WRENN formula 152

NEWSLETTER No17 JUNE 2020

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the June Newsletter, which arrives at a difficult time for all of us. I am hopeful that you will have managed to survive the lockdown in all of your various countries and look forward to a healthy but changed future. Unfortunately this years Slot Car Festival had to be postponed, as all gatherings in the UK, so we are waiting for a removal of these restrictions so that it may possibly be rescheduled. In a previous Newsletter I did state that Maurice Gunter had access to the remains of Wrenn's paperwork archive which did survive the purchase of the company and it's transportation North by Dapol. I am very pleased to be able to report that Maurice has managed to identify a number of specific Wrenn 152 slot car items in the remains of the archive. He has managed to share information, documents and some photos which greatly assist with the history of the production of Wrenn slot cars. Hopefully these will be added to as any more items are discovered. Some of these are contained in the following articles. Other items include Exico's set box differences, a look at the moulding tools for the track sections and those rare, Clear nylon vibrator motor parts. I hope that you enjoy.

THE WRENN ARCHIVES

At the present time Maurice has managed to locate some of Wrenn's original Patent documents, he has also found some information regarding the early days of Formula 152 production as well as some from the latter years. I am keeping my fingers crossed that additional information may still be in existence from the 'middle' period, but it has just not been discovered yet. This then would hopefully enable us to have a better understanding and a more comprehensive picture of Wrenn's slot car production and distribution to be documented. There have also been some photos discovered as well as two plans which were used to prepare the working drawings for the new BRM and Porsche cars. There have even been some of the early pencil illustrations found which were generated for the Catalogues and advertisements. After an initial inspection, what has been discovered in the archive up until now, concerning Wrenn 152, is as follows opposite, with some detailed information.

THE PATENTS

In the Wrenn archives, some of the actual Patent documents have been located. These are the ones for the original Vibrator-motored cars, the design of the track, including the deflector mechanism and also the method of manufacture. Besides these there are the Patent Application documents for the US, please see these below.

As far as the UK is concerned, there were actually five different Patents granted for Wrenn 152. Interestingly those for the DC rotary motor and the 9-Volt motor list Roy Cyril Vaughan as being the inventor. Unfortunately at present I do not have any information as to who he was and whether he was an employee of Wrenn, or possibly one of their existing subcontractors or even whether he was an individual who had just been commissioned to design these two motors. If you have any further information it would gratefully be received.

NEW WRENN FACTORY PHOTO

Maurice included two factory photos in his recent book on Wrenn showing the Formula 152 production and I am delighted to say that another photo has been found in the archives. Although this scanned photo is of a poorer quality, it was taken from a similar position to the previous one, but it does significantly differ in that it includes some additional details not seen in the previous photo, shown overleaf for comparison. This also features the 'Testing Department' and it seems to show a group of ten workers with each of them having a small 152 layout at their workstation to enable the cars to be tested.

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NEW WRENN FACTORY PHOTO continued

These ‘test’ layouts all do appear to be the same size, of an oval of track with fence posts and barrier fencing. The track sections seem to comprise 8No T1-Straights and 8No T8-Curves, however there could also be a T20-Deflector Straight included, which could be out of sight, underneath the central shelf. From the nearest test track it also appears that there is some permanent wiring to the track which would have been a much cheaper solution rather than including a more costly T25-Terminal Straight.

As you may know, Wrenn supplied their cars from the factory with the Collectors preset to pick up from either the two inner or the two outer positions. Therefore these test tracks would have only needed one E1 Controller with the accompanying wiring to both pairs of rails. The individuals do seem to be the same in both photos and it is also interesting to see both men and women working together on the intricate work. The photo also differs from the previous one with this one having used a flash, which would probably indicate that it was taken during the early evening production shift. I’m assuming that daylight would normally have entered via the two roof-lights seen in the original photo and then, when not enough, the ceiling-mounted fluorescent lighting would have been used.

TWO NEW CONFIRMED IMPORTERS

Looking through completed Order Forms it seems as though Hare’s Trading Company (pvt) Ltd. in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia was certainly placing orders for Wrenn 152 items up to November 1965 and there was

TWO NEW CONFIRMED IMPORTERS continued

also Andrew Hawley Ltd. in Wellington, New Zealand who ordered up to July 1966. As you may already be aware, Rhodesia does not now exist since it was renamed Zimbabwe upon it’s independence, which was ratified exactly a week after the above order from Hare’s Trading, which could well have been their last order. I am sure that in the fifty five intervening years since, many things will have changed over there, not least with Salisbury now being known as Harare.

At this point we can therefore now confirm that Wrenn 152 was still being exported to the following countries up to the stated (Order) dates below:

Southern Rhodesia - November 1965,
New Zealand - July 1966,
Denmark - December 1966,
France - December 1966,
Switzerland - January 1967,
Italy - March 1967,
Sweden - April 1967

STOCK SHEETS

In the archives there are some Stock Sheets that have been discovered for the early period of Wrenn’s 152 production. At the end of November 1960, Wrenn had just over 500 of the No1 Basic Sets assembled ready for the expected Christmas rush. Later sheets from March 1961 seem to indicate that the Wrenn production lines were busy attempting to keep a ‘float’ of over 200 Basic Sets in stock for incoming orders. There are also a number of comprehensive year end, Stock Sheets that have also emerged. There is an interesting one that is dated December 1968, which lists all of the complete Wrenn 152 and also Grand Prix slot car items that were still in stock at the time. This does include items listed as work-in-progress as well as some even listed as raw materials, together with their location in the factory as well as their corresponding monetary values. This would seem to indicate that these could well have been prepared for Lines Brothers and could indicate the final amount of Wrenn slot car items that were held in stock after slot car production had finally ceased at Bowlers Croft..

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EXICO SET BOX DIFFERENCES

As stated on the website, Exico added some gummed paper labels to fit over Wrenn's name on the standard set boxes to promote their re-naming to Micro-Racers and also had replacement French language texts. On the 2nd generation of set boxes Exico went further and added some improvements. Firstly the box bases were all covered in a matt Red paper, similar to Wrenn's 1st generation bases. Covering the box base was a distinct improvement since it added to the rigidity and most of those seen today are usually in a good condition, which is more than can be said about some of the Wrenn examples. The fundamental issue with Wrenn's set box bases would seem to have been the thickness, or weight, of the cardboard used, meaning that they were quite flimsy in comparison. Finally Exico included all French language literature in place of Wrenn's English language equivalents by the time of the 2nd generation set boxes.

Exico also replaced the standard Wrenn bottle of oil with one of their own. Exico had used the bottles of oil that Wrenn originally provided, in the 1st generation of set boxes, however this changed with the introduction of the 2nd generation. As you will all know, Wrenn's bottle of oil was a square glass bottle with a cork stopper and a thin stainless steel pin for application. Originally these were sealed to the bottle with a White plastic seal to prevent the oil leaking out. Later Wrenn introduced a Red plastic seal in place of the White version. Exico's bottle of oil was not just a new label added to the Wrenn one. Exico's bottle was slightly smaller, still square, but with a screw thread cast into it. The cap was also moulded in Red but was made from a hard plastic which could accommodate the screw thread. The label around the bottle was still Yellow but it featured Exico's logo,

EXICO SET BOX DIFFERENCES continued

with their cockerel in Black to the face and a smaller Green BP shield logo, with a square around it to both sides. If anyone has any further details of any other differences it would certainly be great to hear from you.

STRAIGHT TRACK MOULDING TOOLS

If you care to look underneath any of the full straight track sections you will notice that they were all produced using the same basic design of injection-moulding tool. This includes the standard T1-Straight Track sections, the T20-Deflector Straight, the T25-Terminal Straight and even the T40-Lap Counter. Strangely the early T1-Straight has a 'plug' within the tool which features the code number B 122 which does not seem to reference anything. Do you know what it means? There is no reference to T1 in these first pieces of track. The basic track includes some indentations which were used when the tool was 'converted' to a Deflector Straight with some additional slots which were either milled or punched out. When the T1-Straight Track was latterly upgraded to the 'Curvable' type, a new moulding tool was necessary with all of the indentations in the slot base and the track sides. These latter ones have to be opened out or cut through to allow the track to be undulated or curved in the vertical plane like a shallow bridge. Each piece of this track now included a new number T1 in the plug. When the tool was used for the Terminal Straight the identification plug included the number C102 and this again does not seemingly reference anything obvious and the holes for the 8No terminal studs were also incorporated. Finally, every piece of track that Wrenn did produce included the

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STRAIGHT TRACK MOULDING TOOLS continued

words ‘PATENTS PENDING’ in small raised capital letters. Please see the photos below and following for all of the discussed track sections.

CURVED TRACK MOULDING TOOLS

Underneath each of the Curved Track sections there are individual raised numbers which don’t seem to be relevant to anything obvious. The T4 Curve track has nothing to reference it’s Wrenn coding (similarly as the T1 Straight) but it does have A.124:, the T8 Curve has NoT8, while the T12 Curve just has T12. The sensible assumption is that A.124: is actually a reference for the injection moulding tool. This is similar to the B122 which is under the T1 Straight, but at this stage there doesn’t seem to be any information on these. Please see the undersides of the various Curved sections below. Can you assist?

SPECIAL TRACK MOULDING TOOLS

Finally the 1/6th Straight and the Chicane Track sections did include their relevant nomenclature numbers on the undersides (T6, T21 & T22).

NYLON VIBRATOR MOTOR COMPONENTS

You may have thought that all of the nylon components in the vibrator motor were moulded in Black nylon, but a small number of these have been seen moulded in a Clear nylon for some reason. There are very few of these seen today, so you may be lucky enough to discover some in your vibrator-motored cars, please see below.

USEFUL CONTACTS

Rob Miller has a website forum for Wrenn 152.
www.tapatalk.com/groups/wrenn152/

Site includes a forum for all slot car manufacturers including Wrenn 152 and a Swap Shop.
www.slotforum.com

Site covers Wrenn railways and Wrenn 152 and includes a list of currently available items for sale.
www.wrennspecialist.co.uk

French manufacturers of reproduction urethane tyres for Wrenn 152 who sell either direct online at www.slotcarstyres.com or via eBay as seller dauremy.