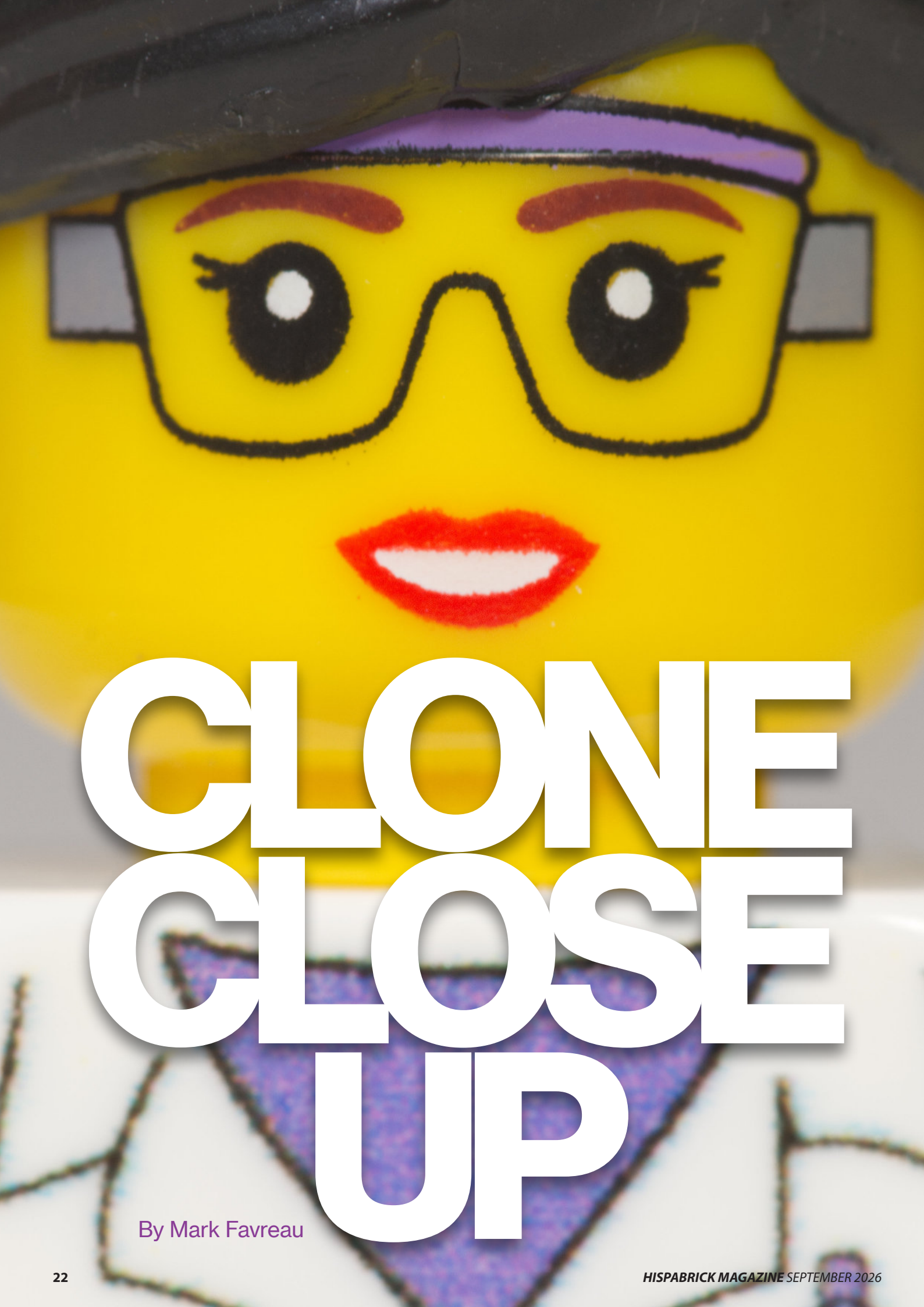




CLONE CLOSE UP

By Mark Favreau



RECENTLY

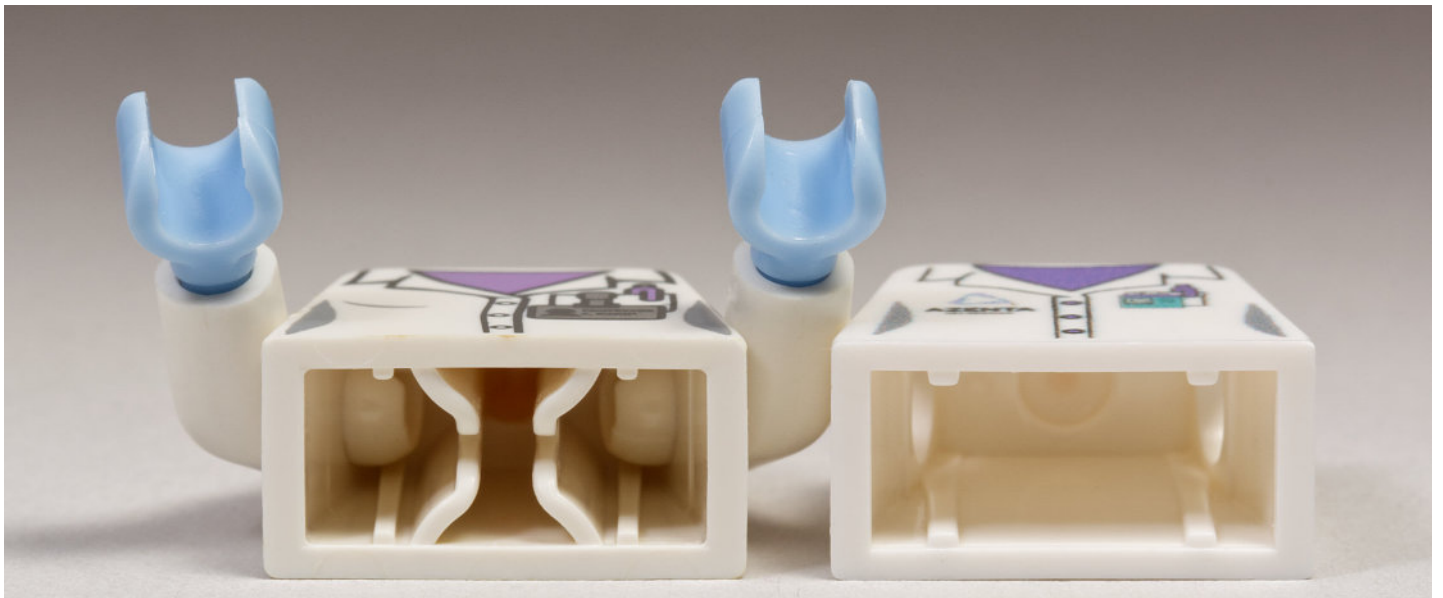
my brother sent me a couple packets of custom minifigures that he acquired through his job. These were trade show promo items or something of that ilk. Somebody spent some money on these things, but they did not spend it with LEGO. I suspect any non-hardcore fan would not take note or care, and the company handing out giveaways likely was more concerned with cost and getting their brand slapped on something than anything else.

I thought it would be interesting to take a close look at the clone product and see how it compared to a collectible minifigure. So here we go.

The clone figures came in tear-off-top, zip-lock style, frosted-finish pouches, ink-jet printed front-side on a white flood background with white flood again under the logo on the back. The bottom portion of the back was "clear" so you could see the parts which were inside another sealed packet.

I would not be surprised if the packaging was as expensive as the parts inside. Limited print runs of this nature are not cheap. Digital printing has made them affordable compared to the old technologies, but still... There is little doubt in my mind that whoever did the printing of the outer baggie was not the same entity that stuffed the parts into the inner baggie. One was sent to the other, or maybe even a third party, for the packaging to be completed.

Keeping in mind the clone is a promotional item and not a product for sale, the giveaway packet measures about 3.25 x 3.25 x .375 inches / 8.5 x 8.5 x 1 cm compared to LEGO's current CMF packaging at 3.75 x 4.125 x 1 inches / 9.4 x 10.5 x 2.6 cm. The downside of the clone packaging is that it is probably not recyclable or biodegradable, and being double-bagged it is doubly so, compared to LEGO's recyclable biodegradable cardboard. On the upside you can see exactly what you are getting as opposed to LEGO's current packaging which shows an incomplete selection of the potential contents. With the clone there is no need for a device with a scanner and an app and a decent wifi or cellular signal as there is with LEGO...which in my experience is generally not good at the LEGO store. While we are on the topic, hey, LEGO, how about providing in-store wifi.





Arms

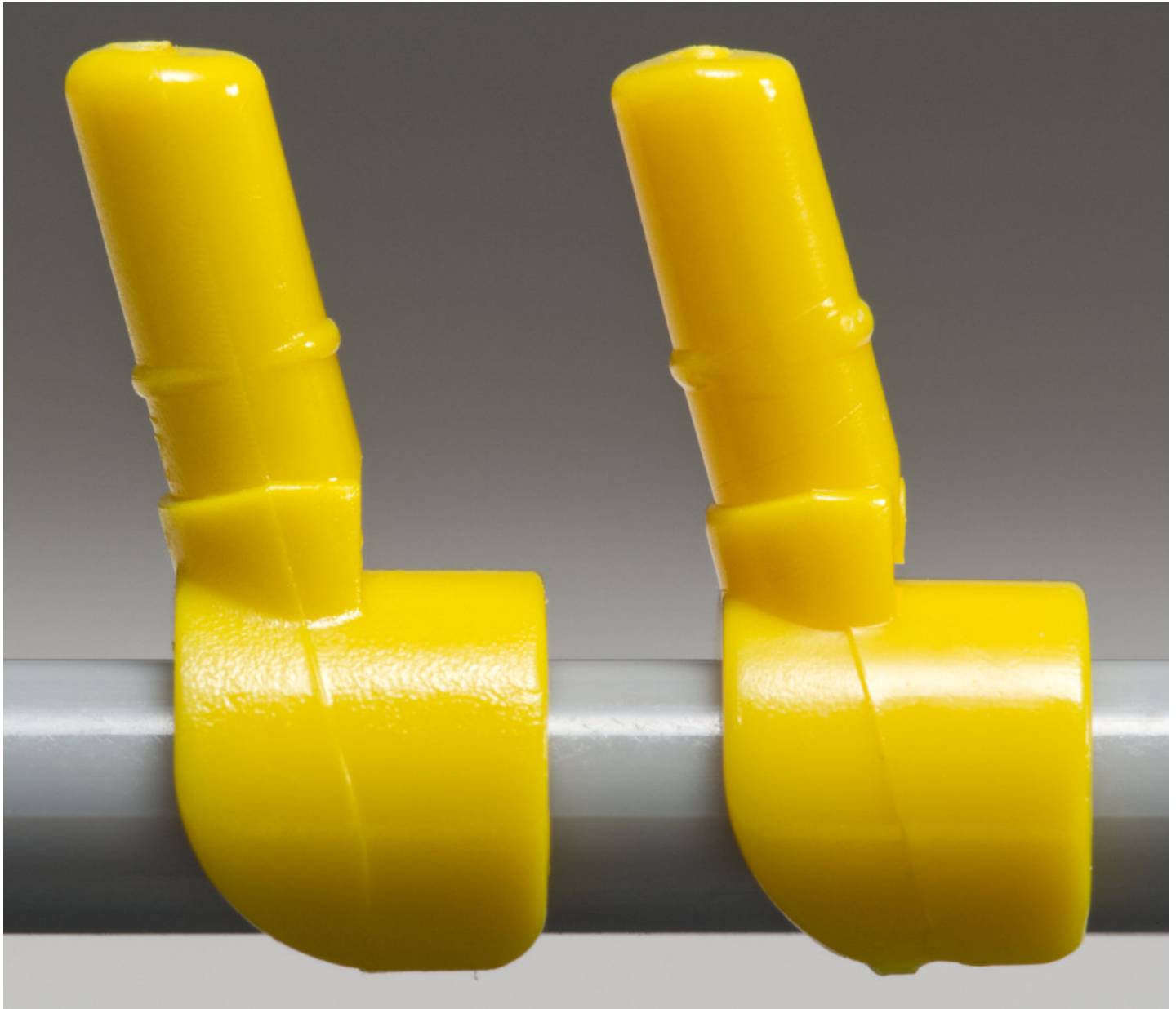
The clone arm studs are split all the way across while the LEGO arm studs have a center hole with a split on one side. Attaching and detaching the clone arms from the torso is significantly easier than with LEGO arms.

There is flashing at the wrist hole on the clone arms, and the arm contour steps and narrows noticeably at the wrist on the right arm and kind of hints at doing that on the left arm suggesting some molding or quality control issue. The LEGO arms have no flash and maintain a smooth contour for the entire length of the arms.

Noting the top picture on this page, the shadow in the wrist hole on the LEGO part is significantly darker than that of the clone part leading me to believe that the opacity of the LEGO part is significantly greater than that of the clone part. This is probably true for all the parts.

Clone arms have no embossed logo, nor do older LEGO arms, but more recent LEGO arms do have the logo embossed on the torso side of the elbow.





A LEGO hand, left, and the clone hand, right. This particular LEGO hand has an angled terminus of the bar, digits on the dorsal side of the angular wrist block, and digits on the bar between the wrist block and the rib on the ventral side of the bar.

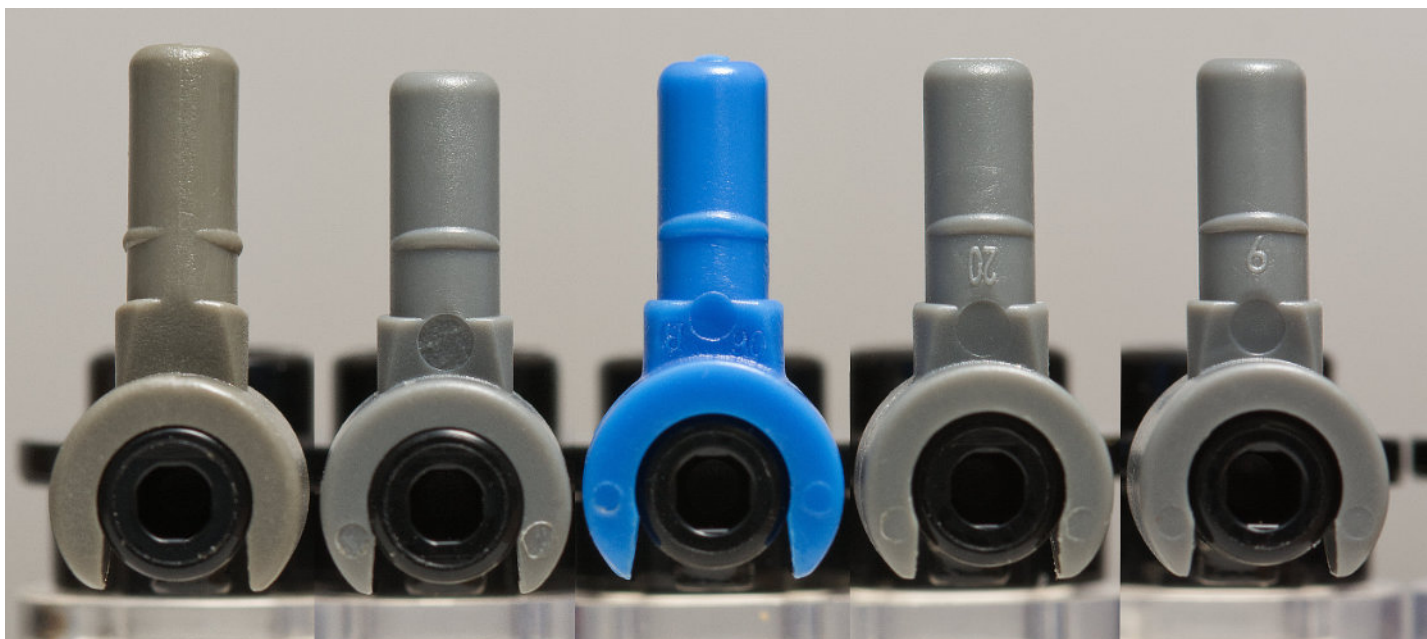
Hands

I wish I could say something definitive about the hands, and in the process of trying to find a hand that would photograph well to show some details I ended up looking at dozens of LEGO hands under the microscope. What I found was I could identify at least five design iterations. Not surprisingly, the older versions had no numbers molded into them. Later versions, in no particular order I want to try to identify, had:

- multiple digits molded on the ventral side of the bar, above the retaining rib
- varying molded digits on both the ventral and dorsal sides of the hand, between the angular wrist block and the rib
- characters on either side of the angular wrist block on the dorsal side and digits on the ventral



The clone hand (greenish) overlaid on the LEGO hand (yellow). Note higher rib placement, lower block placement, and thinner hand thickness on the clone compared to the LEGO hand.



Dorsal side top, ventral side bottom. LEGO hand parts showing various mold iterations.

side, between the wrist block and the rib. Within those groups there exist variations in the shape of the wrist block, variations in the contour of the rib, variations in the font, and probably variations in the ejection pin and injection point marks.

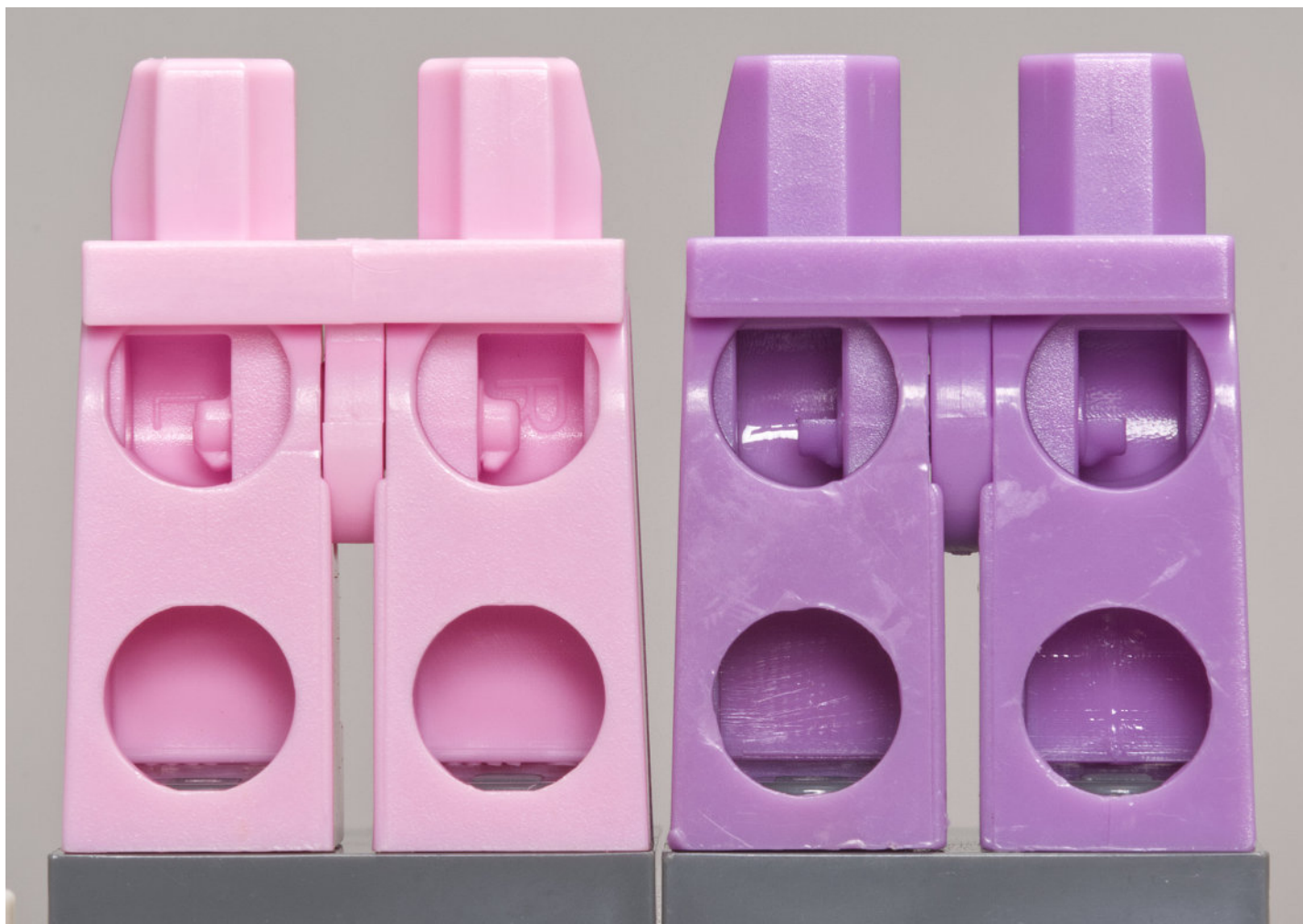
With all that noted, relative to the clone hand, the only things I think I can say for certain are that the plastics are different, the clone hand definitely has less fidelity at the “fingertips” than do the LEGO hands, and the LEGO hands seem to be about one-tenth of a millimeter thicker.

Legs and Hips

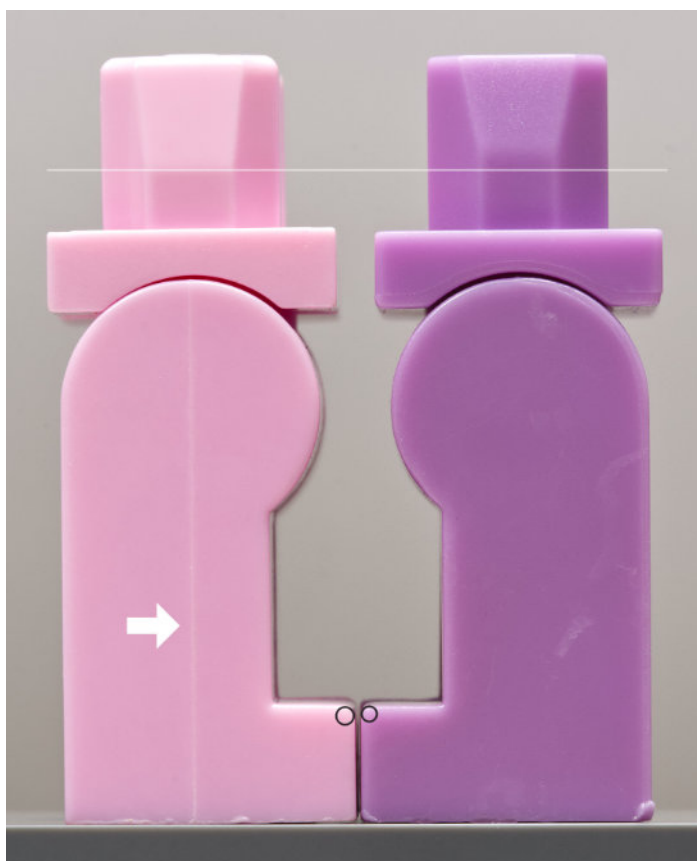
The legs themselves displayed minor differences from the LEGO versions. Notable differences were the inclusion of L and R molded into the respective

LEGO legs and a rectangular through-hole molded, oddly, into only the right leg of the clone. LEGO legs have a seam down the sides and the clone legs do not. The radius at the top of the toes is slightly larger on the LEGO legs than on the clone legs. The stud holes at the heels on the clone are round. Older LEGO legs also have round holes while more recent molds have flattened tops and bottoms of the holes.

The hips display differences on the torso connecting posts. LEGO posts have concave contours on the corners with straight sides; the clone maintains a straight octagonal perimeter all around. LEGO hips have a flattened side in the post holes while the clones maintain perfect circles. The bevel on the outer side of the LEGO posts is a bit deeper than those on the clone.



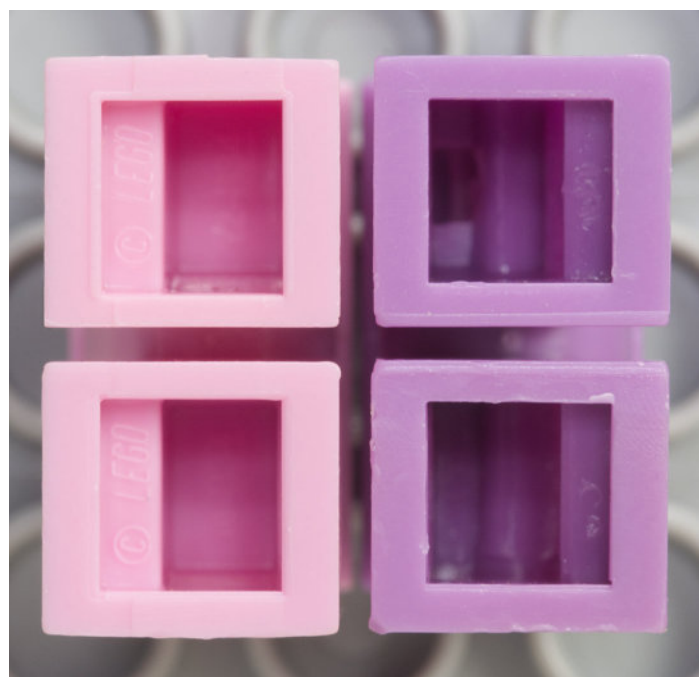
LEGO left, clone right. Top-to-bottom differences: bevel depths on torso posts, belt heights, L and R molded into respective parts on LEGO legs, shapes of the ends of the leg attachment bars, the flattened spots on the ankle holes on the LEGO legs.



This shot compares the post bevel heights, the belt heights, the seam on the LEGO legs, and the toe radii.



The through-hole molded only into the right leg.



LEGO hips display the logo between the posts whereas the clone has a mold number. Belt height on the clone is shorter than on the LEGO. The thin posts at the crotch where the legs attach to the hips have different shapes. Both have round posts with a projecting nodule to hold the legs in place. The clone's nodules being less prominent makes removal of the legs fairly easy, and I found in limited runs that there was no significant degradation in performance of the leg. As most readers probably know, removing

a LEGO leg from the hips is difficult and more-or-less game over as far as future reattachment and subsequent performance is concerned. The tips of the posts on the clone are split about halfway down with the top being removed, presumably to facilitate leg attachment. LEGO does the same thing but removes only about 20-25% versus 50% on the clone. Placing the clone hips into either the clone or the LEGO torso seems to evidence a greater degree of resistance both on insertion and removal.



Heads

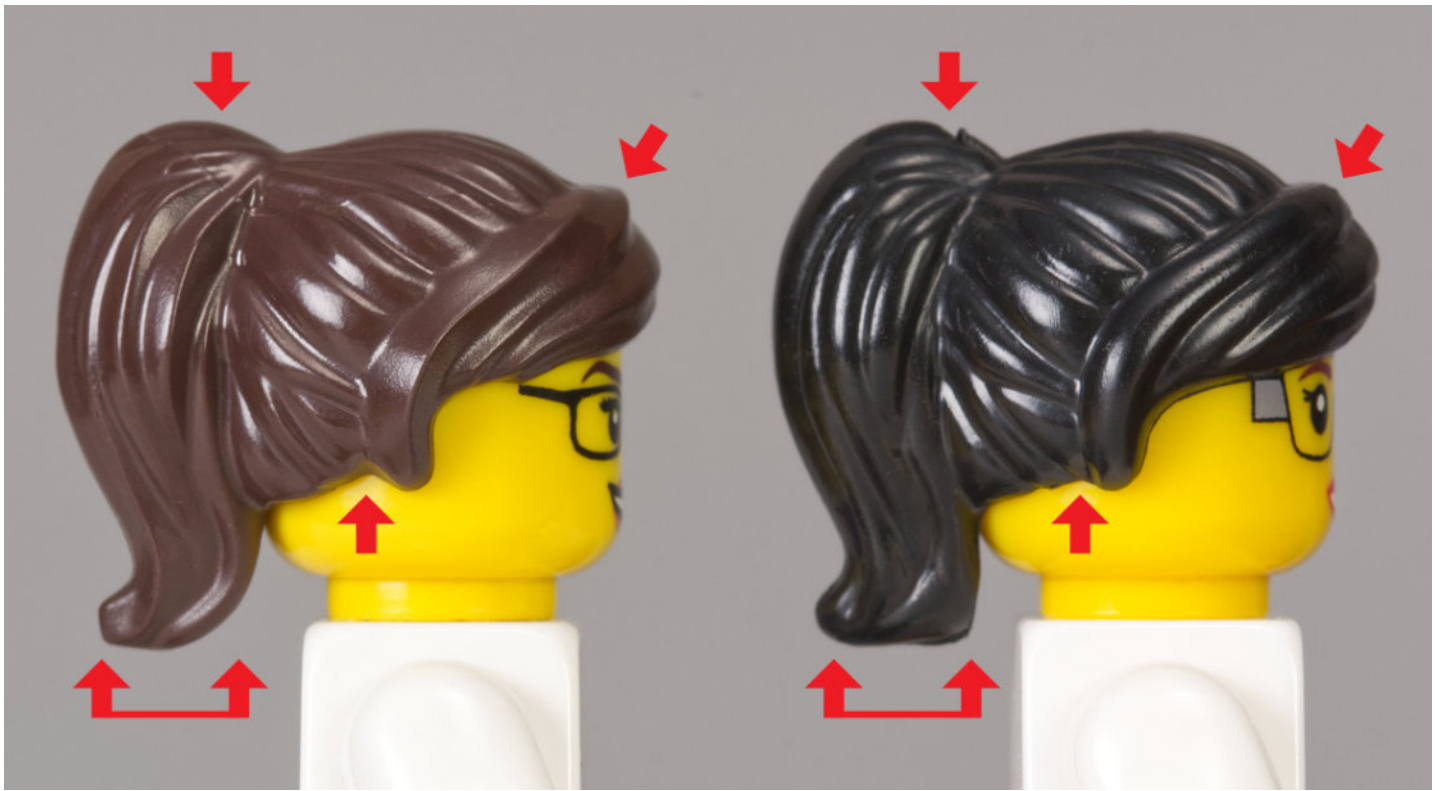
The clone head has a narrow radius on the top stud edge compared to a LEGO head with similar stud. Most AFOLs know LEGO heads have varying stud shapes—solid, Y-bar, tall recessed hollow, short recessed hollow, and I-bar—depending on their vintage. This clone uses a recessed hollow stud.

The printing process on the clone head appears similar to the torso, but a whole lot cleaner in execution. It does not appear to be pad printed, which makes me wonder a bit about the printing process as typically a pad printer is required to print on a non-flat shape. But maybe technology has progressed to the point that splat printers can now manage non-flat shapes as long as the depth change across the print area is minimal.

Colors appear without the halos, presumably

because it appears that the colors are probably solid applications of component inks. If there are ink hickies or voids they are not visible to the naked eye and registration of color appears superior to the registration of the pad printer. My initial reaction to the head printing was that it was clean and crisp and put the older LEGO head prints to shame.

Aesthetically the head is quickly identifiable as being not LEGO as the eye placement is too wide. The line work is also thinner and LEGO rarely contains color fields with thin black outlines. Clone eyelashes appear to abruptly poke out the sides of the eye where LEGO eyelashes tend to sit atop the eye with the lash appearing as a continuation of the contour of the eyelid as opposed to being a circle with a “v” jammed into the side.



Hair Pieces

Stylistically the hair piece is a copycat of a LEGO hair piece, although less refined. Contours are a bit less crisp and the underside antistud while functional is comparatively inelegant. One specific sculptural difference is the terminus of the clone ponytail which is solid and wide compared to LEGO's version which is hollowed out and tapered. Given the various blips, divots, and dings, I think this is easily identifiable as a less-than-LEGO-quality execution. One point for the clone, though. It does do a better job of hiding the molding seam in the contours of the hairstyle where LEGO's seam just is where it is.

Plastic

The plastic on all the clone parts is slightly glossier than the LEGO plastic and in some places some parts display a degree of flash that is absolutely absent on the LEGO pieces. The white of

the clone torso appears whiter than the white of the LEGO torso, and the colors in general have a touch more luminance where the LEGO colors are a bit more flat. I have the sense that the plastic of the clone may be more brittle and there is a brighter sound to the plastic when dropped on concrete.

The harder smoother finish of the clone plastic is more susceptible to scuffs and dings. The finish of the plastic in less visible areas like the insides of legs or the underside of the hair piece tended to be a bit rough or unrefined while the similar areas on LEGO pieces tended to be as pristine as the more visible areas. While shooting photos I noticed that the clone plastic was also more prone to attract dust.

The connections with the clone parts, being arm, hand, and neck movement or attaching the figure's feet to plate studs, tended to be stiffer than with the LEGO. Some of that behavior seems to be associated with the quality of the plastic itself and some of it is due to mold differences.

