

MEGO 8" SUPER-HEROES: WORLD'S GREATEST TOYS!™



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BENJAMIN HOLCOMB

INTRODUCTION TO MEGO.....	6
<i>Birth of the Line</i>	7
<i>Primer and Toy Overview</i>	10
1972	14
<i>Superman</i>	17
<i>Batman</i>	25
<i>Robin</i>	33
<i>Aquaman</i>	43
CHRISTMAS CATALOGS	52
1973	56
<i>Captain America</i>	65
<i>Otto Lange: Captain America</i>	72
<i>Tarzan</i>	73
<i>Spider-Man</i>	79
<i>Shazam</i>	85
1974	90
<i>Otto Lange: Super-Gals</i>	104
<i>Wonder Woman</i>	105
<i>Supergirl</i>	109
<i>Batgirl</i>	113
<i>Catwoman</i>	117
<i>Otto Lange: Super-Foes</i>	122
<i>Penguin</i>	123
<i>Joker</i>	127
<i>Riddler</i>	131
<i>Mr. Mxyzptlk</i>	135
<i>Secret Identities</i>	139
1975	144
<i>Green Arrow</i>	159
<i>Green Goblin</i>	163
<i>Lizard</i>	167
<i>Falcon</i>	171
<i>Iron Man</i>	175
<i>Hulk</i>	179
1976	184
<i>Thor</i>	193
<i>Conan</i>	197
<i>Fantastic Four</i>	201
<i>Isis</i>	211
1977	216
<i>Teen Titans</i>	227
<i>Shipping and Counter Display Boxes</i>	233
1978	234
1979	238
1980-1983	244
INSIDE MEGO	252
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	255

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION TO MEGO

A family business founded in 1954, Mego Corporation evolved from a small import company into one of the most prolific manufacturers in the toy industry. Originally called Martin-Howard Corp. (after the names of founder D. David Abrams' two sons), the company sold a variety of products, acting as a sales representative for a number of importers. One such company imported various "lure" items, which are the relatively inexpensive toys retailers cleverly merchandise near checkout counters. Such products are also known as "hush up" toys, as parents are especially prone to impulse purchases that will quiet a fussy child.

In 1957, Abrams reached an exclusive agreement with a Japanese toy manufacturer to be their sole importer and sales representative. With the growing success, Abrams changed the company name to Mego.

The 1960s were very busy, and found the entire Abrams clan working for Mego. D. David's wife, Madeline, was employed from the outset, and sons Marty and Howard joined the family business in 1958 and 1967, respectively.

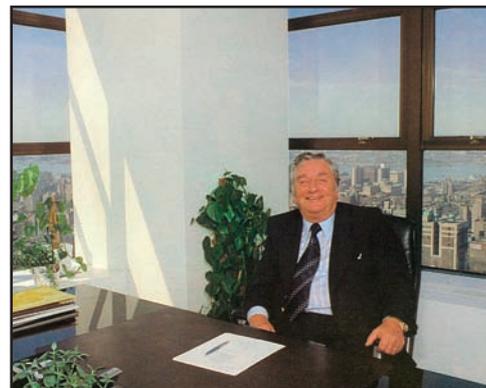
During 1963, Mego established a trading company in Hong Kong called "Lion Rock." Initially a broker, Lion Rock acted as Mego's agent in the Orient, and would go on to become Mego's principle manufacturer in Asia. In 1967, Mego entertained the notion of a public offering, and they immediately began the process of capitalization. In 1969, they filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and joined the American Stock Exchange (AmEx) in May 1971.

The move toward a public offering coincided with a massive shift in Mego's business model. "Mego itself has really gone through a metamorphosis over the last four years," stated Mego president Marty Abrams in a December 1974 interview. "We had a non-proprietary line that we felt was a winding road to nowhere." The public offering allowed Mego to develop proprietary lines that otherwise would have been fiscally out of reach. The company had a specific transition plan, one that would take several years to implement. "We never intended to do it one year," confirmed Abrams. "It was a three-year program," he stated, that called for the complete elimination of non-proprietary products. By 1974, Mego no longer offered any of the 88¢ 'lure' toys that had defined the company throughout the previous two decades.

During the 1970s, Mego released massive quantities of many different types of toys, many of which have never been properly documented. From baby dolls and board games to electronic games such as 2-XL, Mego created products for every segment of the toy industry. In 2003, Magna Doodle (introduced by Mego in 1977, and still produced today by Fisher-Price) made the Toy Industry Association's "Century of Toys List" as one of the 100 most important toys made in the past century.

Mego made its most significant contributions to the world of toys when it established itself as a leading manufacturer of licensed dolls and action figures. By the time Mego secured its first character license, the practice existed for nearly forty years. Herman "Kay" Kamen created the licensing business as we know it when, in 1932, he was hired by Walt Disney as the merchandise licensing representative for Walt Disney Enterprises. In the 1970s, Disney was the largest licensor in the world, with Licensing Corporation of America (LCA), through whom Mego would acquire many licenses, following closely behind.

At that time, it was typical for a licensor to take five percent off the top, as well as a percentage of sales. Mego routinely avoided that paradigm and as they grew larger, they were granted licenses for very little, if any, advance against royalties. With astonishingly successful licenses such as



Right: Mego founder D. David Abrams in 1979.

Cher and Planet of the Apes, Mego became the premier manufacturer of licensed toys by the mid-1970s. In 1981, for example, Mego bought the rights to "The Dukes of Hazzard" television show (from LCA, incidentally) for a pittance of \$2,500.

An article in the March 1976 issue of *Playthings* discussed the licensing business and confirmed Mego's dominance in the field. "Mego, Azrak-Hamway, and Knickerbocker are companies that come to mind immediately," the article stated. "And, of course, the wunderkind of all, Mego, has had unprecedented success with Planet of the Apes, Star Trek, Super-Heroes and most recently, The Wizard of Oz."

Mego had a fundamentally unique approach to product licensing. It was not then, nor is it today, uncommon to find random products imprinted with the likenesses of popular characters. Mego understood the appeal of immediate sales generated by such products, yet consciously avoided it. Using a baseball bat as an example, Abrams explained in a 1974 interview, "Hank Aaron, Willie Mays... putting that figure on it, there's a connection. But to put Batman on a baseball bat, there's no interconnecting meaning."

This philosophy is evidenced by Mego's approach to the license for famous daredevil Evel Knievel. While Ideal was granted the license to create Evel Knievel action figures, Mego endeavored only to create bicycle accessories. Speaking about using the Knievel license for kids' bike accessories, Marty Abrams stated, "This is how we feel in terms of our licensing. [Motorcycles and bicycles] are tied together, as are all of our products." Abrams and Mego were willing to forfeit the short-term sales of such products, in lieu of developing products with extended longevity. "We don't go into a property for one year. We do not try to milk it and move out," Abrams stated. "Ours is a three, four, five year pull. And the success of our

Super-Heroes in terms of that, we've built [throughout] the second year a much stronger category and [in 1975], we'll be even stronger."

Mego's World's Greatest Super-Heroes (WGSB) line was the most successful line of licensed toys for the company, catapulting them from 300th largest in 1969 to the 6th largest toy company (by volume) in the world, at its peak in 1976.

The WGSB enjoyed one of the longer reigns in the history of action figures. Compared to unlicensed lines like GI Joe and Barbie, ten years may seem insignificant, but few other licensed action figure lines have ever enjoyed such longevity.

In addition to the WGSB, Mego made some amazing and important toys, but it would be implausible to address them all in one tome. This examination will not attempt to scrutinize any toys that don't directly impact the principal subject matter: the glorious 8" World's Greatest Super-Heroes action figures of the 1970s and early 1980s.



Mego 2-XL from their 1980 product catalog.



Left: Mego president Marty Abrams poses with Sonny and Cher at the unveiling of their dolls, during a Mego party at the 1976 Toy Fair.

Perhaps the father of the modern action figure body, Robert K. Ostrander patented a “Jointed Doll” (filed January 17, 1958, Patent No. 3,010,253 was granted on November 28, 1961), which sired the construction concepts employed by many well-known, articulated action figures.

In fact, patents sought by Mego for their 8 inch body (including the Fist-Fighting body style), as well as by Hasbro for their 11½ inch G.I. Joe body, all cite Ostrander’s original concept.

While he never received credit or remuneration for his invention from Mego or Hasbro (except within patent filings), Robert Ostrander later modified and licensed his patent to Uneeda Toys, who used the body for their popular “Dollikan” lines of girls’ dolls. Robert Ostrander, Jr. proudly recalls his father’s invention, but did not realize it was such a vital contribution to Mego’s success. “My father’s claim to fame was that his was the first doll that could cross her legs,” said Ostrander, Jr. in an October 2005 interview.

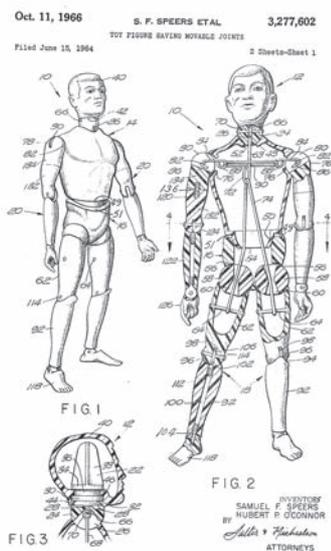
The patents cited within Ostrander’s own patent are for rudimentary dolls (mainly baby dolls), all of which significantly differ from the advanced body construction that Ostrander pioneered. Many subsequent doll and figure patents cite Ostrander’s unique design, ostensibly the progenitor of the modern, articulated action figure body.

In order to exploit a patent for commercial gain, one must make at least one significant change to the patent, and then file for a new patent. This is precisely what Hasbro did when they patented their 11½ inch body and released G.I. Joe in January 1964. Mego, however, did not initially take this crucial step in manufacturing within the law. In February 1966, Mego released their 11½ inch “Fighting Yank” figure to disastrous results; Mego’s factory reportedly formed the Fighting Yank mold using an actual GI Joe figure. A litigious Hasbro recognized a unique thumbnail and pounced (undeterred, Mego modified the mold for Fighting Yank, producing the dolls until 1974).

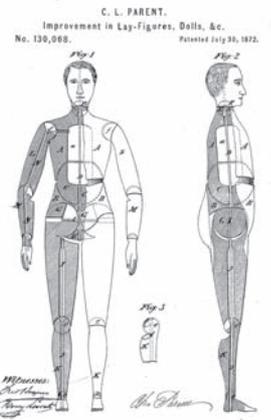
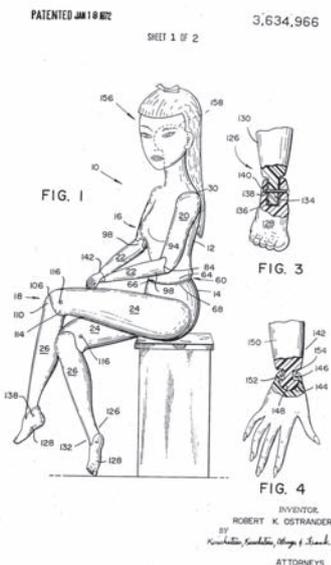
Mego would not make the same mistake twice. In 1970, Mego founder D. David Abrams conceived Action Jackson, a pint-sized answer to Hasbro’s 12 inch GI Joe. Mego developed an 8 inch male body inspired by Ostrander’s “Jointed Doll,” although they did not seek a patent. This body is known today as the “Type O” Mego body, and features plastic rivets.

D. David Abrams found inspiration in basketball coach Phil Jackson, who was then the “sixth man” on the NBA’s New York Knicks. A fan-favorite, Jackson was dubbed “Action Jackson” for his ability to excite the crowd by entering the game in the fourth quarter. Armed with a concept, unique scale, and a clever name, Mego set forth developing the body, new head sculpts and costumes for their diminutive “Government Issue” Joes. Action Jackson hit the toy shelves on June 8, 1971.

Right: Ostrander’s revised 1972 patent, often cited in Mego patent filings.



Above: 1966 Patent for G.I. Joe body.



Above: One of the earliest “doll” patents, from 1872, cited by numerous patents.

The consummate family business, everyone in the Abrams family made valuable contributions to the company’s explosion onto the boys’ action figure scene.

D. David’s son, Howard (Howie) is credited with naming the company. A March 1976 article in *People Weekly* explained that D. David Abrams established the company, “borrowing the name from a childhood phrase of Marty’s little brother Howard (now a vice president), ‘Me go, too.’” This anecdote is often cited during discussions of the proper pronunciation of the name; many people often pronounce the name with a short “e” sound (Meg-O) instead of the long “e” sound (Mee-Go) the story suggests.

Madeline (Maddie) Abrams, was a designer who developed the costume patterns for some Mego figures. Madeline was the namesake of Mego’s extremely successful “Maddie Mod” line of girls’ toys, and the inspiration for Mego subsidiary Princess Grace Doll, Inc., which was launched during the 1950s and trademarked on May 10, 1967. Maddie Mod toys have as much to do with the evolution of the WGSJ as anything; it was the success of the line that provided financial success and a new direction. Alan Ichiyasu was an independent sales representative for Mego from the late 1960s until the mid-1970s. Mr. Ichiyasu recalled that Maddie Mod was phenomenally successful, and ultimately accounted for 90% of his company’s sales volume for Mego products (by comparison, the Action Jackson line accounted for roughly 30% of their volume, for a short period). Revenue from Maddie Mod toys provided some of the working capital Mego needed to transition away from 88¢ promotions into the proprietary phase of the company’s history.

During Mego’s ascension to the top of the action figure market, D. David and Maddie lived in Hong Kong. Robert Ostrander, Jr., recalled Mego’s early and impressive presence in Hong Kong. “They used to call Maddie, ‘The Queen of Hong Kong’ because she was so influential there.”



Above: Maddie Abrams (front row, center) flanked by husband D. David Abrams (right) and Parkdale Novelties founder Morris Kotzer (left) during a 1961 visit with a Japanese toy manufacturer working for both companies.

Parlaying the success of Maddie Mod, Mego entered a new phase, prompting the hiring of Neil Saul and the development of Action Jackson. At that point, Mego underwent significant restructuring, and many new employees were brought in to facilitate Saul’s vision of what Mego needed to do. Saul worked at Ideal while the company produced the Captain Action line, so his insight and experience with boys’ toys and super-heroes proved invaluable.

Abrams' eldest son, Martin (Marty), guided the company's crucial transition. Joining the family business in 1958, Marty went on to preside after receiving a marketing degree from NYU. The aforementioned *People Weekly* article stated, "The senior Abrams, though adept at manufacturing, lacked the necessary flair for marketing." Marty became the company president in 1971, while "his father, now chairman of the board, moved to Hong Kong to supervise Mego's plants there and on Taiwan." Truly a marketing visionary, it was Marty's bold idea to bring Action Jackson to TV.

In early 1972, Mego hired a Madison Avenue public relations and advertising agency, run by the famous Mel Helitzer, to develop a series of expensive animated TV spots, designed to introduce Action Jackson to millions of cartoon-watching children. Unfortunately, the Stop-Motion and 2-D animation upset some adults. In order to reach the largest possible audience, commercials required approval from the National Association of Broadcasters' Code Authority (NABCA), an agency whose purpose, according to former NABCA supervisor Jim Steele, was "Not only to prevent false, misleading or deceptive advertising but, in a larger picture, [ensure that] government intervention was unnecessary."



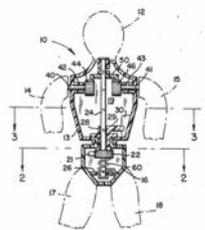
Above: Mel Helitzer (right) consults with Childcraft vice president Saul Cohen in 1979.

With several Action Jackson commercials completed and ready for broadcast, Mego braced for possible rejection from the NABCA (see sidebar, page 249). Having already spent money creating the spots, and facing the possible loss of mass-market exposure through television, the company felt vulnerable. It was very possible they could be saddled with useless television spots and potentially unvendible volumes of raw fabric, plastic and even finished figures. Neal Kublan, who started as an Art Director at Mego in the 1960s and went on to become the Vice President of Research & Development, often dealt with the factories. Kublan explained that material recycling was a clever, frugal practice often employed by Mego. "Some of the material that we couldn't use," he explained, "[was] turned into reprocessed plastic and used over and over again."

In anticipation of the NABCA's refusal to recommend Action Jackson commercials, Mego executives sought alternative solutions for Action Jackson overstock. Fortunately, Stan Weston appeared and pitched the perfect idea to Mego (see sidebar, page 9).

It was Weston's innovative thinking that led to the development of G.I. Joe for Hasbro, in 1964. Also, Weston's is the solitary name attached to the patent for Captain Action, which Ideal Toys began producing in 1966. In 1970, Weston founded American Leisure Concepts (known today as 4Kids Entertainment), a powerful licensing company with contacts at LCA, the licensing arm of Warner Brothers at the time. It was Weston's ALC who brokered the Super-Hero deal with the licensors, and it was up to Mego to make it happen. "They wanted a \$50,000 advance for all the characters," explained Kublan. "Essentially, we had to pay \$50,000 up front, an advance against royalties."

The advance was a lot of money for a small company to risk, particularly given the recent public offering. Thus, the decision required approval from Mego's Board of Directors. "Nobody wanted to spend that much money," Kublan continued. "Captain Action had been such a disaster for Ideal a couple years earlier."



Right: Mego's *Fist-Fighting* body patent, granted in 1977. Mego never patented the standard male body (Type 1 or Type 2).

Kublan made the presentation to Mego's Board. Addressing concerns over the modest success of Captain Action, Kublan countered that Ideal's hero character "was one set, with a bunch of things to turn one character into many." Kublan's quick thinking could be mistaken for prescience, as he told the board members, "That's not what kids [are] looking for. They want their own to play with, so they [can] have an adversarial relationship." Kublan's pitch was successful and the Board approved the expenditure.

Despite Mego's fears of Action Jackson tanking, the 1973 Toy Fair promotional video proudly proclaims that 2.5 million Action Jackson figures were sold during 1972. Apparently, the threat of the NABCA's punitive action did not bring the expected devastation. Ultimately, Action Jackson was successful, but the anticipation of failure may have contributed to the birth of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes line.

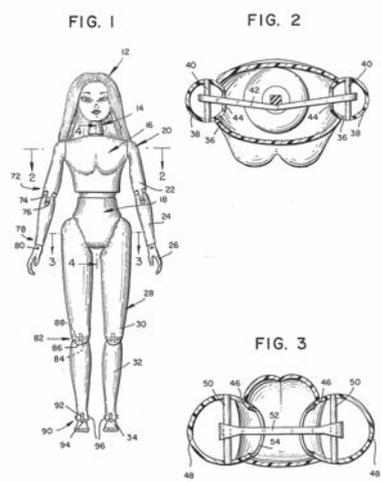
Mego Super-Hero figures were an instant success. From the outset, the figures were in such high demand that Mego had a difficult time producing enough toys to meet retailer orders.

Mego warehouse manager Ray Demato explained that Mego hired Mike McGaughey to deal with the constant inventory deficit. "He was in charge of the orders and allocations. His job was to divvy out the limited supply. If we had, for argument's sake, 20,000 cases of dolls, and he had 60,000 cases of dolls on order," it was up to McGaughey to decide, "how many units Toys "R" Us or Service Merchandise or Child World would get." Mego's independent sales representatives often exploited these situations. Alan Ichiyasu recalled that the overwhelming demand allowed the sales team to dictate terms to the buyers. "If the buyer wanted 10,000 pieces, I would tell him that he had to order 100,000 pieces, because he'd be lucky to receive 10% of the order." This method worked while the toys were hot, but it created a lot of problems once the popularity of the line waned. Eventually the supply caught up with the demand, and Mego would be able to fulfill the entire order, for which the buyer would be compelled to pay in full. "A lot of buyers lost their jobs," recalled Mr. Ichiyasu.

Large quantities of WGSB figures were distributed through wholesalers such as Greenman Brothers, out of Brooklyn. "[Greenman Brothers] would resell to the smaller toy stores" across the country, said Demato. "They also ran a toy chain called Playworld, which was local to Long Island. They had maybe twenty stores." [Ed. Note: there were fourteen Playworld locations]. Greenman Brothers bought in sufficient quantities to secure excellent pricing, and "they were pretty high on the pecking order, meaning when product got allocated, they always got something," Demato explained.

By 1973, Mego had learned some hard lessons about surviving in the highly competitive world of licensed and proprietary toys. A January 1974 article in *Advertising Age* discusses the stumbles the company made during 1973. Mego "found that its 'shotgun' TV ad thrust included "too much of the wrong kind of TV, a poor sales-to-advertising ratio" and "spotty" success with retailers, according to Neil Saul, Mego VP-Marketing." Confirming that Mego posted a loss for 1972, the article reveals that Mego hired a new advertising agency, Ed

U.S. Patent March 9, 1976 Sheet 1 of 2 3,942,284



Libov Associates, and spent 1973 producing a smaller advertising campaign with a "concentration strategy" that entailed slashing the number of spot TV markets from 69 to "the 23 accounting for the lion's share of sales." The new strategy was much more effective, and Saul exclaimed, "Mego was well into the black. By 1974, Mego's advertising budget was back to \$2 million, where it had been in 1972. The majority of the budget, not surprisingly, was devoted to the 'pre-Yule fourth quarter.'

Left: Mego patented the female body (Type 1 Female) in 1976.

This book takes advantage of shorthand and collector jargon, so it is necessary to define the terminology. This chapter details the different types of packaging, as well as bodies and costumes Mego used for the World's Greatest Super-Heroes.

FIGURES

The term "Loose" refers to a toy or figure that is complete with all accessories, but does not have its original packaging. Following are the different body styles, with the copyright information embossed onto each:



Male Body: Type O

In 1971, Mego developed the original 8" male body for Action Jackson. Known as Type O bodies, these figures feature plastic rivets with the body parts strung together by an elastic cord. The top portions of the legs and arms have bumps, creating slight tension when moving the limbs. Every Type O pelvis section is molded with the same skin tone as the torso. Very few WGSB figures

were issued on this body style, and only the earliest editions of 1st Wave Heroes (Superman, Batman, Robin and Aquaman) feature this style.



Male Body: Type 1

In 1972, Mego modified the original body, most notably by replacing the plastic rivets with metal. The Type 1 body also has bumps at the tops of the arms and legs. Every Type 1 pelvis section is molded with the same skin tone as the torso. The body parts are held together by an elastic band, tied inside the chest cavity. The Type 1 design was the standard body used for most male figures between 1972 and 1975.



Male Body: Fat

In 1974, Mego added two villains to the WGSB whose character designs called for a unique body shape. Dubbed the "fat" body by collectors, Mego created a heavysset torso for Penguin and Mr. Mxyzptlk. Mego completed the fat bodies with limbs from the standard males bodies. There are fat bodies for both Type 1 and Type 2 figures, but the torso is identical for all figures. There is a third

fat torso, which Mego used for Boss Hogg figures (from The Dukes of Hazzard), but it was never used for WGSB figures.



Male Body: Muscle

Realizing that certain characters could not be convincingly produced using the standard male form, Mego developed a muscular body. While Mego opted against designing a smaller body for Robin, they realized that new tooling was inevitable to create Hulk in 1975. The Muscle body is the only sculpt that didn't use any existing molds or designs. Mego reused most of the parts

the following year, when they added The Fantastic Four's Thing to the WGSB. In order to depict Thing's rocky surface, Mego sculpted original lower arms, including the hands. Because Hulk is a shirtless character, Mego moved the copyright to the pelvis so the pants cover it.



Male Body: Type 2

During 1975, Mego made some dramatic revisions to the body. Referred to as the Type 2 body, each body part was completely redesigned. Sculpted with more muscle definition, plastic rivets replaced the metal rivets. Mego produced the Type 2 pelvis in a veritable rainbow of colored plastic. In addition to the skin tones of the Heroes and Foes (e.g. green for Lizard), there are also a

number of different plastic colors, including tan and several different shades of blue, white and black. The body part connection design was also overhauled, utilizing metal hooks and a thick rubber band. Mego also eliminated the tension bumps that appear on the Type O and Type 1 arms and legs.



Male Body: Fist Fighter

Also released in 1975, the Fist Fighter body exterior is similar to the Type 2 body. The body features a modified chest and pelvis, to allow for the mechanism and a lever set into the waist. The Fist Fighter body is the only male body for which Mego

was granted a patent. On figures distributed in the United States, the lever is the same color as the body. On figures distributed in the United Kingdom, the lever is molded with black plastic. The internal structure of a Fist Fighter body is quite different from the Type 2 body, requiring a shortened neck plug to avoid obstructing the device.



Male Body: Lion Rock

Perhaps a partial explanation for their addition to the WGSB, the Teen Titans took advantage of the smaller bodies Lion Rock had already produced for the "Heroes of World War II" figures distributed in Europe. These figures are noticeably

smaller, but are very similar to the Type 2 hero body. The articulation at the knee differs from the larger Type 2 body, using a tongue-and-groove joint.



Male Bodies: Limbs

Oftentimes, changing the base color of plastic was sufficient to accurately represent a character. Spider-Man, for example, always used the same molds as the other characters, but his hands were molded from red plastic instead of a skin tone. Penguin, Joker, Riddler, Mr. Mxyzptlk, Green Arrow and Green Goblin also received colored hands to depict gloves. There were other figures, however, whose character designs

Colored plastic can serve as gloves.

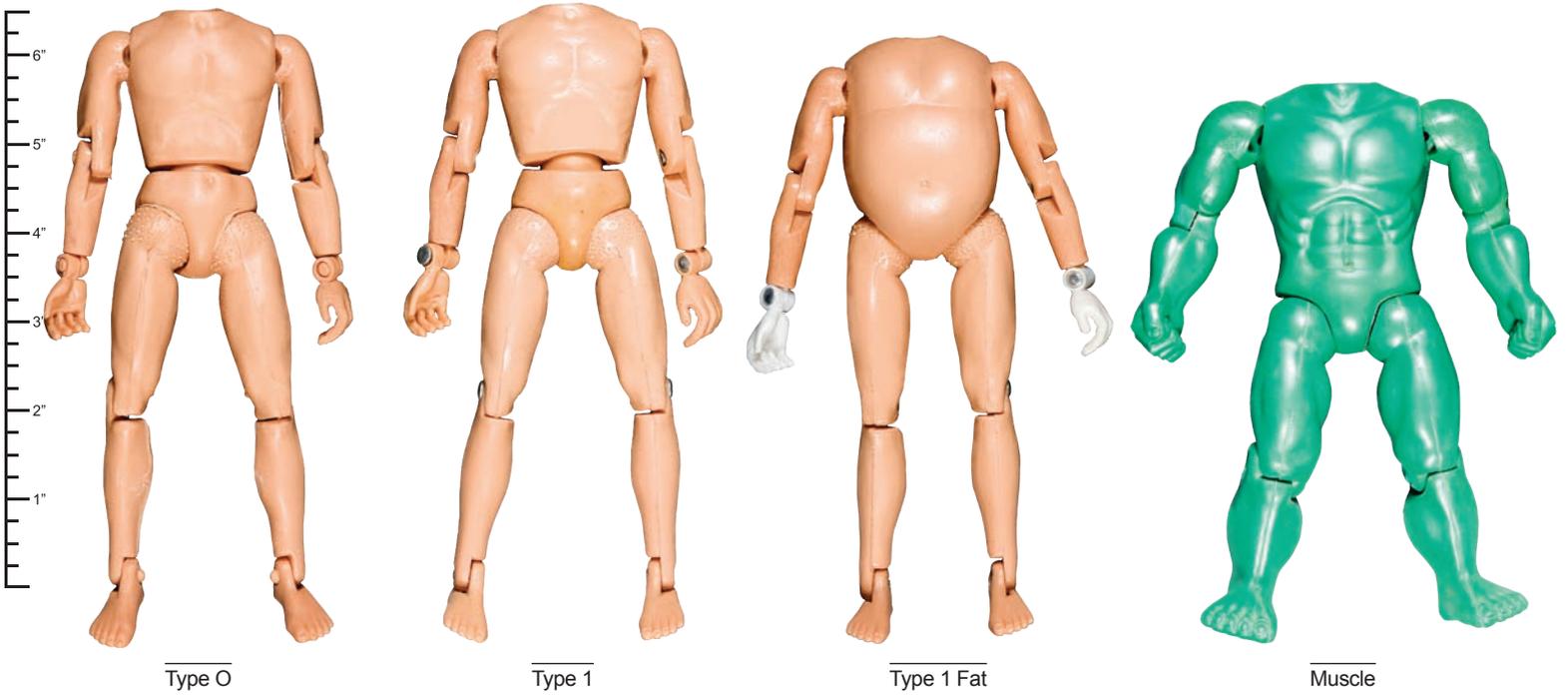
required additional tooling. In most cases, Mego created new limbs while reusing existing parts for the rest of the body.

In 1975, Mego added Marvel's Lizard to the line and sculpted new lower arms and legs. The remaining body parts are from the standard male hero body. One of the truly distinctive bodies in the WGSB line, Lizard has different hands. The left hand is cupped but open, while the right hand is clenched into a fist. As Lizard was developed while the Type 1 body was still in production, there are clear distinctions between the Type 1 and Type 2 bodies: In addition to the metal joints, the Type 1 Lizard arms have no wrist articulation, and the lower legs have no ankle articulation. The subsequent Type 2 Lizard limbs feature plastic joints and wrist articulation. The hands are similar to the Type 1 hands, including the fisted right hand. While new lower legs were sculpted, Mego did not add ankle articulation.



Type 2 Lizard's right hand is a fist.

MALE BODIES



HEADS & NECK PLUGS

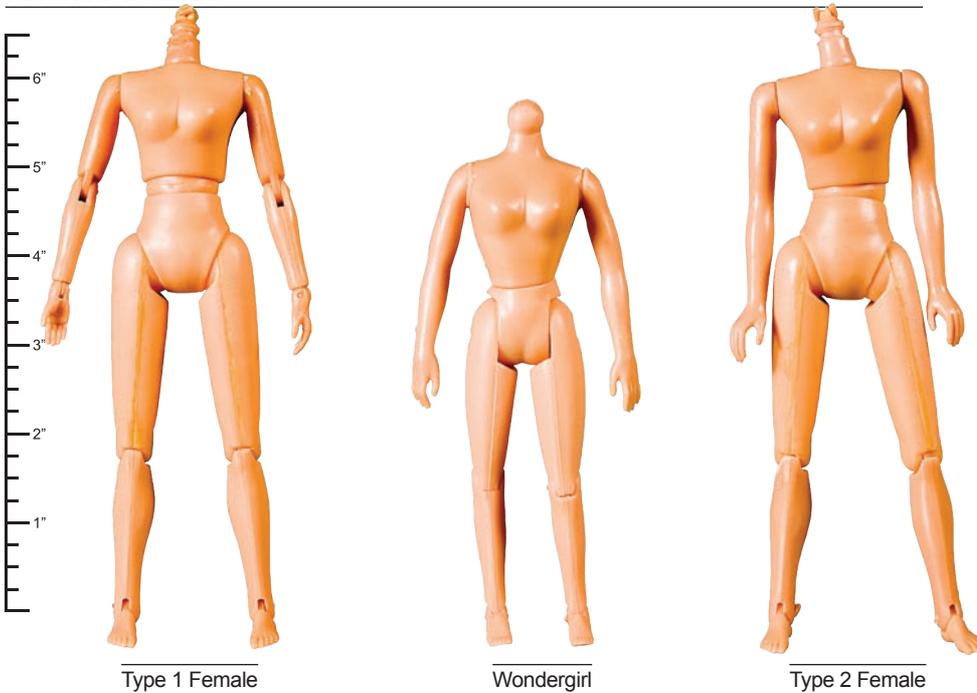


MUSCLE BODY

Technically, there isn't a Type 1 or Type 2 Muscle body, as none comes with the metal rivets that characterize a Type 1. However, there are two different molds for Hulk arms, which could be considered Type 1 and Type 2. The molded loops inside the shoulders on earlier Hulk arms are very wide. When Mego introduced the Type 2 body (which holds parts together with a rubber band and metal hooks), the thick loop is too wide to accommodate the metal hook. Accordingly, Mego reduced the thickness of the plastic loop. While there is no outward difference between Type 1 and Type 2 Muscle bodies, the loop on the plastic arms will give an indication as to when the figure was produced. This variation affects Hulk figures only, as Mego eliminated the Type 1 rubber band connections before introducing Thing. All Thing figures have a thin loop.



FEMALE BODIES



FEMALE ARMS



By 1972, Mego was well established in the toy industry. With distribution secured in Australia and Canada, the company began forging sales channels in Great Britain and other countries. Mego acquired comprehensive licenses to produce action figures based upon famous comic book characters, and the creative team set forth immediately, developing prototypes and manufacturing production samples.

Six characters were selected to represent the line. Superman, Batman, Robin and Aquaman were immediately produced, while Captain America and Tarzan were depicted on the packaging. “We did a test that Christmas,” recalled Neal Kublan, “at EJ Korvette in fact, which was a discount chain in New York then. And [the toys] checked right out. It was instant.”

Mego’s original packaging concept was a graphical, cardboard box. These figures (issued between 1972 and 1976) were shipped in graphical display cases of two-dozen boxed figures. Each counter display box was shipped in a protective master carton. Retailers used the counter display boxes to merchandise the figures (see page 233). Ray Demato confirmed the continual distribution of counter display boxes in the United States, stating, “They were always included.”

The very first editions of 1st Wave Heroes, issued in solid boxes, utilize Type O bodies. It is very unusual to find Type O bodies on Heroes; Mego introduced the Type 1 body while still rolling out the initial World’s Greatest Super-Heroes.

THE 1ST WAVE

The polyester material used to create the costumes came from one of Mego’s factories that also manufactured ladies’ pantsuits. Polyester leisure suits were popular among men and women in the 1970s, and the fabric was ideal for creating tiny, form-fitting costumes. The original material has a distinct ribbing, like corduroy.

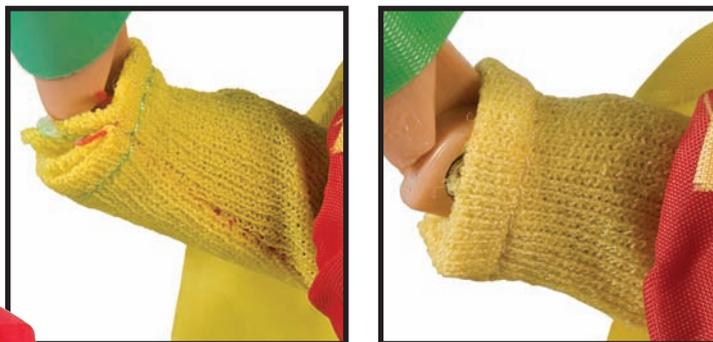
Batman and Superman required plastic boots, so Mego reused a mold from the Action Jackson Fisherman outfit. These narrow boots are quite difficult to fit over the polyester leggings, so Mego hemmed the leggings and added elastic stirrups (right), until a wider boot mold was created. Consequently, stirrup suits and the skinny boots go hand-in-glove (or foot-in-boot).

Once the fit problem was solved, the boot design did not change. Boots may differ slightly when compared to one another, but Mego made no other intentional modifications. The material used for later boots is more opaque than that of the skinny boots. Skinny boots should only come with figures packaged on 1st Issue boxes and variants of the 1st Issue blister cards (both Kresge and Mego branded), as Mego introduced the wider boot while the original 1st Issue card was still in production.

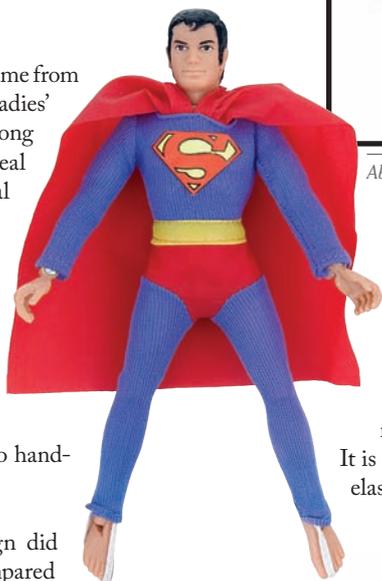
Neither Robin nor Aquaman required boots, but one particular mystery surrounds the green material used to produce their original costumes. Some of the earliest outfits appear to use yellow or chartreuse material, as opposed to green. These variations are known as the Yellow Sleeved Robin and the Yellow Legged Aquaman. Collectors debate whether this hue stems from the use of incorrect material, a chemical reaction that is fading the color over time, or a combination of the two.

Neal Kublan stated that his department would supply color keys to the factory. If the production samples were incorrect, they would be returned with a notation for color correction. The factories were loath to waste material, so if a specific color of fabric were unavailable, the factory would seek permission to use the available material. “If they ran out of material and said, ‘Can we use something [else] in the meantime?’ And we had to supply certain people... we used the next best thing,” confirmed Kublan.

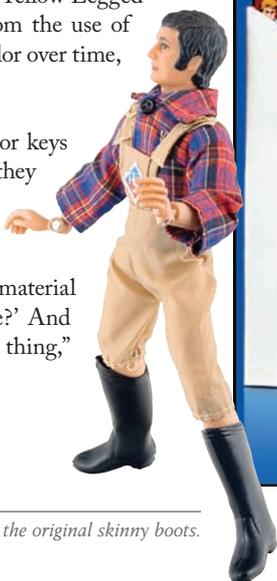
Some Robin and Aquaman figures issued in solid boxes contain outfits with yellow fabric that should be green. Turned inside out, the excess material folded over in the seam is green while the outer portion is yellow. These specimens support the theory of color fading. Other concurrently produced figures, however, contain outfits with yellow thread and consistent yellow polyester. While this does not prove that yellow fabric was intentionally used, it does support the possibility Mego issued a small quantity of figures with incorrectly colored fabric. However, it could simply mean that some outfits faded evenly. The only certainty is that several different colors exist today.



Above: Most Yellow Sleeved figures have green thread (left), while some rarer examples clearly have yellow thread (right), suggesting factory error in addition to fading.



There is another material variation that seems to be unique to the 1st Wave Heroes. There are numerous examples of Batman and Aquaman figures which feature canvas material for the trunks. This material is notably different than the early-issued nylon and later-issued polyester. It is conceivable Superman figures were manufactured using this material, yet no examples have materialized. It’s possible that the unique material was available only in black, which would preclude Superman. It is unlikely there are such examples for Robin, whose separate trunks with elastic openings could only be produced using the stretchy polyester.



Action Jackson Fisherman with the original skinny boots.



The mock-up for the original counter display box was depicted on a one-sheet inserted into the 1972 Mego catalog... an announcement of things to come.

Mike Jamacian, an instructor at New York’s School of Visual Arts under whom Neal Kublan studied, reportedly designed the inaugural packaging style. Kublan started as an Art Director at Mego in the 1960s and went on to become the Vice President of Research & Development until he left the company in 1980. “Those first, closed boxes,” Kublan stated, “were a disaster.” He added that Mego was forced to modify the “solid” box by February of 1973. “The buyers had come in [to Mego’s showroom at Toy Fair] and started saying, ‘we can’t take these things. The kids rip open the boxes [and] take the accessories.’” This predicament was corroborated in a 1974 *Playthings* article. “Pilferage at the retail level remains a serious nation-wide problem, keeping both packaging experts and toy makers in search of improved theft-proof ways of presenting products on the shelf. One packaging executive reports that “all the manufacturers are going to seal-end boxes” instead of the old-fashioned tuck types which itchy hands seemed to find irresistible.”

The solid boxes include unprinted brown cardboard folded inserts to fill the space between the figure’s head and the top of the box. This was done in consideration of shipping, to prevent damages from freely bouncing figures. Due to their utilitarian appearance, these were often discarded immediately. Thus, many specimens today lack this cardboard spacer.

On the box sides, there are trademarks (™) next to Tarzan’s and Captain America’s names only. On both the 1st and 2nd Version boxes, the Tarzan and Captain America ownership attributions (“©1972 Marvel Comics Group All rights reserved” and “©Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc 1972 Mego Corp. Authorized User”) are inverted. This error was not corrected until the 3rd Version box.

According to documents filed by Mego with the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), Mego’s first use in commerce for “World’s Greatest Super-Heroes” is listed as “110872” (November 8, 1972). This dates correlates with Kublan’s recollection that the figures were tested at EJ Korvette stores during Christmas 1972. Kublan’s assertion that the packaging was revised by the following February suggests this packaging version was distributed to stores for merely three months. Such a limited time line certainly explains the scarcity and value of the solid boxes today.

Characters Issued

- Superman
- Robin
- Batman
- Aquaman

Instant Identification

- ▶ Box is solid with no acetate window
- ▶ The front and back are identical; to determine the front, Superman must appear at the top of the box’s left side panel



This is the only package variant that includes an additional emblem on Superman’s cape.

Superman remains one of the most popular of all Mego Super-Heroes. Superman was available from the inception until the demise of the line, and is second only to Batman in number of retail catalog appearances.

1300/51300



This Superman prototype appeared on a photographic one-sheet, inserted into the 1972 Mego catalog. The costume is clearly hand-made, evidenced by the jagged belt and hemmed cape. The emblem is hand-drawn and the boots are painted Action Jackson Fisherman boots. The head is a hand-painted, original sculpture.

Superman was always popular, but initial demand for the figure was not as high as Mego anticipated. During the first full year of production, Mego case-packed Superman figures equal to Batman (9 each, out of 24). By 1974, the second full year, only 4 Superman figures were shipped with each case. By 1975, the quantity further dwindled to only 3 figures per case. In 1977, Superman case pack quantities reverted to the original 9 units; the increase likely in anticipation of the forthcoming live-action film.

FIGURE

With the exception of a small number of Type O bodies used when the line debuted, Mego released Superman in 1972 on a flesh colored Type 1 body. From 1975 onward, Mego produced the figure on a Type 2 body. In 1976, Palitoy issued a Fist Fighting Superman (right) in the United Kingdom (see “Fist-Fighters” section, page 147).

HEAD

The Superman head sculpt is a charming representation of the character, complete with the signature curl on the hairline. Mego immediately reused the head to represent boyfriend Don in the Dinah-mite line intended for girls. This figure kept with the Barbie concept that Dinah-mite overtly emulated, and Don was Mego’s answer to Mattel’s Ken. It was not unusual for Mego to reuse a head mold, and the company likely expected little buyer overlap between the two lines.

Within the WGSB, the head was also used to represent Clark Kent, when Mego created the Secret Identities figures exclusively for Montgomery Ward in 1974. The backs of Clark Kent and Superman necks are crudely inscribed with the legal notice, “N.P.P. Inc. © 1972”. Some Clark Kent heads (as with Bruce Wayne/early Batman and Dick Grayson/early Robin heads) bear faint or no inscription on the neck.

Superman used the same head sculpt throughout production. There are slight variations to the paint masks and material used over the years. New molds occasionally affected the shape slightly, but Mego made no aesthetic changes to the sculpt.



Above: 1974 Ward catalog detail shows the prototype suit, and Clark Kent as ultimately produced.

Above: Early head (above) used for Type 1 and Clark Kent figures, and later head (below) used for Type 2 figures.



OUTFIT

The Man of Steel comes with a blue bodysuit featuring sewn-in red trunks, a yellow stitched belt, and a red cape stitched to the collar. Superman figures have removable red boots, and the character's famous "S" emblem is a sticker applied to his chest.

The color of the polyester material changed over the years, so outfits will exhibit one of many different shades of blue. Early outfits have a decidedly purple tint. On some of the earliest Superman figures, the blue portion of the outfit is a corduroy-textured, polyester material. Known as the "ribbed" costume variation, all of the other 1st wave characters used a similar material. Ribbed Superman outfits are rare and should only appear on Type 1 outfits with nylon trunks. The ribbed outfits may or may not feature the stirrups (see page 15).

The original Superman bodysuit pattern has sleeves stitched to the torso separately, and is known as the "Sewn-Sleeve" variation. Later Superman outfits were cut from single pieces of cloth, and the sleeves are part of the torso pattern. This change was likely done to increase efficiency, by eliminating the labor required to cut and sew both sleeves to the torso of the outfit. The change was implemented during the Type 1 outfit, and remained throughout production of Type 2 bodysuits.

Several other characters have Type 2 outfits that revert to the Sewn-Sleeves pattern, after having been one piece suits for years. No examples of Sewn-Sleeve, Type 2 body Superman outfits have been discovered. Given the character's popularity, Superman costumes would have been produced continually, ostensibly throughout each costume pattern modification. Thus, Type 2 Sewn-Sleeve outfits may exist. While such a costume would be very rare, it is unlikely such a minute difference would increase desirability.

Mego issued this Type 2 outfit and figure in the 5-digit "old" logo box around Summer 1975, while transitioning from Type 1 to Type 2 bodies. The costume is unusual because it features nylon trunks rarely found on Type 2 outfits.



Across: 1st version Superman, with two large emblems, issued in the solid box only.



Emblem

The earliest Superman figures come with a large “S” chest sticker. These glossy paper emblems (below, left) are strikingly larger than subsequent versions. Probably to reduce costs, the larger stickers were quickly changed. Superman figures in the 1st Issue/1st Version box can contain either version sticker. The solid box was only issued for a few months, which gives an indication as to the rarity of large emblems. The large “S” stickers significantly increase the value of a Superman figure.

Superman comic book artist Paul H. Cassidy is credited with adding an “S” to the character’s cape. For a very short period when Mego first distributed Superman, they applied an additional large “S” sticker to the back of the cape. Superman figures with both large “S” stickers are extremely rare and will also increase the value of a loose Superman, even compared to a figure with only one large “S” sticker on the chest.

After reducing the size, Mego continued to produce the stickers with glossy paper (below, center). The glossy paper material remained unchanged until about 1978, around the time ©1977 Blister Cards were issued. These later Superman figures come with a modified “S” sticker known as the “cloth emblem” (below, right). Manufactured using a very thin, cloth-like material, these stickers maintain increased adhesiveness, making them less susceptible to falling off. Cloth emblems have a textured, matte finish compared to the paper stickers. Toward the end, Mego did not use either material exclusively. There are examples of ©1977 cards, as well as ©1979 cards, that use either paper or cloth material. Multiple production sites exhausting the supply of paper emblems at different rates may be responsible for this inconsistency.

Given that only 2nd Issue cards feature cloth emblems, this material should only appear on Type 2 Superman figures and never on Type 1 Superman figures.



Emblem variations shown actual size.

Trunks

Through the decade of production, Superman’s trunks experienced only one significant change: The initial Superman bodysuits have red trunks made from a shiny, stiff nylon. This is known as the “nylon trunks” variation. It is also possible that a corduroy material was temporarily used for the trunks, as with Batman and Aquaman, but there are no examples to confirm this.

Most Type 2 bodysuits feature polyester trunks. Though much scarcer, examples of Type 2 bodysuits with nylon trunks exist (see page 19). These specimens have only one snap set. Type 1 bodysuits with nylon trunks are accurate with or without stirrups, as the stirrup suit was discontinued well before polyester replaced nylon.

Cape

The red cape has one significant variation. For a short period, Superman capes were manufactured using a stiffer vinyl material, differing entirely from the typical nylon material. This variation is known as the “Vinyl Cape” variation. The Vinyl Cape is very difficult to detect from afar, but is striking upon close inspection. The Vinyl Cape material is more textured and rigid than the nylon version. The exact red vinyl material can also be found on equally rare Vinyl Cape Supergirl and Thor figures. It should be noted that this particular vinyl is different than the material used for the Vinyl Cape Batman and Shazam figures. Vinyl Capes only appear on Type 2 costumes, but it is unclear exactly when, or how frequently, this material was utilized for capes.

Superman figures with single large “S” stickers on the chest were issued only in the solid box and 1st Issue blister cards (both Kresge- and Mego-branded). Due to rarity and limited visibility of the back of the figure, no 1st Issue carded Superman figures have been identified with a second, large “S” sticker applied to the cape, and it’s unlikely they exist. Mego presumably eliminated the additional sticker quite promptly, even before manufacturing the 1st Issue Cards.

Snaps

Early Superman outfits contain two sets of snaps on the back of the costume, one at the neck, and another at the waistline. Sometime during the production of Type 1 outfits, Mego eliminated the snaps nearest the waistline, possibly as a cost cutting measure. Type 1 outfits can have one or two snap sets.

Double snap sets (much like the sewn-sleeves) mysteriously reappeared during production of Type 2 figures. Multiple production sites could be responsible for this. In 1979, Mego moved all costume manufacturing to new facilities in Mainland China. Type 2 outfits containing two sets of snaps are scarce, but genuine.

Most Superman outfits have metal snaps. The snaps changed slightly over the years, and they may be round or square. A more significant change occurred around 1981, when white plastic replaced the metal snaps. The change affected existing 8” lines still in production (e.g. Dukes of Hazzard). A Superman outfit with white plastic snaps is extremely rare, and should only feature a cloth emblem.



Boots

The earliest Superman figures with Type O and Type 1 bodies come with skinny boots (below left) and stirrup suit outfits (see page 15). The majority of Type 1 figures were produced after the skinny boot was modified, and feature the wider boot (below right).



Above: Original stirrup pants and subsequent closed-toe stockings.

Belt

Superman belts have two parallel stitches around the entire waistline. There were other characters (such as Aquaman and Captain America) with belts initially stitched in the same manner, while later versions eliminated the circumference stitch in lieu of a single stitch near the snap in back. However, Superman figures did not experience this modification. Even the 12” Superman figures issued in North America always feature circumference stitching, yet some foreign versions do not (e.g. the 12” Superman Denys Fisher distributed in the United Kingdom).

Earlier Superman belts were made from a vinyl that exhibits translucency, while subsequent belts are more opaque. This transition occurred during production of the Type 1 outfit, so no Type 2 outfits should contain a translucent belt. Once switched, the opaque material was used for the remainder of production.

Below: First-edition Type 1 figure, taken from Mego's original packaging, the solid box. Note the reddish-blue polyester bodysuit, large emblem, translucent belt and skinny boots.



Left: Fist Fighting Superman, released in the UK by Palitoy.

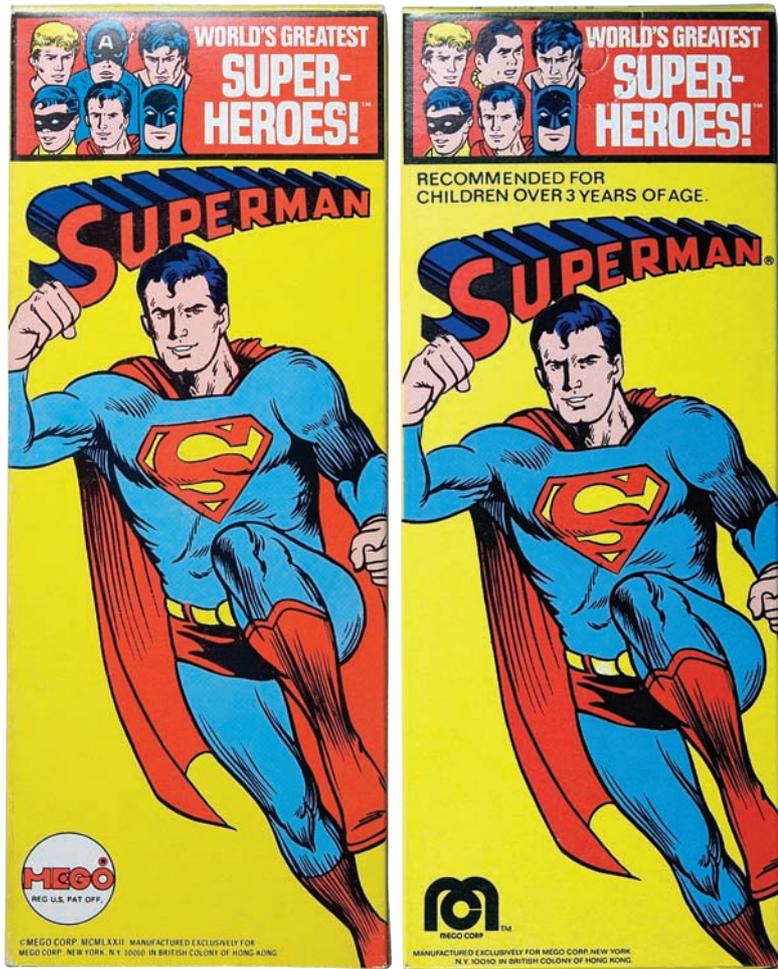
Above: Type 2 Superman with polyester trunks, small emblem and wide boots.

1300	1300	1300	4-01-26	1300	4-01-27	2-4 01-27	1300	1300	51300	51300	51300	51300	51300	51300	51300
November 1972	Spring 1973	Spring 1973	August 1973	Fall 1973	Winter 1973	February 1974	Winter 1974	Spring 1975	Summer 1975	Spring 1976	Summer 1976	Spring 1977	Fall 1978	Spring 1978	Spring 1979
Hb1s-MX-3p-4d-O	Hb1w-MX-3p-4d-O	Hc1-DC-4H-M-O	Hc1-DC-4H-Kv1-O	Hb1w-MX-4p-4d-O	Hc1-DC-4H-Kv2	Hc1-MX-6H-O	Hb1w-DC-3p-4d-O	Hc1-DC-6H-O	Hb1w-DC-3p-5d-O	Hb1w-DC-3p-5d-N	Hc1-DC-6H-N	c2-DC-76	c2-DC-77b	c2-DC-77c	c2-DC-79
		Mego	Kresge		Kresge	Kresge		Mego			Mego	1976	1977	1977	1979

Superman packaging variations are nearly representative of every package created for 1st Wave WGSB figures. Only one packaging variation (©1977a card) has not surfaced, though it probably exists. At the very end of the line, Mego used leftover Superman backer cards to exhaust the inventory of figures, linking Superman to the strange “Kitchen Sink” cards, containing either Aquaman or Captain America figures (see page 250).

BOXES

There are six distinct box variations for all 1st Wave Heroes. For the 2nd and 3rd Version boxes, Superman is the only character out of the eight lacking a white stroke around the acetate window. The only other notable differences are color separation errors. The bottom edge of the cape should be visible between Superman’s legs. The illustrator forgot the black line differentiating the background from the cape, and the color separator filled the area between his legs with solid red, effectively overextending the cape. This was eventually addressed, but problems persisted. By the final window box, the red was completely removed from between Superman’s legs. In doing so, the color separator mistakenly eliminated the entire cape below Superman’s left arm. This error is unique to the backs of 8” Superman boxes, as all side panel illustrations are correct. The same illustration appears on packaging for other Mego WGSB toys (e.g. Bend N’ Flex figures), and in some versions the illustration is correct, including the missing black line. It’s a strong reminder that in the days before computers and master art files, art was often created and recreated, as necessary.



Above: The backs of 2nd Version (left) and 6th Version boxes (right) demonstrate the printing errors on the cape, different Mego logos, and revised Age Labeling.

USA Packaging Checklist

For collectors who differentiate large emblem specimens, there are seventeen different variations. For those interested only in packaging design changes, there are sixteen different package variations:

- Hb1s-MX-3p-4d-O: 1st Issue/1st Version (Mixed) “Original Solid” box
- Hb1w-MX-3p-4d-O: 1st Issue/2nd Version (Mixed) “First Window” box
- Hc1-DC-4H-M-O: 1st Issue/1st Version (DC) “Mego” card
- Hc1-DC-4H-Kv1-O: 1st Issue/2nd Version (DC) “Kresge” card
- Hb1w-MX-4p-4d-O: 1st Issue/3rd Version (Mixed) “4 Panel” box
- Hc1-DC-4H-Kv2: 1st Issue/3rd Version (DC) “Kresge Reorder” card
- Hc1-MX-6H-O: 1st Issue/4th Version (Mixed) “FOB HK” card
- Hb1w-DC-3p-4d-O: 1st Issue/4th Version (DC) “4 Digit/Old Logo” box
- Hc1-DC-6H-O: 1st Issue/5th Version (DC) “Shazam!” card
- Hb1w-DC-3p-5d-O: 1st Issue/5th Version (DC) “5 Digit/Old Logo” box
- Hb1w-DC-3p-5d-N: 1st Issue/6th Version (DC) “New Logo” box
- Hc1-DC-6H-N: 1st Issue/6th Version (DC) “Green Arrow” card
- c2-DC-76: 2nd Issue/1st Version (DC) “76” card
- c2-DC-77b: 2nd Issue/3rd Version (DC) “77b” card
- c2-DC-77c: 2nd Issue/4th Version (DC) “77c” card
- c2-DC-79: 2nd Issue/5th Version (DC) “79” card

Below: 1st version box and the often missing cardboard spacer.



Above: Japanese toy maker Popy issued Superman with a unique window box.

Below: All six Superman box variants. Only the first three depict Captain America, as the fourth box represents Mego's segregation of Marvel and DC characters.



Above: The only box to feature four panels per side, the 3rd version has no white border around the acetate.



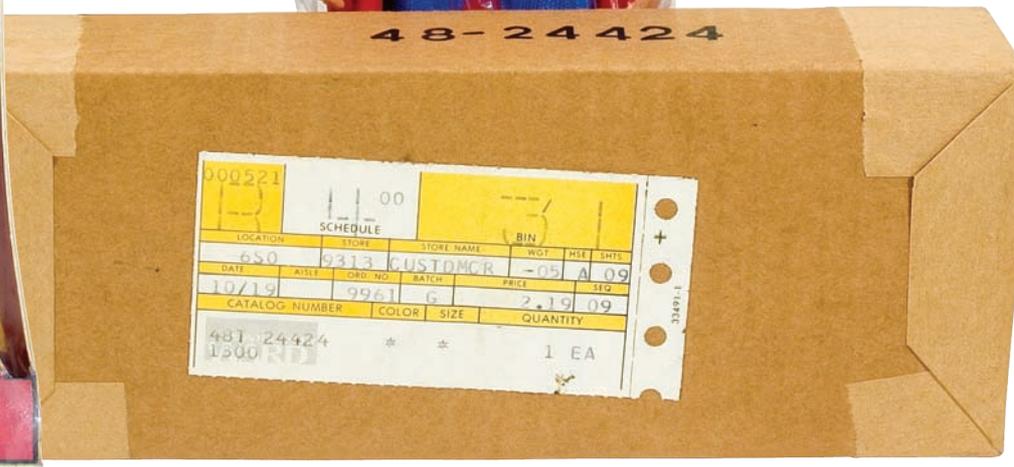
Left: Superman, manufactured and distributed in Mexico by Lili Ledy.



Left: 1973 Montgomery Ward Mailer box. Superman cost \$2.19 that year.



Right: Mego issued the final box in 1976, just before transitioning to the 2nd Issue card.





Above: Three of the six 1st Issue Superman cards. 1st Version Kresge (left), 4th Version Mego (center) and 5th Version Mego (right).



Above: All four, 2nd Issue U.S. card variants, left to right: 1976, 1977b, 1977c and 1979. No examples of a 1977a card have ever surfaced, though it may exist.



Batman is, unquestionably, the most popular of all the WGSB characters. Available from the inception until the demise of the line, Batman easily outsold all other characters. Offered in every 1st Wave packaging variant, Batman is the only Mego figure to appear in every retail catalog that included Mego Super-Heroes.

Batman sold continuously in the United States, as well as in every country Mego toys were distributed, including Australia, Belgium, Central and South America, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. The universal popularity of Batman contributed to the line's international success. Two noteworthy foreign-issued Batman figures are the unique Mexican figure, manufactured by Lili Ledy, and the British Fist-Fighter issued by Palitoy in 1976. Both figures are relatively scarce and desirable to collectors.

Batman and Robin battle Joker and Riddler using the Mobile Bat Lab, a crime-fighting vehicle Mego introduced in 1975.



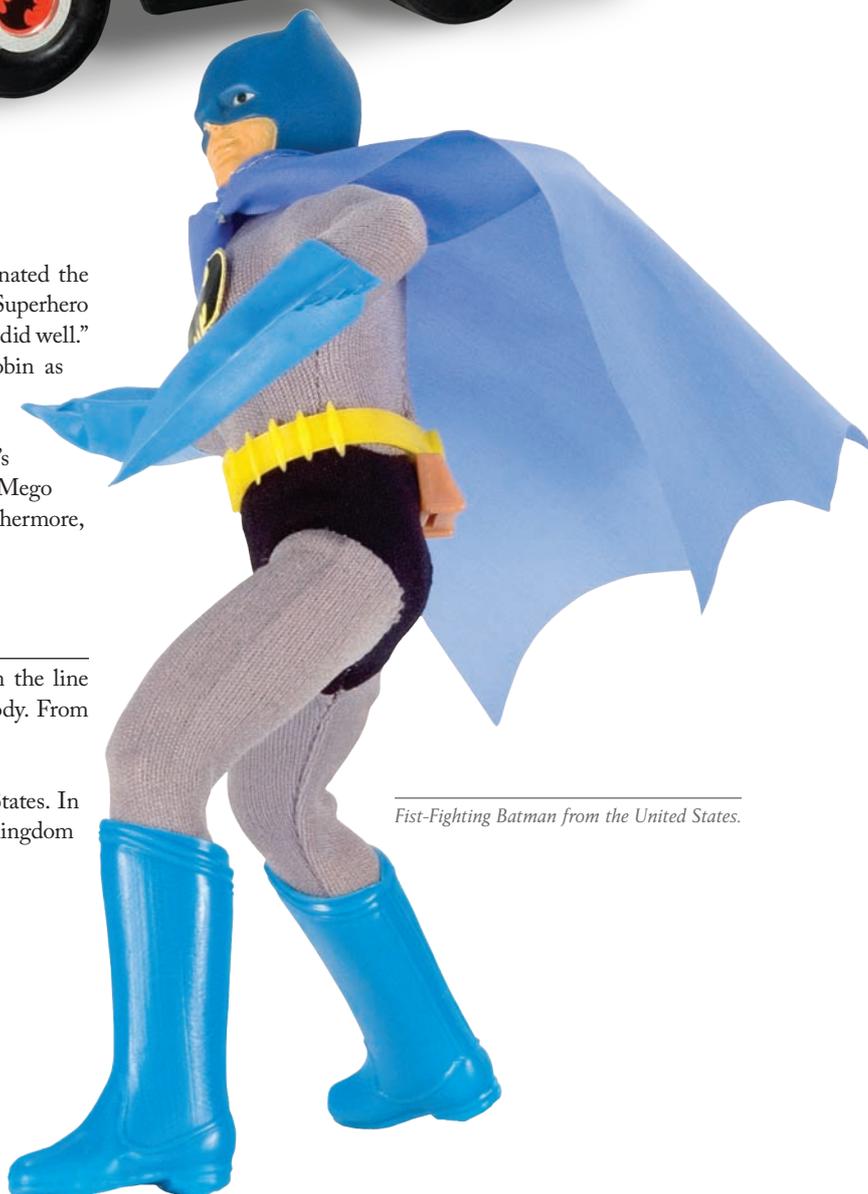
The "What's Selling" column in the February 1976 *Playthings* illuminated the public interest. "Roller Derby Skates moved well at \$7.99 and Mego's Superhero figures – Batman and Robin – at \$3.50 and the Mego Knights at \$3.69 did well." It is no accident the author specifically recognized Batman and Robin as characters eliciting noteworthy sales.

The WGSB vehicles and playsets veritably evidence the character's enduring popularity. Seven of the fourteen ancillary (non-figural) toys Mego produced were drawn specifically from the Batman mythology. Furthermore, both the Carry Case and the Hall of Justice have references to Batman.

FIGURE

With the exception of a small number of Type O bodies used when the line debuted, Mego released Batman in 1972 on a flesh colored, Type 1 body. From 1975 onward, Mego utilized the Type 2 body.

In 1975, Mego issued a special Fist-Fighting Batman in the United States. In 1976, Palitoy issued a similar Fist-Fighting Batman in the United Kingdom (see "Fist-Fighters" section, page 147).



Fist-Fighting Batman from the United States.

Emblem

Robin emblems are black circles with a yellow "R" in the middle. The size of Robin's emblem was unchanged throughout production, but there are two distinct materials and designs. For roughly the first half of Robin's production life, the emblem was printed on a glossy paper material (right), and the "R" is a bold typeface nearly touching the edges of the circle. This emblem is the only material used for all 1st Issue cards and boxes. After they transitioned to the 2nd Issue cards, Mego changed the emblem. The new material is a fabric exhibiting a textured, matte finish (below, left). The "R" also changed, to a rounded typeface thinner than the previous version. This emblem first appears on ©1977 2nd issue cards, but during that period both materials were used interchangeably.



Even the ©1979 French Pin Pin cards can have paper stickers, but by the time U.S. ©1979 cards arrived, Mego phased out the paper emblems.

Gloves

The vinyl material used for gloves has a waffled texture (below, left) on one side only. Originally, the material was heat-sealed in the same position with both pieces waffle side down. Eventually, the production was altered, and all subsequently produced gloves expose the bumpy side (below, right), with the waffle texture on the insides of the gloves.



Shoes

Robin was the first hero to receive footwear molded in soft rubber. Mego later gave other characters (such as Joker and Penguin) footwear made from the same malleable material. Subtle color shifts are not uncommon, but Mego made no intentional design modifications.



THE FIGURE

Aquaman was released in 1972, on a flesh colored Type 1 body. While examples of Superman, Batman and Robin were discovered with Type O bodies Mego used when launching the line, no such examples of Aquaman figures have surfaced. In 1975, Mego introduced the Type 2 body, propagating it to all figures by 1976.

The 1978 Mego catalog has two pictures of Aquaman with a hand variation that has long befuddled collectors. The first shows Aquaman among the 8" assortment and the second depicts the "Aquaman vs. The Great White Shark" playset. Both pictures clearly show that this figure has webbed hands with straightened fingers. Known as the "Webbed Hand" variation, only one specimen is known to exist (right). A well-known Mego dealer confirmed that each of the three Great White Shark playsets he owned contained regular hands beneath the gloves.

The packaging suggests that Aquaman can "swim with the shark," and the accompanying illustrations show Aquaman without any gloves. It isn't unusual for products in Mego catalogs to differ from production pieces, but this could be the only example of a prototype featured on the packaging. It is unknown exactly why the webbed hand was created, but theories abound (see page 235).

HEAD

Aquaman had only one head sculpture, and it was never used on any other Mego figure. Consistent with the other 1st wave heroes, Aquaman has a pleasing, cherubic face. With blonde hair and a distinctive hairline, it also stands apart from the three, black-haired figures.

Inexplicably, the character has pointed ears. As the comic book never depicted this oddity, it is possible the sculptor confused Aquaman for Marvel's aquatic hero, Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner. The backs of Aquaman necks are crudely inscribed with the legal notice, "N.P.P. Inc. © 1972".

OUTFIT

Aquaman's bodysuit has an orange top, green leggings with green vinyl fins sewn into the calves, and sewn-in black trunks. He has a yellow vinyl belt with a yellow "A" sticker (an upside-down "V") applied as the buckle. Over the years, Aquaman outfits experienced minor modifications.

Initial Aquaman bodysuits contain separate sleeves stitched to the torso section. This is known as the "Sewn Sleeve" variation. Possibly altered to increase efficiency, later Aquaman outfits had the torso and sleeves cut from a single piece of material. Modifying the pattern in this way eliminated the labor and thread needed to sew both sleeves to the body of the outfit. This change occurred during the Type 1 outfit and remained for the duration of production; no Type 2 outfits containing sewn sleeves have been confirmed. A Type 2 sewn sleeve outfit would be interesting, but this minor variation is not necessarily desirable to collectors.

Aquaman figures in a solid box will always be a Type 1 body with a stitched translucent belt, paper emblem, gloves with waffle texture on one side, nylon trunks, and sewn sleeves.

The truly wonderful and unique Webbed Hand Aquaman (left), and detail of the hand (right).

Right: Aquaman's pointed ears is one of the great Mego mysteries.

In the years before online stores and shopping malls — before many stores maintained year-round toy aisles, even — mail order was a vital tool for manufacturers and retailers to reach consumers. Each year, stores like Sears and Montgomery Ward offered giant, product-filled Christmas catalogs, a source of tremendous joy for children of the 1970s; Kids spent countless hours poring through each catalog's toy section, circling items on dog-eared pages and compiling a Wish List for Santa.

Mego did a lot of business with catalog-producing retailers, called “catalog houses” by Mego staff. The business was cutthroat, each seeking an exclusive Mego item, such as the Secret Identities and Isis, to differentiate them from the competition.

Linda McNett, administrative assistant to Mego vice president Neal Kublan, recalled the push-and-pull of negotiating catalog placement. “The catalog houses liked their special items, because they were more profitable than a non-special item,” she explained. “Mego could offer them a ‘different’ product with a different stock number, [allowing the retailer to] avoid the legal problems of offering special deals on the same item to select customers.”

Working directly for Kublan, McNett had plenty of experience working to appease each store. “Everyone hated doing catalog items,” she declared in a 2006 interview with the author. “Retailer demands would often force Mego to minimize regular items, in order to sell them at a price in the catalog that allowed retailers to maintain their margin. Sometimes a plain brown package could be enough to make the difference. More often, pieces or equipment from the original retail items were subtracted until the cost came out to what the buyer expected.”

Once they reached an agreement with a retailer for a catalog item, Mego endured a mad scramble, preparing the product for the catalog. “Because catalogs had to be created and circulated so early in the year, rushing to get samples for their photography on time was a monstrous headache,” McNett explained. “Sometimes their photography sample was the only one that existed [if the item were] brand new at the time.”

Most catalog deals were negotiated leading up to, and during Toy Fair, held each February. “Catalogs were typically shot in the summer,” McNett stated. “And you couldn't send them photos, they had to have samples. That was just the way they did things.” Often at the expense of their own

promotional needs, Mego accommodated the catalog houses. “Generally, the prototypes for photography went to the catalog houses first, because of their early shooting schedule,” she explained.

“Mego started developing most toy concepts one year before the Toy Fair at which they were introduced, and Mego conceived almost twice as many products as it ultimately produced,” McNett recalled. “We counted it up once, and one out of five made it from prototype to catalog.”

“Mego could do a prototype in three weeks. The problem was getting it into our own catalog, because that was usually at the limit of the photography and printing schedule for the Toy Fair catalog,” which took three weeks to create. “The product

had to be photographed, copy had to be written, the layout for the catalog had to be switched around, and the catalog printed. [Mego product] catalogs sometimes weren't ready until right before Toy Fair,” she said.

Mego printed product catalogs annually, occasionally offering a smaller, supplemental catalog during the year. “Price sheets were reprinted every time there was a change,” according to McNett. “For example, adding or subtracting an item, a price change, or anything else that would make the price lists obsolete. That's why price sheets had dates in the corner so one would know how current the price list was.”

Left: The highlighted date code printed in the upper-left corner of this 1976 price sheet reflects the print-date of May 10, 1976 (051076).

CATALOG PRODUCTION TIME LINE

To illustrate Mego's product development process for catalog items, Linda McNett drafted this hypothetical time line of a Mego product destined to appear in a 1975 Christmas catalog.

November 1974 through January 1975

Mego previews new item from their upcoming Toy Fair 1975 line to preferred toy buyers (such as Sears and Toys “R” Us) with models, sketches, or whatever they've got. Both the buyer and the seller are determining how hot the new item will be, so the buyers can save room in their “open to buy” budgets. Discussing “specials” for the Christmas 1975 catalog (a year away), the buyer also discreetly advises Mego if a competitor may be coming out with a similar item.

February 1975 — Toy Fair

Major buyers get a better look at the new products, while mid to low-level buyers get their first look. New items in the catalog are primarily “looks-like” models or prototypes; generally, Mego has done no production yet.

Spring 1975

Retail buyers estimate how many items they will buy, followed by negotiations for Christmas 1975 catalog space. Mego tries to get as much space as possible for promotional reasons, while the catalog house tries

to match the amount of catalog space to the item's profitability. This is also when catalog houses decide with Mego what “specials” [exclusives] they want for their Christmas 1975 catalog.

Late Summer 1975

Catalog houses begin photography for their Christmas catalogs. They have very tight schedules; if Mego doesn't get samples of the new item to the catalog house in time, it will be dropped from the catalog. If Mego has an early production sample, we send that. Otherwise, the catalog houses get prototypes. At the same time, Mego is finalizing the package design. This is generally when all buyers finalize their orders for the coming Christmas season and beyond. No order is carved in stone, however, and orders can be increased, decreased or cancelled as necessary. The two problem areas are 1) Hot new products the buyer can't get fast enough and; 2) Disappointing products that are not “selling through” (moving off the shelves).

Fall 1975

Production begins at Mego's factories. Catalog houses distribute their Christmas 1975 catalogs to consumers. All shipments to buyers must be substantially complete by December 1st of 1975 to avoid cancellation of the order.



The exquisite figures pictured on this page are Montgomery Ward mail order figures, purchased as a complete set in 1973.

NEW! The exciting world of SUPER HEROES™

8-inch figures

2¹⁹

2¹⁹

2¹⁹

D Batman **E Robin** **F Superman**



Above: In 1973, Montgomery Ward was one of the first retailers to feature WGS in Christmas catalogs.

Emblem

There are two distinct variations for Captain America's emblem, and both are made from cloth, not paper. Initially, the emblem was a soft felt material. Known as the "felt" star (below left), Mego used a weak adhesive, often resulting in detachment.

The emblem material remained unchanged until around 1978. Later issued Type 2 figures feature a relatively thin fabric. These stickers (below right) have a glossy finish and a subtle waffle pattern. The majority of these emblems are found on ©1979 cards, but they were introduced while the ©1975 cards were still in production. Stars were rarely applied straight; one point often faces downward!

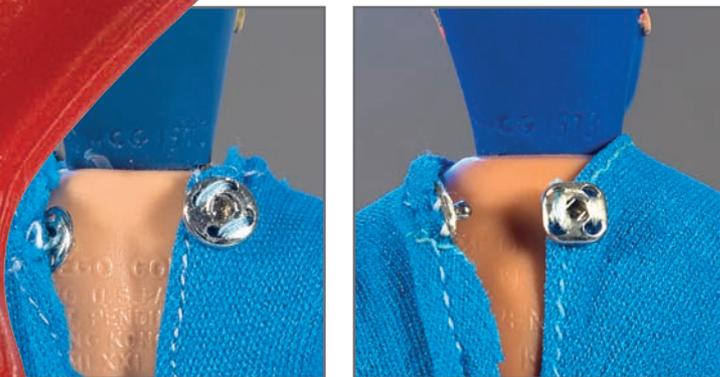


Snaps

Early Captain America outfits contain two sets of snaps on the back of the costume, one at the neck, and another at the waistline. Sometime during the production of Type 1 outfits, Mego eliminated the snaps nearest the waistline, possibly as a cost cutting measure. Type 1 outfits can have one or two snap sets.

Despite having been phased out, double snap sets reappeared during production of Type 2 figures. This recurrence coincides with the unstitched belts, which necessitates lower snaps in order to secure the belt.

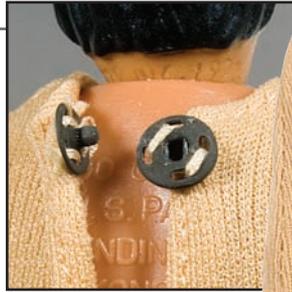
Captain America outfits have metal snaps. Metal snaps have a tendency to become very difficult to separate; after so many years, the metal becomes soft. The snaps did change slightly over the years, as they may be round or square. While unconfirmed, it is possible that toward the end of the line, white plastic replaced metal. Plastic snaps are a common modification for those figures produced after 1981 (including Captain America).



Bodysuit

The original bodysuit pattern called for sleeves sewn separately to the torso. This is known as the "Sewn Sleeve" variation. Later outfits were cut from single pieces of cloth, with the sleeves part of the torso's cut pattern. This change was likely done to increase efficiency, eliminating the labor required to sew both sleeves to the torso. The change was not implemented until after the Type 2 body was introduced. All Type 1 figures have sewn sleeves, while Type 2 figures can have either version of the suit.

Tarzan bodysuits contain one set of snaps on the back of the costume, at the neck. As with the loincloth, the bodysuit snaps may be round or square, but are always metal.



Loincloth

The leopard-print pattern on the loincloth, as with all other screen-printed Mego outfits, can be one of innumerable patterns. Mego printed the pattern on large bolts of cloth, and then cut the material to size. The patterns for Tarzan's loincloth vary, but are all very similar. The material also varies, but is always thick corduroy. Each loincloth includes one metal snap set. The snaps may be round or square, and may connect in either direction (left-over-right or right-over-left). The stitching thread is either yellow or orange.



Tarzan loincloths can have round (above) or square (left) snaps, and can connect in either direction.

Knife

Mego used an existing mold to accessorize Tarzan. The knife is identical to those found in the Action Jackson Secret Agent outfits, and is embossed on one side of the blade, with the letters "H.K." (Hong Kong). The loincloth is not tight enough to hold the knife firmly in place, so the factory added a small rubber band around the figure's waist (right). The band is usually hidden by the loincloth, and is often missing, even on packaged specimens.



Across: Type 1 Tarzan.

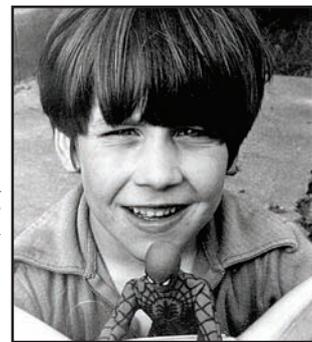


Kids continually demanded Spider-Man, so Mego exploited the license several times. In 1974, Mego introduced the peculiar “Supervator” playset. While not specifically branded as a Spider-Man toy, the packaging features the wall-crawler along with his arch nemesis, Green Goblin. For Christmas 1974, Spider-Man’s alter ego, Peter Parker, was the only Marvel character among the Montgomery Ward-exclusive Secret Identity outfits.

In 1976, Mego offered a vehicle for Spider-Man. Depending upon whom you ask, credit for the dubious idea is given to either Marvel or Mego. Mego executives credit Stan Lee, recalling Lee’s argument that if Batman could have a car, so should Spider-Man. Marvel’s “Spider-Mobile” appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man* comics between November 1973 and September 1976. While the other Mego vehicles debuting in 1976 (Captain America and Green Arrowcar) lasted only one year, Mego produced the Spider-Car for four consecutive years.



Right: A very happy Andrew Jones, with rare Circle-Suit Spider-Man, circa 1974.

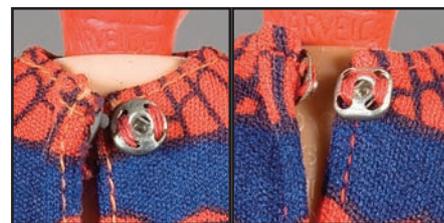


Left: The Amazing Spider-Car.

OUTFIT

Mego factories lacked the ability to use master artwork for any screen-printed outfits. Each time costumes were produced, new artwork was created. The result is a host of different outfits, some scarcer than others.

Early Spider-Man outfits contain two sets of snaps on the back of the costume, one at the neck, and another at the waistline. All Spider-Man outfits have metal snaps, which changed slightly over the years. They may be round or square. While unconfirmed, it is possible Mego used white plastic snaps toward the end of the line.



Sometime during the production of Type 1 outfits, Mego eliminated the snaps nearest the waistline, possibly as a cost cutting measure. Therefore, Type 1 outfits can have one or two snap sets. Double snap sets (much like the sewn-sleeves) mysteriously reappeared during production of Type 2 figures. Multiple production sites could be responsible for this. In 1979, Mego moved all costume manufacturing to new facilities in Mainland China. Type 2 outfits containing two sets of snaps are scarce, but genuine.

FIGURE

Spider-Man was initially released in 1973, on a flesh colored Type 1 body with red hands. Most Spider-Man bodies are flesh-toned, but some later Type 2 torsos are cast in red. It’s possible the color change was based on aesthetics, as the torso is visible around the neck of the original figures. Given that Spider-Man was produced for two years before Mego introduced the Type 2 body, however, it is more likely that such torsos were simply shared with Human Torch figures.

In 1976, Mego issued the Fist Fighting Spider-Man exclusively in the United Kingdom (see “Fist-Fighters” section, page 147).

HEAD

Spider-Man heads are molded with red rubber, debossed with web details; the sculptor etched subtle lines into the head, in lieu of applying black paint to define the lines. Painting the web details on the head may not have been feasible, given the rudimentary paint masks Mego used at the time. Mego did, however, apply black and white paint for the famous teardrop eyes. The backs of Spider-Man necks are crudely inscribed with the legal notice, “©MARVEL CG 1972”.



Across: “Broken” Circle-Suit Spider-Man.



OUTFIT

Shazam's outfit is not entirely accurate, but is pleasing in its simplicity. While the comic book character wears a collared white cape embroidered with gold trim and floral symbols, Mego opted for a solid yellow cape with a collar. The comic book character also has ornate cuffed boots, while Mego's version merely reused an existing mold without cuffs.

The original bodysuit pattern has sleeves sewn separately to the torso. This is known as the "Sewn-Sleeve" variation. Later Shazam outfits were cut from single pieces of cloth, with the sleeves part of the torso's cut pattern. The change was implemented during the Type 1 outfit, and remained that way throughout production of Type 2 bodysuits.



Cuffs

The polyester material used for the cuffs varies in texture and color. For a short period, it was decidedly orange. These typically appear on Type 1 figures, and are likely the result of a particular batch of material purchased by a single factory.

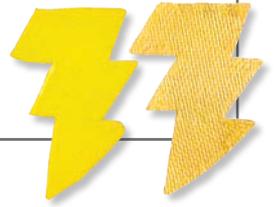


Boots

Shazam was introduced after Mego eliminated the "skinny" boot mold, so all figures have the wider boot mold.

Emblem

The majority of Shazam costumes have glossy paper emblems (below left). The lightning bolt remained unchanged until Mego issued the ©1979 card. These later figures have a cloth emblem (below right), manufactured using a very thin material. Cloth emblems have a textured, matte finish compared to the glossy paper stickers. These emblems maintain increased adhesiveness, and are less likely to fall off. Unlike Superman, the cloth emblem has not surfaced on a ©1977 2nd issue card.



Cape

The cut pattern for all capes is the same, featuring a stitched elastic band and a collar. A variety of nylon was utilized, so capes can be one of numerous shades of yellow. Aside from color, there is a significant and rare cape variation. For an unknown period of time, a small number of figures included vinyl capes instead of nylon. The history of this material is unknown, but it first appeared after the introduction of the 2nd issue card.



Right: Detail of vinyl cape on ©1976 card. Note the texture and lighter color.





Shoes

Supergirl shoes are among the most desirable accessories to collectors. Lacking a heel, the shoes are prone to falling off, becoming easily lost. Each shoe was created from the same mold, and features wonderful detailing.

Emblem

While other characters' early emblems are smooth paper stickers, only Supergirl and Batgirl feature emblems produced with a textured, cloth-like material. Years later, a similar material replaced other characters' paper emblems.



Belt

In the United States, Mego issued only the elastic belt, similar to, but smaller than the early Robin belts. When Pin Pin released Supergirl in France (after her discontinuance in the U.S.), the factory used an existing Dinah-mite belt mold with a "peace sign" belt buckle.



Cape

Nearly all Supergirl capes are nylon, but there is one significant variation. For a short period, Mego manufactured the cape using a stiffer vinyl material. This variation is known as the "Vinyl Cape" variation. More textured and rigid than the nylon version, the Vinyl Cape is very difficult to detect from afar, but is striking upon close inspection. The exact red vinyl material can also be found on equally rare "Vinyl Cape" Superman and Thor figures. Vinyl Capes only appear on 2nd Issue cards, but it is unclear exactly when, or how frequently, Mego utilized this material. A short elastic band keeps the cape in place, and can only be removed by separating the head from the neck.

Insets: Texture detail of nylon cape (top), the vinyl cape's bumpy side (middle) and the vinyl cape's smooth side (bottom).

Above: Exposed side of a nylon cape.

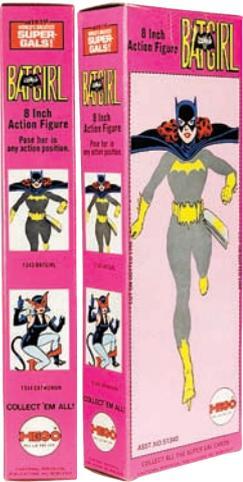
Above: Supergirl with vinyl cape.



1343	1343	8-3 \$2.68	8-3 \$2.96	51343	51343	51343	51343	51317
December 1973	December 1973	February 1974	Winter 1974	Winter 1975	Spring 1977	Fall 1977	Spring 1979	Summer 1981
Gb2v1	Gc1-M	Gc1-Kv1	Gc1-Kv2	Gb2v2	c2-DC-76	c2-DC-77b	c2-DC-79	c-RED

Mego issued Batgirl in window boxes, 1st Issue cards and four different 2nd Issue cards, two of which bear unique markings. The first is a typical ©1976 card. The second version uses the ©1976 artwork but the Marked Year of Release (MYOR) reads “1977.” Either Batgirl was the first character issued on a ©1977 card, before new artwork was introduced, or it’s a simple oversight. No U.S. Batgirl cards use the ©1977 artwork. The third version uses ©1979 artwork, but the MYOR still reads “1977,” surely a mistake. Lastly, the rare generic Red card with a ©1979 MYOR, was sold exclusively through Toys ‘R Us.

The Batgirl illustration on 2nd Issue card-backs is one of the graphical elements collectors use to distinguish DC cards, as the purse and bodysuit coloration changed several times. The ©1976, ©1977a and ©1977b cards depict a gray suit and a purse with a yellow bat. The ©1977 and ©1979 cards feature a black bodysuit. The ©1977c card depicts a black purse with a red bat. The ©1979 card depicts a red purse with a black bat. The inverted colors reveal the outlines of the purse.



Both Batgirl box variants are identical, except for the item codes. The first box (left) features the 4-digit codes while the second (right) uses the 5-digit codes.

Below: The first Batgirl Kresge card. The second version features a \$2.96 pre-printed price sticker.



Left: ©1976 card.



Right: ©1977b card (note the straight arms and opaque plastic accessories).



Left: ©1979 card.



Right: Generic Red card.

USA Packaging Checklist

There are nine different package variations:

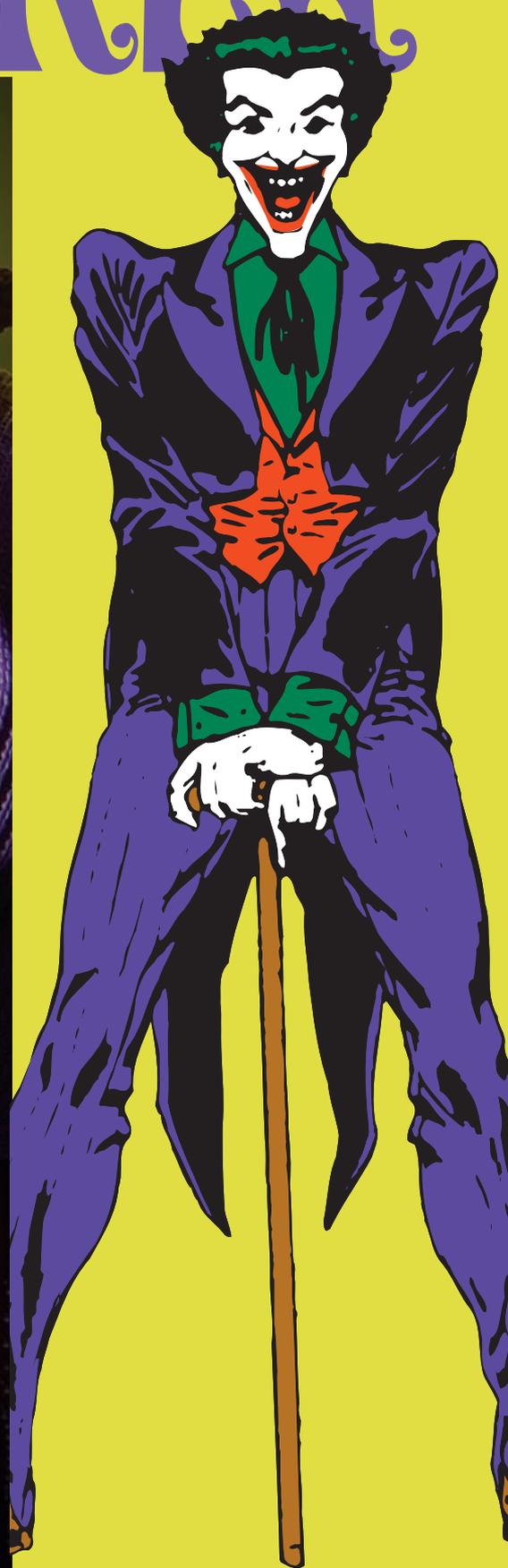
- Gb2v1: 2nd Issue/1st Version (Gals) “4-digit” box
- Gc1-M: 1st Issue (Gals) “Original Mego Gals” card
- Gc1-Kv1: 1st Issue/1st Version (Gals) “\$2.68 Kresge” card
- Gc1-Kv2: 1st Issue/2nd Version (Gals) “\$2.96 Kresge” card
- Gb2v2: 2nd Issue/2nd Version (Gals) “5-digit” box
- c2-DC-76: 2nd Issue/1st Version (DC) “1976” card
- c2-DC-77b: 2nd Issue/3rd Version (DC) “1977b” card*
- c2-DC-79: 2nd Issue/4th Version (DC) “1979” card†
- c-RED: 2nd Issue/Generic (DC) “Red” card

* Artwork matches ©1976 card, but copyright reads “1977”
 † Artwork matches ©1979 card, but copyright reads “1977”

Joker™ and © 2007 DC Comics.

1351/51351

BATMAN'S Arch Enemy
JOKER



Among the Super-Foes, Joker is generally considered the fan-favorite. Mego consistently sold large quantities of Joker figures, including a Fist-Fighting version. Mego sub-licensed Joker to Palitoy in the United Kingdom and to Lili Ledy in Mexico.



Clark Kent and Peter Parker

Clark Kent's head is the same sculpture Mego created for Superman. Along with black dress shoes, Superman's alter ego wears a white polyester shirt with a red felt tie stitched to a single snap at the neck, and a blue polyester-knit suit. Black rubber glasses and a black plastic hat complete the ensemble.

Peter Parker's head is the same sculpture Mego created for Shazam, but painted with blue eyes and a widow's peak. Along with white cleats, Spider-Man's alter ego wears blue polyester pants and a red polyester turtleneck. The pattern is similar to the Action Jackson Secret Agent outfit, which Mego manufactured in black polyester.

(D) Superman's Clark Kent suit and Spiderman's Peter Parker outfit. Figures not included.
 48 G 24714—Ship. wt. 3 oz. set 4.49
 Above items not recommended for children under 3.



Above: Back view of Peter Parker's turtleneck.

The 4th Wave of characters, released in 1976, was Mego's final WGSB-branded wave. Mego distributed five new heroes after the 1976 Toy Fair, whose inclusion within the line is cause for great debate among collectors.

Isis was first issued as a Christmas 1976 catalog exclusive, and the Teen Titans debuted in 1977. None feature any direct reference to the World's Greatest Super-Heroes on their unique packaging designs. The Titans card back promotes the WGSB Hall of Justice Playset, yet describes it as "Headquarters for your team of action heroes." By itself, the promotion of a playset on a blister card is unique, but one wonders why Mego didn't promote the WGSB line or the concurrently produced Wayne Foundation playset.

Many collectors refuse to accept Isis and the Teen Titans as part of the WGSB. However, there are several compelling points to consider before deciding whether these figures merit inclusion. For example, Isis bears an intriguing item number. When adding new products to the line, Mego typically assigned new item numbers in chronological order. They would also occasionally recycle numbers from discontinued products. Isis, however, is 51345, a continuation of the Super-Gals' item numbers from 1973. The correspondence of her item number with the Super-Gals wave, rather than a new and separate number, suggests Mego considered her one of the Super-Heroes. The Teen Titans received unique assortment and item numbers consistent with WGSB figures.

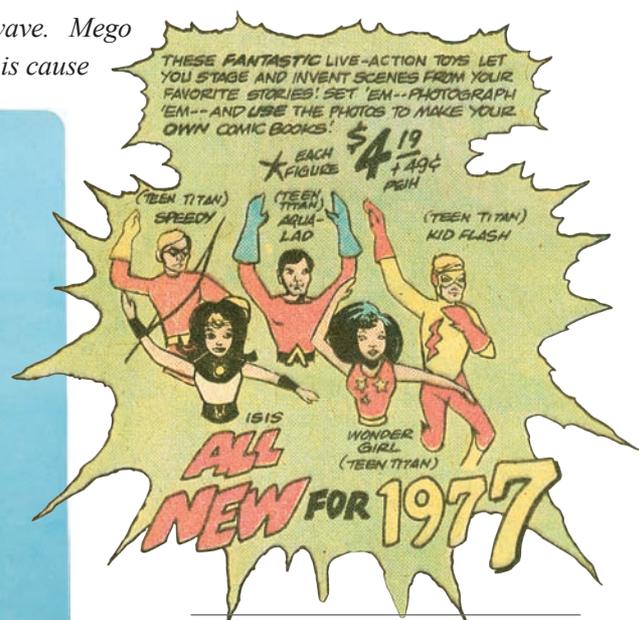
Further, Isis and the Teen Titans were licensed characters. All five were promoted, distributed and sold alongside WGSB-branded toys. In the 1977 Mego catalog, the Teen Titans are offered as a distinct WGSB assortment. These irrefutable facts support their inclusion, at least in this book, if not the hearts of all collectors.

A logical explanation for the lack of WGSB branding may exist. At the time, Mego felt pressured by the licensors to back away from the term "super-heroes," which Mego trademarked. Neal Kublan worked with DC and Marvel, surrendering the trademark to both companies. Even the term "Official" was being phased out, and Mego eliminated it entirely on the final packaging design. Thus, avoiding the WGSB masthead for the Teen Titans was likely an intentional shift away from a problematic title.

The card back features a photograph of the Teen Titans, depicting Wondergirl with flesh-toned, cloth sleeves (right). There is just one known example of this production sample (left). Mego ultimately manufactured the bodysuits without sleeves.



Mego produced the Teen Titans with considerations beyond expansion of the line. In a 2004 panel discussion, Mego vice president Neal Kublan noted, "It was just another one of those things to make sure nobody else got [the license]. And also to keep DC and LCA, the licensing arm, happy. We had to keep coming up with fresh things, and we took them right out of the comics." DC Comics' animosity, hinted at by Kublan, is hardly surprising given that merely one of the twelve previous Super-



Above: Premiering in the April 1977 Heroes World catalog, Aqualad and Kid Flash sold out before the next catalog was released later that year.

Heroes was based on a DC character. The other eleven characters came from DC's competitor, Marvel Comics. By the time they solicited the Titans, Mego had not introduced any new DC characters for two years.

At this point, Mego already 'locked' their WGSB character offering, by virtue of the 2nd Issue Card design, which depicts all available characters. In the aforementioned panel discussion, Marty Abrams pointed out, "[The Titans] were an after-thought... they were specialty." Mego warehouse manager Ray Demato, despite his uncanny recollection of the toys, later confessed, "I don't remember them at all."

There is one packaging design for all four figures, and only the characters' names changed. Mego used existing male body molds from their 7" Lion Rock War Heroes, and created a diminutive female body with bendable arms, along with head sculpt and costumes to produce the Titans. The figures are absolutely gorgeous, and represent some of Mego's finest work. The heads are detailed and refined, and include rooted hair for Wondergirl. The costumes enjoy the latest production techniques, including rubber boots and gloves. Kid Flash bears a heat-sealed lightning bolt emblem, a vast improvement over adhesive stickers.



The Teen Titans had an extremely short production life, offered to retailers only once, at Toy Fair in February 1977. With no marketing support, and little interest from buyers, the Teen Titans failed. "We did not do a lot of business in Teen Titans," confirmed Marty Abrams in a 2004 panel discussion. Shoppers could find Teen Titan figures on closeout racks at Toys "R" Us stores well into the 1980s.



Above: The Teen Titans boast exquisite costume detail and some of the most realistic head sculptures Mego produced.

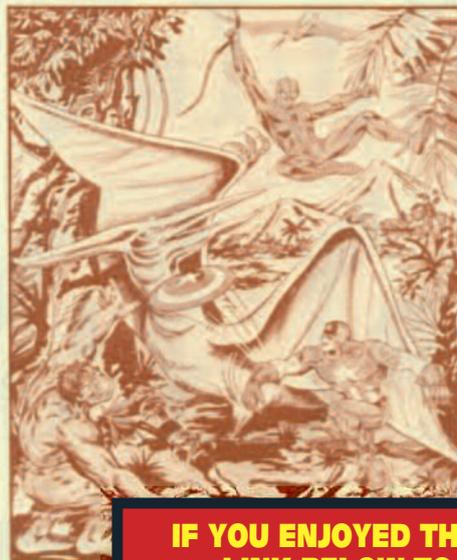
SUPER HEROES™ PROMOTION

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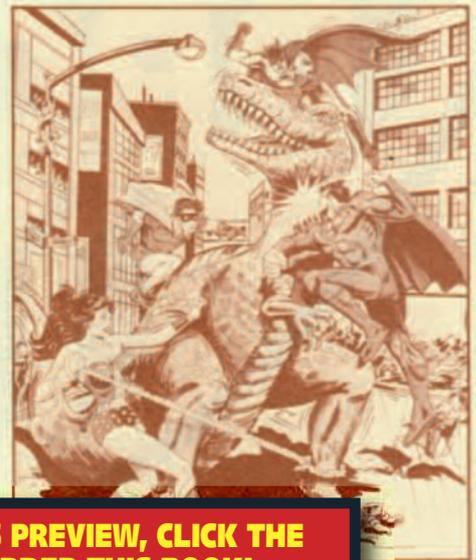
For a limited time, Mego is packing its 8" Super Heroes in an easy to erect display with free posters. Each pre-packed display contains 4 dozen Super Heroes and 96 free posters (48 D.C. Comics characters and 48 Marvel characters). In addition, for those accounts that will be building larger displays, we are offering a separate shipper containing 96 posters (48 of each style) and a display card. Your customers will get a free poster with every Mego Super Heroes purchase. Posters of this type have had an advertised value of \$6.00!



PRE-PACK DISPLAY



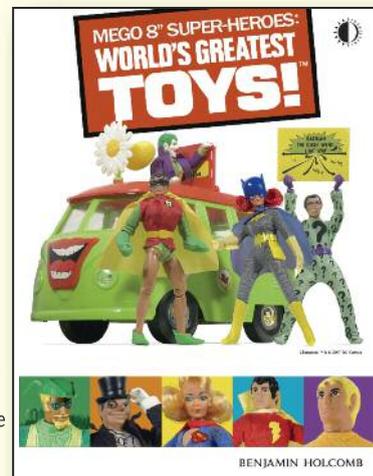
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- (b) He also enters toy shopping spree sweepstakes
- (c) Grand Prize* is all the Mego toys he can buy
- (d) Child gets to redeem prize at toy store
- (e) No purchase required for sweeps entry.

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