

Yat Ming 1:24 1925 Ahrens-Fox N-S-4 Pumper Fire Truck, Part # 20108

On March 2, 1852, a failed Cincinnati locksmith named Abel Shawk, a moderately successful—but highly-eccentric—railroad locomotive builder named Alexander Bonner "Moses" Latta, and a successful iron-foundry owner named Miles Greenwood, pooled their talents to unveil the world's first successful steam-powered fire engine. Shawk's quick-steaming boiler,



which could raise water in under 10 minutes, made the steam-powered fire engine practical, while Latta lent his locomotive expertise to the steam engine, pump, and chassis. Shawk and Latta, along with Latta's brothers Edmundson and Finlay Latta, formed the A. B. & E. Latta "Buckeye Works" to build this steam-powered fire engine. Chris Ahrens, a young German-born apprentice, worked in their steam-powered fire engine factory. In 1863, when the business was sold to Lane & Bodley, a local machine shop, Chris Ahrens became L & B's superintendent of fire engine construction. Five years later, Chris Ahrens bought out the Latta fire engine business, renaming it C. Ahrens & Co. In 1870, Ahrens introduced a new style of steam-powered fire engine that could raise steam from cold water in 5 minutes. Ahrens renamed his growing company, Ahrens Manufacturing Company, in 1877. By 1903, Ahrens Upright steam-powered fire engines held every world's record for steam-powered fire engine performance: fastest steam, fastest water, greatest flow in gallons per minute, highest pump pressure attained, furthest and highest distance for fire streams, and longest time operating without a mechanical failure. When one of these records was broken, it was another Ahrens engine that set the new record. Ahrens Manufacturing Company merged with three of its biggest competitors, Silsby (Seneca Falls, NY), Button (Waterford, NY), and Clapp & Jones (Hudson, NY) in 1891, to form the American Fire Engine Company. Ahren's son-in-law, Charles Hust Fox, left his position as Assistant Chief of the Cincinnati Fire Department to join the Ahrens firm at that time. Among Mr. Fox's innovations were the Fox Vertical Water Tube Boiler, which could raise steam from cold water in 3 minutes, and world's first pumper to carry its own hose supply. Until Fox's 1893 invention, a steam-powered fire engine required a separate hose wagon to carry its hose load. In 1902, Fox helped develop the world's first gasoline-powered fire engine. Over the years, through a series of mergers, the American Fire Engine Company became the International Fire Engine Company, and eventually the American-LaFrance Fire Engine Company. Chris Ahrens, his bother Peter Ahrens, his sons G. Fred and John P. Ahrens, and his sons-in-law Charles H. Fox and George W. Krapp, did not much like the new "fire engine trust" because it was run by bankers and lawyers and not by seasoned fire engine manufacturers like themselves. So, they began making plans to separate their company from the American-LaFrance conglomerate. After a protracted and uphill court battle, they were able to separate their company and reorganize it as the Ahrens Fire Engine Company in 1905. On August 9, 1910, they again

reorganized as the Ahrens-Fox Fire Engine Company, with Charles H. Fox as president, John P. Ahrens as vice president, and George W. Krapp, as treasurer. Ahrens-Fox introduced its first gasoline-propelled fire engine in 1911. The familiar front-mount piston pumper (with the spherical air chamber out front) followed in 1914, and continued in production until 1952. The Ahrens-Fox Company was hard-hit by the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent decade-long economic depression. In 1939, it was sold to Harold LeBlond of Cincinnati. The company ceased production in March 1940 and, under a new name, Ahrens-Fox Corporation, turned to making lathes for boring holes in battleship guns during WW II. The corporation reopened its doors in 1946, to build engines again. By 1948, after a promising start, the company had a huge backlog of fire engine orders. To clear this backlog, they didn't accept any new fire engine sales for the entire year of 1949, which proved to be a big mistake. Rumors of the company's demise were rampant in 1949, making it nearly impossible to regain sales momentum in 1950. LeBlond sold the Ahrens-Fox Corporation name to one Jim Jordan in 1951, who in turn sold it to the Tousignaut family of Englewood, Colorado. Meanwhile, Walter "Duke" Walkenhorst, Jr. obtained the Ahrens-Fox Company (as opposed to the Ahrens-Fox Corporation) name. All of the fire engine company's tools, machinery, and sales and service records, however, went to a Cincinnati GMC truck dealer whose father once worked for Ahrens-Fox. By 1953, the company was awash in red ink and C. D. Beck & Company of Sidney, Ohio—manufacturer of inter-city buses—was contracted to build the final 25 Ahrens-Fox fire engines then on order. The very last fire engine built by Ahrens-Fox personnel in Ahrens-Fox's own factory, before the Beck sub-contract took effect, was delivered on Christmas Eve, 1953, to Volunteer Fire Company #1 of New Milford, NJ. Curt Nepper, Ahrens-Fox's Chief Engineer, bought what was left of the company in 1953, including the Ahrens-Fox Company name, and he continued to supply Ahrens-Fox parts and service to fire departments around the world for another 37 years. He even built two more Ahrens-Fox fire engines: one on an International Harvester chassis, in 1956, for Miami Township in Ohio, and one on a Ford C tilt-cab chassis, in 1977, for the Southern Campbell Volunteer Fire Department of Alexandria, KY.

Since 1990, the Ahrens-Fox Company name, along with the remaining parts inventory and manufacturing and service records, has belonged to Ken Menke of Webster's Grove, Missouri. Officially, Menke is the sole owner of the Ahrens-Fox Company. Unofficially, however, the company now has several separate, unaffiliated owners. The sales and service records of Ahrens-Fox's New York, Chicago, and New England sales offices, now belong to Ed Hass, who also owns all of the special repair-service tools and equipment of Ahrens-Fox's New York office. The entire spare parts inventory of Ahrens-Fox's New York office now belongs to John Koho of Phoenix, AZ, owner of two Ahrens-Fox fire engines. The parts inventory and tooling from three of Ahrens-Fox's long-time key suppliers (Buckeye Lights and Signals, Grether Lanterns, and Larkin Brass) now belong to Bill Darrow of Xenia, OH, the owner of 10 Ahrens-Fox fire engines. He makes various reproduction Ahrens-Fox parts—both from the original Buckeye and Grether molds, and from patterns he makes—using parts off of his own fleet of Ahrens-Fox fire engines. The number three fire engine builder in America has come full circle. It began 150 years ago with just three men (Miles Greenwood, Abel Shawk, and Alexander Latta) who were each an independent company unto themselves. After 75 years as a leader in sales, performance, and innovation, the corporate remains are once more in the hands of just a few men (Ken Menke, Ed Hass, John Koho, and Bill Darrow) who have no official connection with one another.

In the case of the 1925 Ahrens-Fox N-S-4 pumper, the "N" indicates a 1000 gallons-per-minute pump, the "S" indicates shaft drive, and the "4" indicates a booster tank. This

tank, another Ahrens-Fox innovation (1913), is now taken for granted in fire services around the world. It is faster to deliver water than the old soda-and-acid chemical tanks, eliminating the need for firefighters to handle dangerous sulfuric acid bottles. The booster tank led to triple-combination pumpers (pump, hose, and booster tank). Adding Ahrens-Fox's double-banked ladder racks to the triple combination made possible quadruple-combination fire engines. Miraculously, both the first triple and the first quad survive today in the hands of private collectors of antique fire engines. The Ahrens-Fox pumper is most commonly recognized by its front-mount pump with the familiar chrome sphere mounted on top. The sphere is actually an air chamber that helps "smooth out" the action of the piston pump. Rather than spurting with each movement of the piston, the sphere helps to equalize the pressure for a more continuous, steady, and powerful flow of water. Not all Ahrens-Fox apparatus had the sphere but, without question, the most beautiful and unique would be those with the chrome ball. It represents a truly beautiful work of art that once served as a working part of the most powerful fire engines of the day. The Ahrens-Fox Fire Engine Company was a major contributor to the fire service for many years, and we admire those "Rolls Royces" of fire engines that are still around for us to study and appreciate.

This image from Yat Ming is the fourth of their Signature Series fire engines, all of them pumpers. Yat Ming seems to be the only die cast company out there doing fire equipment in 1:24 scale, so I can't compare them to anyone else's images. I've been consistently impressed with the level of detail and features on what are very reasonably priced images at around \$40 to \$45. Everywhere you look, you'll find interesting features—hoses, nozzles, lanterns, axes, extinguishers, valves, bells, and searchlights. Extras this time out include two extension ladders and a soda-acid fire extinguisher. The front end, where the pump assembly dwells, is a remarkable collection of (mostly chromed) hardware that looks as if it could supply water pressure for a small town! Its distinctive chromed sphere, which tops the assembly, is prominent on the front, drawing the eye to the incredible amount of tiny detail on the pump mechanism. In fact, that level of detail is evident throughout the image. The booster and gas tanks are prominently and visibly mounted above the hose bed. Under the double-sided hood is the massive six-cylinder motor—that does double duty to propel the engine and power the pump—that shows a reasonable amount of detail. You'll also find lots of detail at the driver's position and in and around the hose bed. The searchlight swivels, the two rear-mounted lanterns swivel and move up and down on their mounts, and the steering wheel smoothly turns the front wheels. The driver's seat is done in soft vinyl to simulate leather. Even the undercarriage displays enough detail to help the mechanically inclined decipher how the engine and pump assembly work together. In addition to all the tiny parts evident all over the image, the pin-striping and lettering are beautifully done—and there's a lot of it too. Yat Ming puts a lot of effort into each of their fire truck images, with lots of fine detail, and oodles of small parts. This Ahrens-Fox pumper is no exception. In fact, I'm consistently impressed at the quality and level of detail Yat Ming crams into what are relatively inexpensive images. Each of their pumpers is a beautifully rendered tribute to fire department rolling stock. I've become more of a fan of their images with each new release. I'm eager to see what they'll come up with next.

Just to look at an Ahrens-Fox pumper in profile shows the company's experience with building steam engines—it looks like a locomotive! Every inch of its over 23-foot length has the same massive, purposeful stance as those denizens of the iron highways. The top of the booster tank is 7 feet from the ground. Even the top hinge of the hood stands at 5 feet 9 inches high—taller than the roofline of most cars. To see one of Ahrens-Fox's pumpers in action must be a treat indeed (see photo) for any bystander interested in fire fighters and their equipment.

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