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Tramfare

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The Hong Kong 'Standard' Post-War Trams

John Prentice pays homage to these iconic tramcars

Perhaps the favourite, and certainly the most iconic of Hong Kong trams were the "post-war" cars that were built between 1950 and 1964 following a 1949 prototype. If you include the one rebuilt from a trailer car in 1979 there were 163 trams of this type.

The underframe, lower deck bulkheads and side frames up to window level were of welded steel construction with troughing for the main cables integral with the frame. Reinforcing plates were welded from the floor to the side frames to give additional strength and both were cross braced. The bodies were built up with teak framing and the outside was covered with aluminium panels. The seating on the upper deck was two-and-one with a crossbench seat facing inwards at each end. The seats had slatted backs and rattan bottoms for coolness. The lower deck had two longitudinal seats of tongued and grooved varnished teak. The bodies were mostly constructed by the local dockyard workshops, with a few by Hong Kong Tramways (HKT) themselves.

As built, the livery was plain Brunswick green (British racing car green) for the exterior, which tended to darken with age, and with no lining or advertisements. Separate adverts were later fitted and for a short time in the 1960s some cars received yellow lower-deck panels. Later the livery was jade green and then apple green until finally they had all over advertising. The interior was green below the windows, white above. The trucks, lifeguard, and fender were painted black.

These cars were designed by Mr. C. S. Johnston when he was Chief Engineer. The first 100 or so used Peckham P.22 or P.35 8ft 6in wheel-base trucks (supplied by Brush) recovered and renovated from pre-war trams, some dating back to 1925. As additional new trucks were not available from Brush, Maley and Taunton supplied a similar pendulum design and some trucks were constructed locally. English Electric 305 33.5hp motors were mostly used, with Dick, Kerr form K4 controllers and Maley and Taunton air wheel-brakes.

Basic Data

Length: 29ft. 2in. Width: 6ft. 6in.

Gauge: 3ft. 6in. Wheelbase: 8ft. 6in.

Unladen weight: 12 tons

Height over trolley plank: 14ft 9¼in.

Seats: 63 (as built), 50 (in final form, with one class and driver only; 23 lower, 27 upper)

As originally built there were two classes with first-class passengers boarding the tram at the front and proceeding to the upper deck, while third-class passengers boarded at the rear for the lower deck; there was a conductor on each deck. In 1972 the two classes were dispensed with and a second staircase was added at the rear nearside where a seated conductor collected fares. From 1973 onwards the straight staircase was removed and a second spiral one was fitted at the front offside.

From 1976 these cars became driver-only operated, rear entry and front exit, with passengers paying in a fares box next to the driver. From the early 1980s onwards, the closed panel where the nearside front staircase used to be was opened up and replaced by a window, and the blind box moved to the lower part of the panel covering the rear staircase. At the same time the upper-deck end hopper vents (above the end central window) were removed and flush paneling fitted. From 1986 the lifeguards began to be replaced by a skirt on trams that were remaining in service for a time. The last "post-war" car ran in 1991, although heritage car 120 is a replica of this type and is in service. There is another replica, albeit static, at Ocean Park and there is one original car in the Hong Kong Museum of History. One (in poor condition) is in the US.

The photographs on the following pages show the trams at their most attractive and colourful in 1982 and were taken by the late H.Ball. My thanks go to Joseph Tse for verification of some of the locations.

Further information is available in the book 'Hongkong Tramways' by Joseph Tse and John Prentice, and published in 2017 by the LRTA.

On the front cover: Car 83 at Yee Wo Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong in 1982. The tram was built in 1953 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company.

On the back cover: Car 127, still with its upper-deck front hopper vent, stands in Sharp Street East depot together with 125 and 126. It was built in 1953 by Hongkong Tramways Ltd as was 126, but 125 was built the previous year by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company.

Car 1 is in Johnston Road, Wan-chai. The colourful livery advertises Korean instant noodles. The tram was built in 1954 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company and had probably been recently renovated.



Car 19 is in Des Voeux Road Central, in front of the old Bank of China. The building site to the right is for the new Hong Kong and Shanghai bank skyscraper. 'Incabloc' is a Swiss movement for wind-up watches. The tram was built in 1951 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company.



Car 70 in Des Voeux Road Central, by the old Supreme Court. The livery for Northwest Orient Airlines was one of several airline adverts at this time. It was built in 1951 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company.



All photos by H.Ball



Car 75 is at Jackson Road in Central, with the Hilton Hotel in the background. It was built in 1953 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company. Just in view is 119 which still has its upper-deck front hopper vent and remains in the jade green livery.

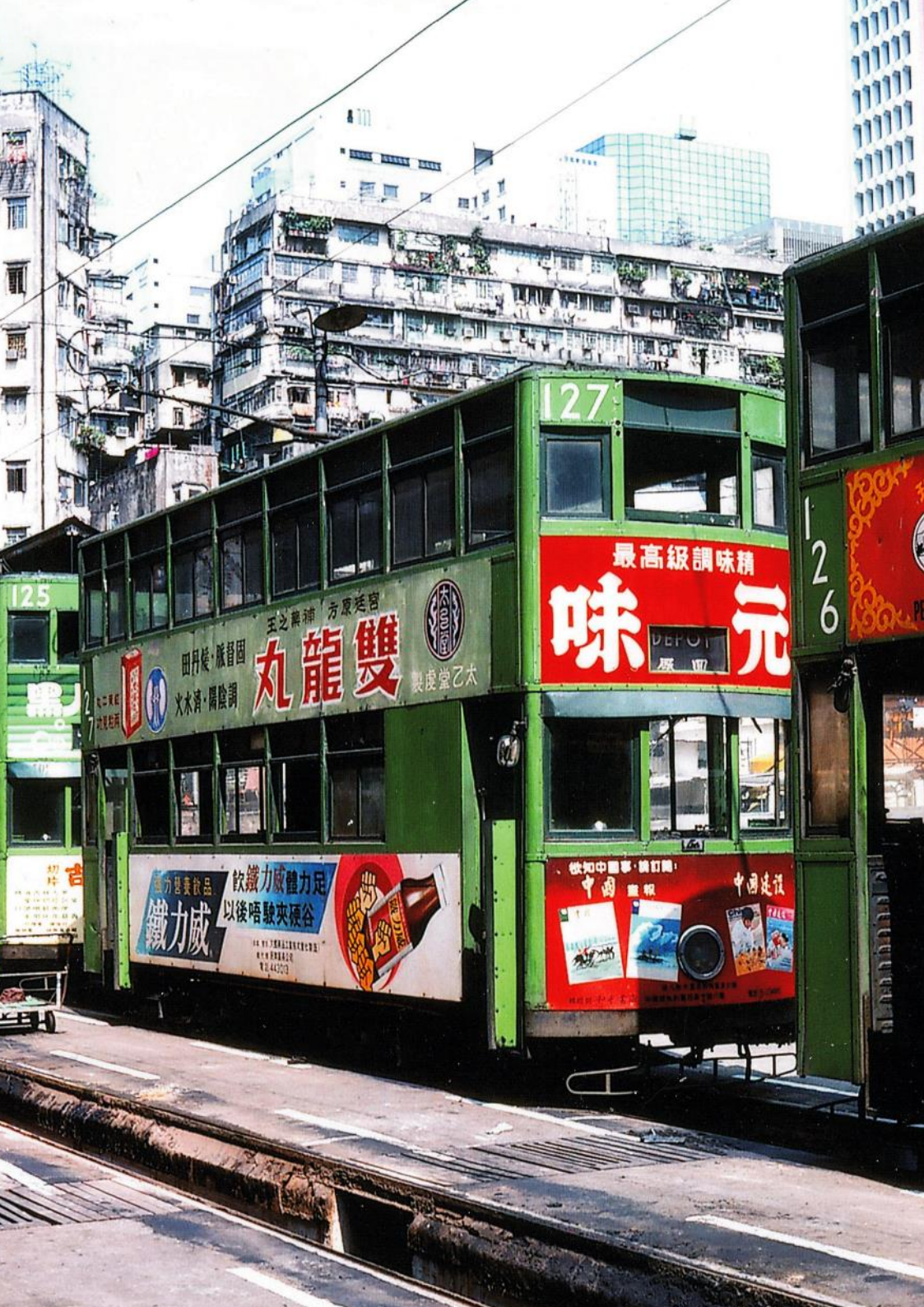
The Hong Kong Hilton was built in 1963 and was the first hotel in the world to introduce mini-bars into all its rooms. It was demolished in 1995.



Car 80 in Des Voeux Road Central, again by the old Supreme Court building. The tram was built in 1951 by the Hongkong & Whampoa (Kowloon) Docks. It advertises the then new Kodak Disc Photography system, which was released in 1982. This was a film system using a disc instead of a cassette or roll. It was not very successful as the negatives were too small.



Car 104 is in Johnston Road, Wanchai. It was built in 1955 by the Taikoo Dockyard & Engineering Company. The striking livery was for Crocodile men's and ladies' fashion clothing, a company based in Hong Kong.



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