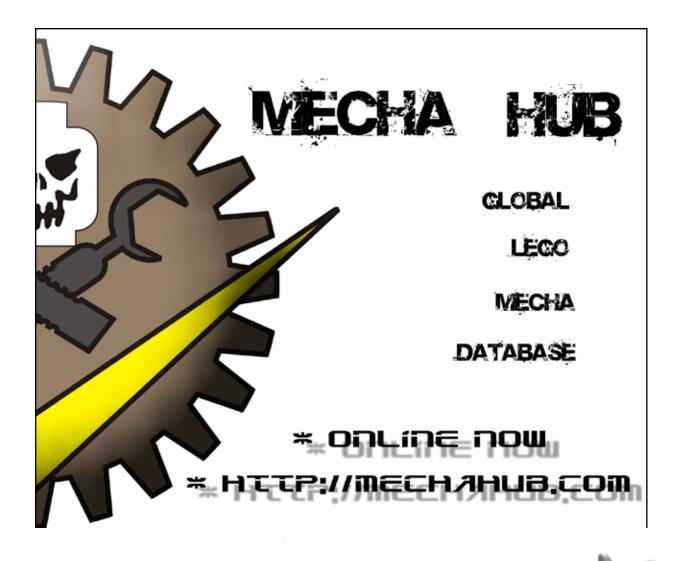
Where do you see yourself in the next 4 years?

In Stakeholder Relations

Many thanks, Aksel, for the quick chat; I hope to see you again in the future for another awesome factory tour or Family Days!











LEGO Events Near and Far

Before I began working on BrickJournal, I was an AFOL who got involved in – and enjoyed helping with – a lot of events and projects. Between North Carolina and Washington, DC (the two areas I concentrate my travel), I have been able to participate in displays that have taken place in malls, museums, libraries and even a planetarium! In all of those, I have been a displayer and sometimes a coordinator. Last year, things were different.



Event: LEGO Building Blitz

Photography by Joe Lewis and Joe Meno

Ben Lewis in Potomac, Maryland (a suburb of Washington, DC) wanted to help with Habitat for Humanity, but was too young to be a volunteer. So he created an activity for younger volunteers that involved building for the needy...but with LEGO bricks! With some support from his community, the LEGO Building Blitz was born. It was hosted by a local mall (Montogomery Mall in Maryland) October 22, 2006 and a small display was done by local adult builders. A local clown company also gave a festive air to the event.

The Building Blitz was a building challenge where teams created a house with a set of parts randomly selected from donated bricks and elements. There was a time limit, and afterwards, the best model house was picked from a panel of judges.

At the event beginning there were 24 teams poised to build, and when the "go" signal went, there was a frenzy of motion to open the bags of parts. Then there

was a funny pause – most of the parts offered were not typical and quite a challenge to use! From there, the competition picked up steam, punctuated by various comments of disbelief from the builders. The finished houses were all different and clever builds and there were a lot of smiles and laughter that could be seen and heard.

While the Blitz was going on, onlookers were able to find out more about Habitat for Humanity and give donations. LEGO bricks were also given for the Builders of Tomorrow campaign for New Orleans schools. Over 50,000 bricks were donated from the event. There also was a display of a neighborhood that was done by some adult builders. Since it was before Halloween, it included a haunted house and graveyard in the layout, and a couple of ghosts and skeletons visiting.

What was wonderful about the whole thing was it wasn't really a LEGO event – it was a fundraiser that happened to have LEGO elements included. The organizer was a teenager, and what he







created was an event that made a great local impact and also launched the local Youth Volunteer Program for Habitat for Humanity. It's just a glance at what the future holds for the adult LEGO community, and it came from the next generation of builders.













Orlando was the setting for the Festival of the Masters at Downtown Disney November 10-12, 2006. Festival of the Masters is a juried arts and crafts show, and is one of the largest in the American South. The show includes activities and events for all ages, and the LEGO Imagination Center took part in the festivities.

To coincide with the Festival, The LEGO Imagination center had two activities: a building event, and a LEGO display. Some new sets for 2007 were also shipped in to display and sell, so the new ExoForce, Aquaraiders, Technic and Mosaic sets were available before December!

Members of the Greater Florida LEGO Users Group (GFLUG) were invited to display, and other builders from as far north as North Carolina joined to present their models. The theme, as determined by the coordinator, KK Quah, was Hollywood, so models based on movies and television shows were the primary focus.



What made this display different from most is that Festival of the Masters is an outdoor show, so all displays had to be taken down each night. This made things a little interesting at the end of the day, and meant most of the models had to have portability. Set up was pretty quick but teardown was even quicker. Everything was stored for the night – then we came back and brought it all out again.

Our models came from a wide variety of shows and movies. A city layout had Spiderman stopping a train, and Batman in his Batmobile was close by. Another layout was of Rick's Place, from the movie *Casablanca*, as well as the plane and the scene with Rick and Ilsa. From Harry Potter was a model of Hogwarts Castle, with each room decorated as in the movie. The largest layout of all was of the entire plane crash from *LOST*.

Chase scenes were also present. There was a cool boat chase from *Live and Let Die* and the helicopter chase from *Mission Impossible*. Being in Downtown Disney, it was only appropriate to have some Disney inspired models too, including Ariel's Grotto from *the Little Mermaid*, the *Nautilus* from 20,000 *Leagues Under the Sea*, a spaceship (the red one) from *Lilo and Stitch*, and another from *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

Some sculptures and whimsical figures were shown, and a demo model of the Mindstorms NXT was constantly being taken through its paces.

Inside the LEGO Imagination Center, there was a building event where visitors built giant bricks then added them to build a seven-foot tall model of Yoda. This took place over the entire weekend and there was a constant stream of people participating. 250,000 people were expected to show, and it certainly looked that way.











It seemed like a never-ending river of people who flowed by the model display - they took their time to look over each MOC and express their pleasure. They gave smiles of recognition to the models, and the Disney creations generated the most, including even some Disney employees who recalled the old 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea ride. There were other things going on for the show, such as chalk painting, but the LEGO display and event was one of only a few specifically geared for kids – and kids at heart. This made it supremely popular.

All in all, it was great fun and for me, a lot like an artists' gathering. Each of the people who displayed enjoyed the company of the public and each other, and the display was a gallery of both the talent and the hospitality of the group. Next year looks to be better, and I am looking forward to returning.





















Photography by Joe Meno and Patrick Rumpel



A suburb of Munich was the site of a display hosted by 1000steine, the German LEGO club. Bricking Bavaria, as it was dubbed, drew 50 builders from Germany and Holland. They presented some of the most incredible MOCs I've seen to date.

The site was a local church, which opened much of its space to the displayers. Different areas and rooms were utilized to host themes and clubs. Upstairs the Dutch LEGO club had two interactive displays where a person could run a train with an exercise bike or try to pick up candy with a Technic-based candy crane. There was also a loft area reserved for Star Wars and moonbase MOCs, and dioramas of Endor's forests and Jabba's palace interior were there alongside custom Star Wars models and a moonbase display with a giant robot bay. Downstairs, there was a Mindstorms room where attendees could 'gamble' for candy using tokens that were given with their admission. By winning 5 tokens from Mindstorms vending machines that worked like casino games, people were able to redeem their tokens into another machine and receive a piece of candy. I really liked how they tied it all together.

The main meeting room held a tremendous assortment of models, from mosaics to a 15 foot long aircraft carrier MOC. The tallest model was a 7 foot TV tower. Other large models included a replica of the Frankfurt train terminal, a mountain with a train track that spiraled inside, and four churches.

There were other items too - like the characters from the movie *Cars*. Cool train layouts which included working streetlights and Christmas lights, and a town layout which showed off Bavarian style buildings.

At the entrance hall were more, including a fire trucks layout with lighted vehicles, a firehouse and a town layout. By the windows were large sculptures of cartoon characters, provided by the LEGO Group.

A few hundred visitors and their families came through, but the highlight was when one of the German TV networks visited and did a report on the event, taking footage of the models and interviewing some of the builders.

For a newcomer and a foreigner, this was a great introduction to the German community - their models were outstanding and they were great hosts. So welcoming, helping each other set up, answering endless questions and even feeding everyone. I'm looking forward to going again.

























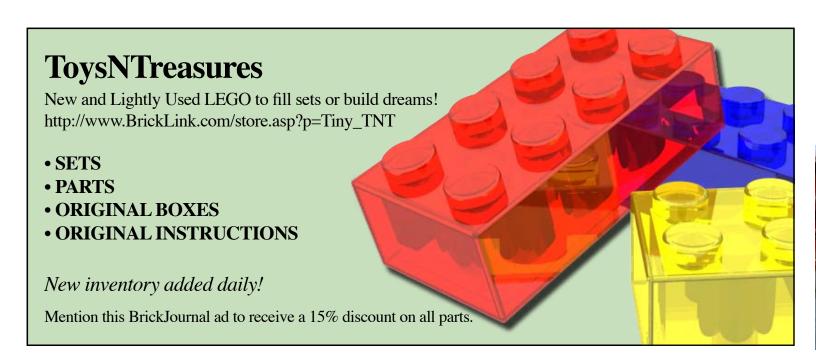












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S0937FG, which stands for Singapore LEGO Fanatics Group, was founded about 2 years ago by a bunch of fun-loving AFOLs based in Singapore. The number "0937" is actually the word "LEGO" read upside-down! This idea came from a core-group member, Eugene Tan. We wanted very much to use the name

"LEGO" in the group's name but was a little worried about the "legal" implications. Hence this was the best method then!

When we started, there were less than 20 AFOLs. Although the group was small, we bravely took on the projects that came

bravely took on the projects that came across our paths.

In September 2005, led by Eugene, the group created a 1:10 scale model of The Roman Colosseum for the Asian Civilization Museum. The building was created using bricks sponsored by LEGO Singapore. It was a two day event, which required the group to build "live" at the Museum. With the limited timeframe, the group still managed to complete one full quarter and two-third of the second quarter with lots of sweat, blood (yes someone was injured by bricks!) and knee bruises.

Later in November/December 2005, the group spent 18 days building a 3-story tall (almost 10m, including the star) LEGO Christmas Tree at a shopping mall with bricks sponsored by LEGO Singapore. The 8m tall tree was built on a wire-meshed frame where many wonderful creations were placed over it. There was a lot of free play during the 18 days where each member used their own creativity to add Christmas related MOCs onto the frame. There were a



Club Spotlight:

Singapore LFG

BrickJournal meets up with a group in Asia!

Article by Diana Wong LEGO Ambassador Singapore, S0937FG

Photography by Diana Wong and Nicholas Foo





Santa with reindeer, musical angels, snowman, the 12-Days-Of-Christmas, all sizes of presents, musical notes, elves, candy-sticks, socks, jingle-bells, Christmas wreaths, Christmas wishes, candles, mini-towns, and more. The challenges were how to secure all the creations to the wire frame and placing the creations up high on the tree. Its was like using LEGO bricks to create lots of Christmas ornaments to decorate a really huge Christmas tree.

Besides the Christmas tree, the group also created huge Christmas candles that were place around the shopping mall walkway.

After two successful projects, we were more ambitious and took on the LEGO World Cup project with LEGO Singapore by working on totally new designs in March 2006. Eugene designed the soccer stadium and Nicholas Foo designed the "Soccer Player Megafigs Scenes". Since











we were not allowed (like in the Christmas project) to build in the shopping mall, we spent many weekends in one of the AFOL's home and created all the modules for the stadium and "Megafigs" parts. They would be put together overnight at the mall on 23 May. It was another great experience as all of us has to race against time to complete the stadium (decorated with 3000 minifigs, and many other accessories) and the 5 Soccer Scenes by next morning 7am. We did it! We were all tired but really proud of the work we did.

The stadium was really well received by the public and even had air-time on a local news channel!

On November 26th, our group had the great opportunity to meet Mr. Jørgen Vig Knudstorp, the LEGO CEO, in person and up close. In this dinner meeting, the group shared our passion on LEGO while Mr Knudstorp shared the LEGO Group's directions and visions. We then presented him with a MOC especially created for him – The Merlion. This symbolic sculpture of Singapore was designed by Nicholas in minifig scale. The group, led by Diana, spent almost 1.5 months to conceptualize the idea and eventually getting the MOC "fixed" into a hand-made acrylic box (made by Eugene). This MOC used 857 elements to build. There is also a S0937FG minifig (made by Leroy) waving the Singapore Flag, welcoming Mr Knudstorp.

S0937FG today has close to 90 registered forum members, and we hope to involve more AFOLs in our next project. You can come and talk to us at the following location:

Forum: http://s0937fg.proboards41.com/

Brickshelf: http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.

cgi?m=Singapore0937FG

MOCPage: http://www.mocpages.com/home.php/2441

Email: S0937FG@gmail.com

You may contact us at the above location or email Diana, the group LEGO Ambassador at dianavirus@gmail.com



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Not Quite LEGO: Star Wars® Kubricks

It's time for another edition of "Not Quite LEGO" —the column that takes a look at some of the other toys out there that are "not quite LEGO." No, we're not talking about MegaBloks, but about other toys that are sometimes similar to LEGO, or may be of interest to LEGO fans in general!

Article and photos by Greg Hyland

LEGO Star Wars vs. Star Wars Kubricks – Kubricks Gives Us the Figures We Wish We Had In LEGO!

Kubricksare a line of figures made by the Japanese toy company MediCom that resemble, and surely are inspired by, our beloved LEGO mini-figure. At first the Kubrick line was meant to be a customizable figure line, where different coloured bodies and parts were sold, but the Kubrick line really caught on when they started getting various character licenses from movies, television and video games, such as *Planet of the Apes, Reservoir Dogs* and *Batman*. In January 2003, they got the line that I'm sure most Kubrick collectors wished for: *Star Wars*!

The Star Wars Kubrick line started off mimicking the way the original Kenner Star Wars figures came out in 1977, by releasing Kubrick recreations of the original four Kenner Star Wars figures, Luke, Leia, R2-D2 and Chewbacca, and also replicating the original "Early Bird" mail-in certificate and packaging. After that, they'd release sets of six individually boxed figures (and one or two more randomly packed "chase" figures) every six months. The choice of figures at times followed next to no logical assortment, and seemed almost random at times. Minor characters would often appear before more known characters (for instance "important" characters like Darth Vader or C-3PO didn't appear until the third and fourth lines!). While LEGO has a considerable jump on the Kubrick line with the amount of characters made, there are still a few standout characters that the Kubricks have done that LEGO has vet to do.

Here, we'll take a look at some of these characters, and maybe get a glimpse of how LEGO *might* possibly do these same characters!



Boussh – This is the one figure that is noticeably absent in our Jabba's Palace set, and a popular figure done by customizers. While a regular Kenner figure's helmet fits nicely on the mini-figure head, what we really want is the "official" LEGO helmet piece! Kubrick Boussh comes with both the Boussh helmet and Leia hair, and was in Series 7, released in November 2006.



Ewoks – Kubricks didn't cop out with some easy colour re-use, the way our LEGO friends did. The difference between Wicket and Paploo is obvious, with different cloak pieces. Wicket came out in Series 3, released in October 2004 and Paploo was in a Japanese Toys R Us exclusive boxed set from December 2004.



Spirits of Obi-Wan and Anakin – How many of us wouldn't LOVE a transparent mini-figure? This would be such an easy figure for LEGO to make, with no new parts and minimal printing needed. And check out the version on Anakin Kubricks chose... I guess the Original Trilogy DVDs haven't reached them yet... The Spirit of Obi-Wan was in the first Japanese Toys R Us exclusive boxed set from December 2004 and the Spirit of Anakin was in Series 7 from November 2006.



Death Star Trooper

– Sometimes an extra
Samurai helmet on an
Imperial Officer doesn't cut
it. This is a figure the army
builder types would kill for.
The Death Star Trooper was
in Series 6 from June 2006.



Bounty Hunters – The very first individual boxed line of Kubricks was a set of all six Bounty Hunters. While we just got LEGO versions of Dengar and IG-88, Kubricks gave us the other fan-favorite non-speaking-or-moving characters, 4-LOM, Bossk and Zuckuss. All these figures were in Series 1 from summer 2003.



Rebel Trooper – The LEGO Star Wars 2 video games teased us with this figure, and let's face it, it's a figure we all really want. That pesky helmet is all we need! The Rebel Trooper was in Series 6 from June 2006.



Admiral Ackbar – "It's a trap!" With the likes of Chewbacca, Greedo and Jar Jar, LEGO set the precedent that aliens have special molded heads. So that's what it'll take to get Admiral Ackbar, and possibly what's keeping us from having him! Ackbar was in Series 5 from November 2005.



Cantina Band Member-Get a bunch and make the whole band! This guy actually came with a few different instruments so you could do just that! There's almost no excuse that this guy doesn't exist in LEGO, and should really have come with the Cantina set. As with the Tuskin Raiders and Ten Nunb (and in opposition about what I said about Admiral Ackbar), a printed head is all that is needed! The Cantina Band Member was in Series 2 from November 2003.



Death Star Gunner – Surely a special helmet would be needed (or perhaps they could share a black version of a helmet that might get made for the Rebel trooper on a black head?), but the Death Star Gunner is another figure that the army builder types would love. The Death Star Trooper was in Series 5 from November 2005.

Other figures that Kubricks have produced that are absent from the LEGO line include Bespin Han, Endor Leia, Nien Nunb, RA-7, R4-M9, K-3PO, Snaggletooth, an Imperial R5, Ceremonial Luke, and then there's chase and exclusive characters (that you'll never own unless you are rich or live in Japan!) that have been made like Jorg Sacul and the "Blackhole" Stormtrooper, and even Indiana Jones (using the Han Solo face!).

While Kubrick figures aren't widely available in North America or Europe, look for them in most specialty toy or comic book stores, or a look on eBay will come up with dozens of sellers (mostly in Japan or Hong Kong). Be warned... collecting these figures can be pricey, with the newer figures going for \$10-\$15 each, and exclusive and chase figures going for as much as \$150. The original "Early Bird" set (with Luke, Leia, Chewie and R2) can go for as much as \$250!









Star Wars Kubrick Checklist

Series 1 - Summer 2003:

- ☐ 4-LOM
- ☐ Boba Fett 2 green gauntlets (ESB)
- □ Bossk
- □ Dengar
- □ IG-88
- □ Zuckuss
- Chase Figures:
- ☐ Boba Fett 2 red gauntlets
- □ Boba Fett 1 yellow & 1 red (vintage)

Series 2 - Nov 2003:

- ☐ Cantina Band Member
- □ Greedo
- □ Han Solo
- □ Obi-Wan Kenobi
- ☐ Sandtrooper orange pauldron
- □ Tusken Raider
- Chase Figures:
- ☐ Sandtrooper white pauldron
- □ Indiana Jones

Series 3 - Oct 2004:

- □ AT-AT
- ☐ C-3PO
- ☐ Han Solo in Carbonite
- □ Iawa
- ☐ Lando Calrissian
- Wicket
- Chase Figures
- ☐ Hibernation Sickness Han Solo
- □ Logray
- □ Vinyl Cape Jawa

Series 4 - Jul 2005:

- □ Darth Vader
- ☐ Emperor
- ☐ Han Hoth
- ☐ Luke Bespin
- □ Nien Nunb
- ☐ Stormtrooper
- ☐ Chase Figures
- □ Darth Vader w / Luke's face
- ☐ Han Solo Stormtrooper



- ☐ Luke Skywalker Stormtrooper
- E. Series 5 Nov 2005:
- ☐ Admiral Ackbar
- ☐ Death Star Gunner
- ☐ Luke Skywalker Jedi Knight
- ☐ Princess Leia Slave
- ☐ Snaggletooth Red
- ☐ Yoda
- Chase Figures
- ☐ Han Solo Endor
- ☐ Snaggletooth Blue
- □ Walrusman

Series 6 - Jun 2006:

- ☐ Death Star Trooper
- ☐ Luke Skywalker X-Wing Pilot
- □ R4-M9
- □ RA-7
- □ Rebel Trooper
- ☐ TIE Fighter Pilot
- Chase Figures
- ☐ Grand Moff Tarkin
- ☐ Imperial Commander
- □ Wedge Antilles

Series 7 - Nov 2006:

- ☐ Anakin Skywalker Spirit
- □ Lando Calrissian Skiff Guard
- ☐ Princess Leia Boussh
- ☐ Gammorean Guard
- ☐ Emperor's Royal Guard
- ☐ Scout Trooper
- Chase Figures
- ☐ Anakin Skywalker Old
- ☐ Yak Face
- ☐ Emperor's Blue Guard

Carded Kubricks:

- ☐ "Bape" Boba Fett Series 1 Vintage version - 2003 Medicom Toy Exhibition exclusive - 150
- ☐ Luke Skywalker Blonde hair - Art of Star Wars exclusive at Kyoto National Museum & internet exclusive
- □ R2-D2 "Droids" version
- Wonder Festival (Feb 22/04) & internet mail order exclusive - 2004 pcs total
- ☐ "Parco" Sandtrooper black pauldron - 2004 Medicom Toy Exhibition exclusive (Jun 12/04) - 150 pcs?
- ☐ Boba Fett "Droids" version
- Wonder Festival (Aug 29/04) & internet mail order exclusive
- 2004 pcs total

- ☐ Princess Leia Holographic
 - World Character Convention
- 19 (Nov 21/04) & internet excl.
- 2004 pcs total
- ☐ "Parco" Darth Vader Series 4 version - 2005 Medicom Toys
- Exhibition exclusive (Jun 29/05) ☐ "Parco" Jorg Sacul - 2006
- Medicom Toy Exhibition exclusive (Jun 23/06)
- ☐ Blackhole Stormtrooper (assume it's carded?) - WCC 2006? & internet exclusive - 2006 pcs total

Kubrick Boxsets:

Early Bird Set - Jan 2003

- □ Chewbacca
- □ Luke
- ☐ Princess Leia
- □ R2-D2

Speeder Bike Boxset - Apr 2004

- ☐ Endor Luke
- ☐ Endor Leia
- ☐ Speeder Bike

Toys R Us Exclusive Boxset - Dec

- ☐ Han Solo Bespin
- □ Paploo
- □ R2-Q5
- □ R5-D4
- ☐ Spirit of Obi-Wan

Max Rebo Band Boxset - Feb

- □ Doda Bodonawieedo
- □ Droopy McCool
- □ Max Rebo
- ☐ Sy Snootles

Toys R Us Exclusive Boxset 2 - Dec 2005

- ☐ Imperial R5 Unit
- ☐ K-3PO
- ☐ Luke Skywalker Ceremonial
- ☐ Ten Nunb
- ☐ Wicket Ewoks Cartoon

Speeder Bike Boxset 2 - Nov 2006

- ☐ Biker Scout
- □ Speeder Bike

Mail Away Boxset - Apr 2007

- ☐ B-Wing Pilot
- ☐ C-3PO Droids style
- ☐ Dagobah Luke Skywalker & Yoda
- ☐ Snowtrooper

Crane not included.



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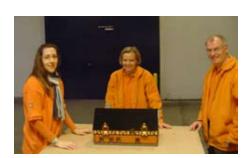
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Last Word











Wow! Could the year have been any busier?

My apologies to some of my contributors for those event reports that didn't make it to press – They will be in the next issue, along with the other things that have happened in the meantime.

Issue 6 has been an eye opener for me. This was the first time that I truly saw the global reach of LEGO bricks. It's amazing to see articles submitted that chronicle happenings in Italy, Germany, and the United States, all directly related to the LEGO hobby. Can you believe that the CEO of the LEGO Group went to Singapore on business and met an adult LEGO club? Yes, this hobby is maturing and continuing to spread.

I also was lucky enough to attend an event overseas and see the differences between events in the US and in Europe. Each place has its own personality, and I was able to experience both firsthand. I'm hoping in the coming year that I'm able to attend even more events in even more countries.

This is the end of Issue 6 but you might be wondering, "What's up with next issue?" I can tell you, there's some exclusive content coming, more great articles and models...and best of all you won't have to wait long for it.

And one last thing – comments and thoughts are always welcome! Drop me a line at: admin@brickjournal.com

See you next time!



AFOLs





by Greg Hyland



