

The LEGO® Trains Book ... the story continues

by Holger Matthes



Some time has passed since the initial German version of my LEGO® Train Book was released in May 2016. Since then things have evolved. LEGO® has introduced the new Powered Up electric system, and I have been successfully working on a new train project. Besides this, the book caught international awareness and various translations have become available.

International release

As with some other LEGO® hobby books, the original publisher offers licences to foreign publishers. Shortly after the release of the original German version, **dpunkt Verlag** (the German publisher) offered the licence, and publishers both in the USA and China showed interest in translating the book. Work on the Chinese version took a while and there was hardly any communication between the author and **Post and Telecom Press** (the Chinese publisher). Late 2018 I discovered the Chinese version on the publisher's website (<http://www.ptpress.com.cn/shopping/buy?bookId=0ed0cd68-ca59-41fc-9bf9-193b06089996>) and with the wonderful help of a LEGO® train fan from China I was happy to receive my own copy – even without understanding a single word.



All versions of Holger's LEGO® train book

Well known publisher **No Starch Press** from San Francisco (USA) took over the English version. LEGO® train fan Ronald Vallenduuk translated all the original German text and I helped out with some rearranged chapters and further photographs and renderings. The English version of THE LEGO® TRAINS BOOK was finally published in October 2017.

No Starch Press' marketing efforts went well and they were able to sell further licences for Spanish and Italian version of the book. So, in 2018 the Spanish version LEGO® TRENES, published by **Ediciones Anaya Multimedia** and translated by Eduardo Ventas Maestre, and the Italian version TRENI LEGO®, published by **Edizioni LSWR** and translated by LEGO® fan Francesco Spreafico, became available. Still ongoing is the work on a Russian version which will be published by **Eksmo**.

Time for an update

In autumn 2018 dpunkt Verlag discussed the opportunity for a second, revised edition of the original German version rather than just printing more copies of the existing book. The two main reasons for this updated second edition were the new electric system Powered Up and the well-received MOC of the Trans Europ Express which I finished in September 2018.

A core part of the book is its description of all the different power systems LEGO® have come up with in past decades, beginning with 4.5 Volt battery trains in the 1960s. Since Powered Up was announced, we also needed to add this system to the book. Despite not being a big fan of the new system, I purchased the new city train #60197 to get some hands-on experience with this new system. Bluetooth is great, but the non-compatibility with Power Functions, the fact that only one device (motor or lights) can be connected to the one output of the hub, and the battery-only approach make this system somewhat less interesting for most LEGO® train builders. Nevertheless, it is an electric system so it needed to be added to the book.



Trans Europ Express (TEE) by Holger Matthes

Sometimes a MOC may take a few years to be finalized: The idea for a LEGO® version of the iconic and well-known historic Trans Europ Express (TEE) started while I was working on the initial book, with two Brick, Round Corner 3 x 3 x 2 Dome Tops (88293) for the characteristic nose of the engine units. This sketch stood on my shelf for a month without any further development on how to capture the grey-silver stripe from the lower front lights up to the driver's cabin. For a while I favoured a solution using rigid hoses, but this didn't work out so I ended up with a plate-built variant, but at least I avoided using stepped plates.

The second edition of the book did not have space for full instructions for the TEE but a further chapter was added showing the design process from the real prototype towards the LEGO® model. Some WIP pictures and renderings of specific details were also included.

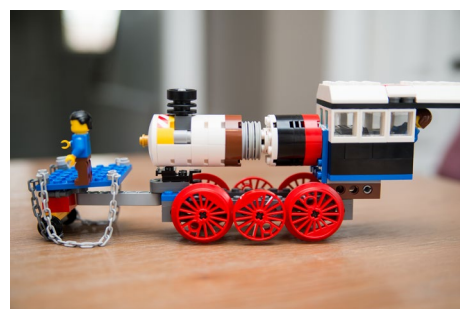
The timeframe was tight – too tight to make the second edition available for Christmas 2018. Reviews and production also took time so the new, revised edition was published on Valentine's day in February 2019.

Positive feedback

Although written primarily for experienced MOC builders and AFOLs, the book has also attracted interest from younger builders finding inspiration from its content. From the USA I received the following wonderful little story:

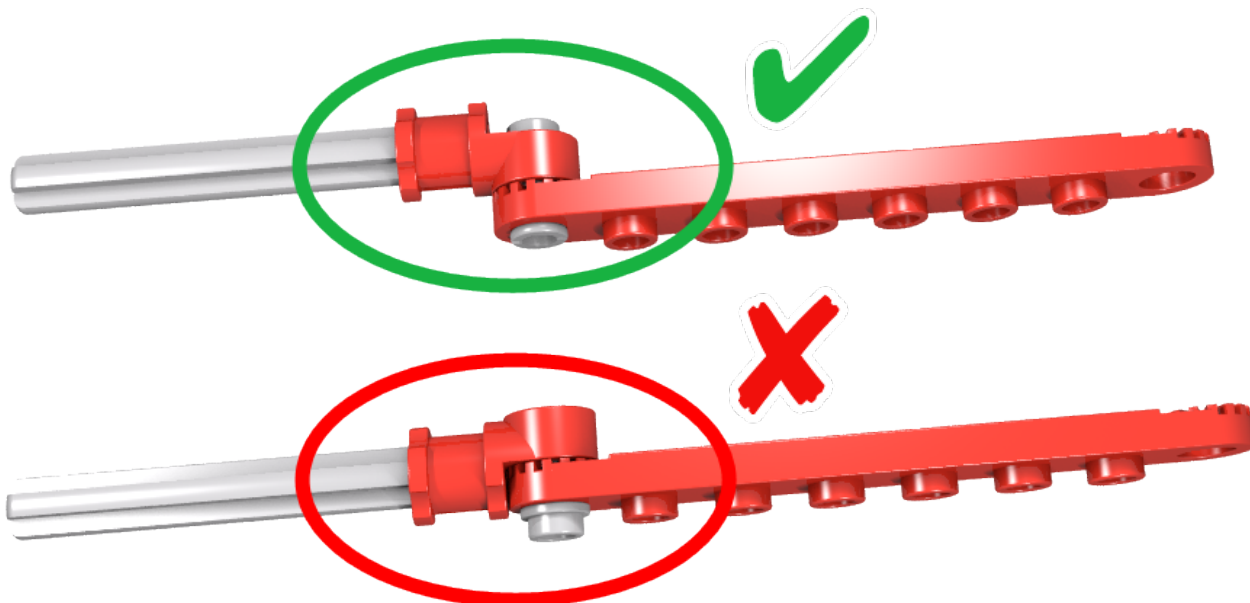
Our five-year-old son is both train and LEGO® obsessed. He got your book in 2017 for Christmas, and it has since been daily bedtime reading. He has learned so much and drawn so much inspiration from this book. Now he talks about you like a hero: "Holger Matthes builds his trains this way, does this, says this, etc."

I read the book cover to cover to him three times within the first few months of owning the book (I also have learned a lot about LEGO@s! ha!). Last summer, he taught himself to read, and now he reads and studies the book constantly on his own. The cover and pages are very worn; we may have to buy another copy. :-)



Unique Steam Train by five-year-old Hudson

And an eight-year-old boy from Germany fell in love with the BR10 steam engine which is featured in the book with instructions available on my website (<https://holgermatthes.de/bricks/en/br10.php>).



His mother contacted me saying that Jonathan was building the engine but could not get the drive wheels to spin. I mentioned the 90° offset for the wheels, but they were still not working. Jonathan and his mother were getting more and more frustrated, and I couldn't really help without seeing the real model on my desk. So I offered to have them send me their model and asked where they were living. To my surprise, they lived just around the corner – 15 minutes by car, so we arranged a visit at my LEGO® room. Due to schedule difficulties a few more days passed and Jonathan got more and more exited. Finally, they showed up and I was able to quickly discover the build error: the connectors for the rods were not in the correct orientation (I have since updated my website with a note on this potential problem).

Jonathan was so happy to have the large driving wheels spinning correctly that he completed building the rest of the locomotive the very next day after his visit.

A few weeks later I sat up a simple layout in my living room to see some of my trains in action and to test some 3D printed R104 switches from BrickTracks. Friends and family came, and old and young LEGO® fans played with LEGO® trains throughout an enjoyable afternoon. Axel, an AFOL, also showed up and brought his Dark Green, yes Dark Green(!), version of the Crocodile (<https://flic.kr/p/SekFbF>) engine featured in my train book.

And of course, Jonathan came with his completed model of the BR10 engine which he wanted to see running. It was really great to see two BR10 steam engines in the same layout. But running trains can reveal even more faults. This time a quality issue caused the connecting rods to fall off very easily. The full LEGO® build rods are attached to the Big Ben Bricks drive wheels using Technic half-pins. Attaching the studs of these pins to the underside of a new 1x4 plate didn't have as much clutch power as the older pins and plates I had used. So how could I fix this quickly to bring a smile back to Jonathan's face? I did what I would normally never do: glue (argh). You might wonder why I even had ABS glue on hand. I had to buy some to glue the ME-model rails to 2x8 plates, otherwise these large curves are so fragile that you can't even touch them without having them fall apart. But I promise, I had never glued original Danish plastic before.

Two tiny drops of glue on each side, a few minutes to let the glue set, and then the steam engine was back on track... and Jonathan was happy again. I told him not to tell anyone about this little cheat... but now our secret is out ;-)

For me as an AFOL it was great to meet Jonathan, and I am fascinated by how an eight-year-old boy could rebuild such a complex model as the BR10 steam engine. And my hat is off to Jonathan's mother. She became a real expert in ordering specific LEGO® elements through Bricklink.

While I was fixing some other minor issues on the cabin, I had to browse through the PDF instructions myself... Jonathan gave me directions: "This step is somewhere previous, at page 11, so turn back!" Wow, he knew the instructions by heart, even better than I did as their creator.

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