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LIONEL TRAINS

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Fall 2012



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The Golden Years 1950-54

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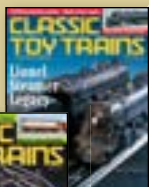
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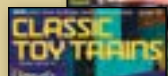
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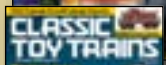
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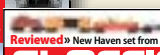
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Roger Carp, editor

WELCOME TO **LIONEL TRAINS:** **THE GOLDEN YEARS, 1950-54**

Or should I be saying welcome back? When it comes to the early 1950s, those wonderful years when the Lionel Corp. released some of its finest, most exciting and innovative electric trains and accessories, we at *Classic Toy Trains* know we are helping many of you readers relive some of your own wonderful years.

About 60 years ago, when there were still 48 states in the union and 16 baseball teams in the majors, many thousands of you entered the marvelous world of miniature railroading when you received a train set. And, most likely, it was an outfit marketed by Lionel, then the giant of the domestic toy industry. Odds are, your train featured a die-cast metal steam locomotive that puffed smoke and whistled boldly, a few freight cars, and a compact loop of three-rail-track. Paradise!

The years after Lionel celebrated its first half-century in business were remarkable for reasons beyond your own experience. The electric trains so many of you enjoyed in the early 1950s belonged to outstanding product lines, some of the best in terms of appearance and operation any toy company has ever produced.

The first five years of the 1950s deserve attention because they shaped your lives and the model railroading hobby in profound ways. In this latest special publication from the editorial and art teams at CTT (with help from collectors Joe Algozzini, Ron Antonelli, and Jack Sommerfeld), we give them that attention.

We turn the spotlight on each of those years by looking at the outfits and cars, locomotives and accessories distinguishing Lionel catalogs. Accompanying these surveys are in-depth looks at particular models, especially those worth owning today, as well as a range of neat promotional materials and displays.

So get set to join us as we return to one of the greatest periods in the history of Lionel. Besides learning about this heyday, you'll likely recall some of the most enjoyable years of your life, a time when an electric train was the finest gift any youngster could receive and you started a lifelong love affair with toy trains. For all of us, things were seldom better.

Roger Carp

CLASSIC TOY TRAINS SPECIAL ISSUE

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Lionel Trains: The Golden Years, 1950-1954 (ISBN 978-0-89024-884-3) is published by Kalmbach Publishing Co., 21027 Crossroads Circle, P.O. Box 1612, Waukesha, WI 53187-1612. Single copy price: \$9.95 U.S., \$10.95 Canadian and international, payable in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank. (Canadian price includes GST.) BN 12271 3209 RT. Expedited delivery available for additional \$2.50 domestic and Canadian, \$6 foreign. ©2012, Kalmbach Publishing Co. Title registered as trademark. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

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1950-54 launched a golden age at Lionel

THE BEGINNING OF ITS SECOND GREAT HALF-CENTURY

The celebration by the Lionel Corporation of its golden anniversary in 1950 was a triumph for Joshua Lionel Cowen, cofounder of what by then had become America's premier electric train manufacturer. Still a powerful presence in the daily life of the company though in his mid-70s, he watched over a toy firm that had become synonymous with the product it made.

As Lionel ended its first half-century in business and prepared for its second, Cowen could look at its current success with tremendous pride. Long gone was Harry Grant, who had established the company with him and been responsible for some of its early wares. Also missing by this time was Mario Caruso, who had overseen manufacturing for decades and contributed to the financial strength of the corporation. He had left in 1944. Only Cowen remained, although he was amenable to working with

ABOVE: Lionel assembled quite a roster of locomotives for its golden anniversary year. The corporation's catalogs for 1950 extolled, among other examples of motive power (front to back) the nos. 2343 Santa Fe Electro-Motive F3 diesel, 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA diesel, 2046 steam locomotive and tender, and 773 Hudson steam locomotive and tender.

members of a younger generation in producing and publicizing more and superior electric trains.

In 1950, Cowen stood alone at the helm, holding the position of chairman of the board of directors while keeping close tabs on his son, Lawrence, who served as Lionel's president. The elder Cowen's friend and confidant, Arthur Raphael, reported to him as executive vice-president and national sales manager. Even at an advanced age, Cowen continued to influence the development

The Most Wonderful Christmas in Any Boy's Life!

...THE DAY HE GETS...THE DAY YOU GIVE

LIONEL TRAINS

Everybody's happy when it's a Lionel Train Christmas. Sonny, the engineer, just can't wait to send that big, solid, gleaming locomotive rolling around the track... with a long, exciting line of cars whizzing behind it. And Dad and Mother get the kind of a thrill that comes only when you make the Christmas dream of a boy who's been hoping, and hoping for Lionel Trains, come true.

He just has to see them anywhere, anytime, and he knows that nothing else equals LIONEL... for smoke-puffing, whistle-blowing realism... for steel-wheeled solidity that can "take it"... for remote-control precision... for the thrill of grade-climbing, speed-boosting Magna-Trains™! Only Lionel Trains have all these features, plus real railroad-type remote-control knuckle couplers, and heavy-duty die-cast tracks.

And, LIONEL TRAINS are what Dad really wants, too. World's best for over 30 years!

Available in all 100+ pages are out in April 1951 only.

The only trains that fully match your boy's dreams are Lionel Trains. Start him off with these this Christmas. And as time goes on, build a bigger and better railroad around them with available Lionel accessories.

Illustration of the Santa Fe locomotive and various Lionel accessories including a signal, a trestle, and a bridge.

Has father, not then, read all about them in the new big 36-page catalogue that lists all the railroad sound effects, and more! See special coupon offer below... send coupon now!

*Offer in all 16 & P.M. photographs shown cover detail details on automatic changes.

Send 36-page Lionel Train Catalogue to: Mr. & Mrs. J. Edgar Hoover, 400 ...
 Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____

Lionel used the mass media to showcase its trains and accessories during the years before and after its golden anniversary in 1950. The firm inserted colorful advertisements in newspapers throughout the country (this one appeared in the *Detroit Free Press* in November of 1951) and mass-circulation and specialty magazines. Lionel products were also featured in television programs and movies.

of the train line. Therefore, the golden anniversary let insiders pay tribute to him.

Indeed, accolades from across the domestic toy industry were heard during 1950. Contemporary observers honored Cowen in mass-circulation magazines and business journals. They recounted his decades of success while glossing over personal and corporate setbacks. The applause eventually became deafening, to the point that commentators acted as though Joshua Cowen were single-handedly responsible for developing the miniature electric train.

Challenges faced and overcome

Such a claim certainly stretched the truth. Yet Cowen had proved over 50 years to be an extraordinary marketer, better at building up his business than at tinkering with electric motors and assembling models of locomotives and railcars. He had defeated his mightiest rivals, revamped his product line when necessary, and survived economic depressions and wartime restrictions on production until his electric trains had become the most sophisticated and desired plaything for boys.

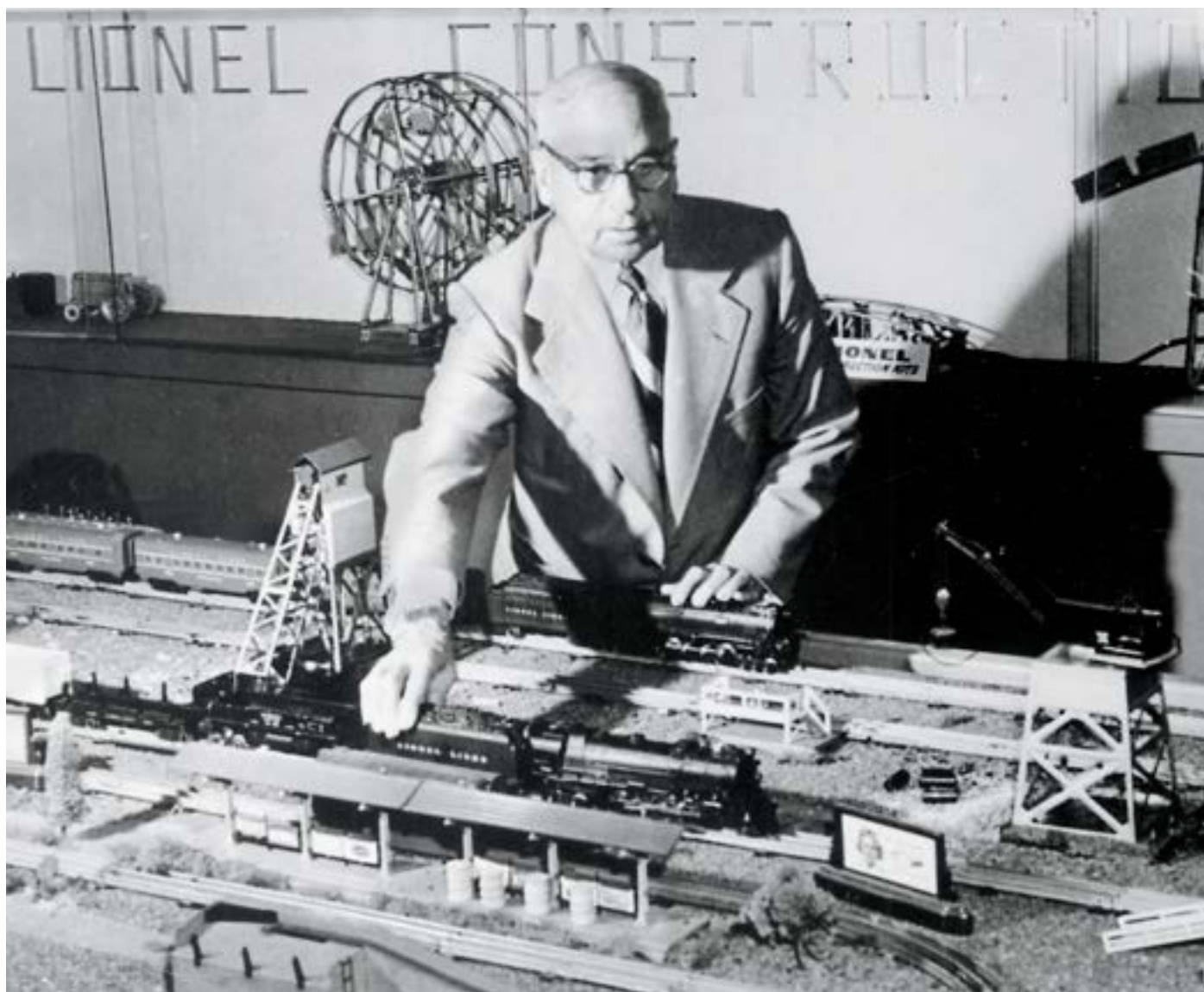
Now, five years after the end of World War II and at the peak of American influence around the globe, the Lionel Corp. and its mastermind marked a grand moment in its history. The trains released in 1950 reflected the firm's sense of triumph and hope for the coming years. Even in retrospect, when unanticipated

difficulties and changes slowed Lionel's momentum and worried its leaders, there is little question that the first half of the 1950s can be lauded as a heyday.

Yes, progress was held back as the country found itself engaged in a new military conflict affecting the supply of materials used by Lionel. The impact of the Korean War can't be ignored; factory supervisors and sales executives had to alter the product line because of the war's impact. Indeed, the catalogs released in 1951 and '52 appeared sparse with items hardly changed from the past. Plainly, the war limited opportunities for Lionel to expand and innovate at a key moment.

At the same time, rivals were capitalizing on the enhanced demand to find niches in the marketplace they might occupy at Lionel's expense. To be blunt, American Model Toys, Colber, and Thomas Industries, to name three small yet robust competitors ended up stealing sales from Lionel in the early 1950s, as did the S gauge American Flyer line put out by the A.C. Gilbert Co.

To the credit of Lionel's brilliant engineers, production managers, and marketing executives, virtually every notable challenge was answered in 1952 and 1953, so the Cowens and their lieutenants were able to maintain their dominant role in the marketplace. When retirement and death robbed the top echelon of shrewd and energetic minds, Lionel roared back, replacing them with fresh blood.



Well past the age when men retired in America, Joshua Lionel Cowen continued to visit Lionel's corporate headquarters and main sales office, located in midtown Manhattan. He maintained an office there, but preferred to walk onto the floor of the showroom. There, he studied display layouts such as this one and conversed with members of the sales team as well as visitors of all ages.

Never stronger

Despite, or maybe because of, the myriad challenges Lionel confronted and strove to overcome, the corporation was moving forward at an accelerated pace by 1953 and '54. Sales soared as never before, and profits eclipsed anything seen in the past. Some of the most beautiful and powerful trains ever to grace Lionel's catalog made their debut in those noteworthy years, along with trail-blazing near-scale replicas and thrilling, imaginative accessories of all sorts.

Arrows on the charts compiled by decision makers at the company might not have consistently pointed upward during the tumultuous five years after the golden anniversary celebration in 1950. Nonetheless, everything seemed to have been handled by the middle of the 1950s and the future appeared very, very bright.

Still presiding over Lionel was Joshua Cowen. He might have taken a diminished role in the day-to-day operations of the firm, and he was delegating authority to his son and other leaders who were younger and more energetic. But the cofounder remained an overshadowing presence, certain he understood what children loved

about his trains and determined to create more great products and find novel ways of promoting them.

The heyday of the early 1950s promised so much for Lionel. The mood of optimism and satisfaction was reflected in the full-color ads the firm placed in American mass-circulation magazines and metropolitan newspapers during the holiday season. Get ready to return to those glorious years and discover again the trains that put smiles on the faces of Joshua and Lawrence Cowen and left them confident Lionel's immediate prospects looked absolutely brilliant.

RIGHT: The confidence Lionel's leadership felt about its electric trains and their positive impact on families was reflected in full-page advertisements in popular magazines around the time the firm marked its golden anniversary in 1950. Cofounder Joshua Lionel Cowen, like Advertising Manager Joseph Hanson, recognized the importance of promoting Lionel's products and linking them to happy, well-rounded youngsters. This ad, published in the November 16, 1953, issue of *Saturday Evening Post*, captured the optimistic mood at Lionel in its heyday.



Happy Family Circle!

This "ring-around-the-family" is the happiest hobby in millions of American homes. Father and son (and daughter, too!) team up as engineers of the world's most famous railroad . . . LIONEL! They send those real-life trains highballing around the track with all the extra speed and power of Lionel's exclusive *Magne-Traction*. And it's a joy for Mom, too. She knows everything is running smoothly . . . her family and Lionel Trains.

The big, colorful 1953 Lionel Catalog is great reading for the entire family . . . be sure to drop in at your Lionel dealer's for your copy.



LIONEL TRAINS

1950

THE LEADING AMERICAN
MAKER OF TOY TRAINS MARKED 50
YEARS OF GLORY

Celebrating a golden year



A true star of Lionel's golden anniversary year of 1950 and the train whose coloring reminded customers of the firm's 50th year in business was set no. 1464W. This new O-27 outfit – known as the Anniversary Set – introduced an elegant pair of Alco diesels and included a trio of matching streamlined passenger cars in the Union Pacific's Armour Yellow and Harbor Mist Gray paint scheme.

Joshua Lionel Cowen had good reason to consider 1950 a golden year. After all, he, along with Harry Grant, had led the way in establishing what was known around the world as the Lionel Corp. half a century earlier. Now that elderly yet still vibrant gentleman prepared to be celebrated for his numerous triumphs.

Tributes appeared in magazine profiles of Cowen and Lionel. Later in 1950 came ceremonies near the grounds of the company's factory in northern New Jersey to which all employees and their families were invited. All but lost in the shadows cast by Cowen and his wife were other executives, including Lionel President Lawrence Cowen, Executive Vice-President Arthur Raphael, Works Manager Charles Giaimo, and Chief Engineer Joseph Bonanno.

1950 was a golden year

Without a doubt, 1950 did represent a momentous time for Lionel. Sales had been rising every year since the return of peace in 1945, when the federal restrictions on the production of toys had

been rescinded. Cowen and his son had overseen the expansion of the network of authorized retail outlets and service stations. They had built up a superb team of salesmen based in New York City as well as outstanding regional offices in Chicago and San Francisco.

Most of all, at least to children waiting impatiently for the annual full-color consumer catalog to arrive in the weeks following Labor Day, Lionel had assembled a terrific lineup of outfits for 1950. Kids then, like collectors today, also noted the impressive roster of locomotives (all of them equipped with the highly publicized feature of Magne-Traction), rolling stock, and accessories.

Coincidentally, 1950 turned out to be a great year for a pair of celebrities with ties to New York City who had a passion for Lionel trains. Phil Rizzuto, the New York Yankees' esteemed shortstop and future member of the Baseball Hall of Fame, won the American League's Most Valuable Player Award. And Ezio Pinza, starring on Broadway in *South Pacific*, received a Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical. Both men operated O gauge trains in their spare time.

Beginning quietly in the 1900s

As much as any award-winning actor or highly paid athlete, Joshua Cowen had reason to consider 1950 a golden year. Certainly, he could look back on what he had achieved with satisfaction.

Five decades earlier, Cowen had arranged with a shopkeeper in New York City to create a window display featuring an electrically powered gondola he had assembled. The primitive railcar sped around a loop of metal track Cowen also had built. The young man's display amazed onlookers, motivating them to flock inside the store. To the owner's consternation, however, customers often strolled in, not to buy his wares, but to ask how they could buy similar miniature railways.

It didn't take Cowen long to realize that a burgeoning market existed for toy trains. With assistance from Grant, he began by selling handcrafted models of trolleys, urban locomotives, and freight cars that ran on track with 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches between the outer rails. They produced rudimentary power supplies to provide the electric juice necessary to operate their trains and energetically advertised them.

In 1906, the Lionel Manufacturing Co., as the enterprise was then known, abandoned 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch gauge for slightly smaller models that ran on track with 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches between the outside rails. Ever the marketer, Cowen dared to announce the novel track as "Standard." Consumers must have agreed, because sales rose steadily in the ensuing years. When an attempt to sell the line of trains to the Ives



The advance catalog announced that Lionel was marking its golden anniversary.





The no. 736 2-8-4 Berkshire steam locomotive with Magne-Traction made its debut in 1950 as a component of two O gauge outfits and a separate-sale item retailing for \$37.50. That powerful new engine pulled four freight cars in the no. 2163WS set, including the brand-new no. 6472 refrigerator car, all for \$49.95.

Manufacturing Corp., the principal toy train maker in the United States, failed in 1910, Cowen, now on his own, vowed to push ahead until he gained the top spot.

As part of this concentrated effort to eclipse Ives and all domestic rivals, Cowen introduced another line of toy trains in 1915. These smaller and less costly sets and models, dubbed O gauge, ran on tubular track with 1¼ inches between the outermost rails. Lionel did not, it should be noted, give up Standard gauge when it brought out this new size. It would depend on both for many years.

Satisfaction for the “Old Man”

Cowen, working closely with Mario Caruso who supervised the expanding group of industrial facilities Lionel maintained in northern New Jersey, watched his business mushroom in the 1920s. German competitors had vanished from the domestic market during World War I, never to return in force. American foes, notably the American Flyer Manufacturing Co. and Voltamp, hardly challenged Lionel.

Meanwhile, Cowen’s hard-driving business tactics and innovative brand drove Ives into bankruptcy. By 1930, his corporation reigned over America’s toy train arena.

Yet when Cowen glanced back to the 1930s, he probably winced a bit. From the vantage point of 1950, he would have remembered a slew of financial setbacks that had threatened the health of the Lionel Corp. during the Great Depression. Fortunately, he could hastily remind himself that models of streamlined passenger trains and inexpensive mechanical toys using Disney characters had made it possible for Lionel to surmount its difficulties and thrive.

By the time World War II erupted, Lionel again controlled the train market. The American Flyer Manufacturing Co. had given up, selling its assets to the A.C. Gilbert Co., a prominent toy producer (Erector Sets and Mysto-Magic outfits) based in New Haven, Conn.

Gilbert hoped to carved out a profitable place for itself, but Cowen expressed confidence his firm would retain its preeminent position. The inexpensive train sets sold by Louis Marx & Co. didn’t worry him either. Rather than concentrate on just whimsical models, Cowen and his key assistants confidently entered the realm of scale models.

Success during and after the war

Little wonder that Lionel was praised around the globe for its products. The company prospered during World War II when it turned to making precision instruments for the American armed forces after restrictions on the use of strategic materials compelled it to abandon the electric train market. Links with the federal government continued to draw lucrative contracts after the war.

Military work didn’t represent the only venture outside the train realm in the late 1940s. Prodded by Lawrence Cowen, Lionel entered a new field when it acquired the Airex Corp., which manufactured fishing gear. About the same time, in a vain effort to compete with the Gilbert Co., Lionel brought out a construction set. Too bad for the firm its version of the Erector Set failed to win over kids.

Nonetheless, Joshua Cowen could cite Lionel’s heightened profits as proof of the wisdom of elevating his son to the presidency of the corporation. The “Old Man,” as employees warmly referred to the elder Cowen, moved up to the position of chairman of the board of directors. He increasingly left day-to-day affairs to Lawrence. His family, like his business, proved to be a great source of pride.

Equally as important to Lionel’s ongoing success were the stability and strength of its inner circle of top-level management around the time of its golden anniversary. Joshua and Lawrence Cowen could rely on the astute mind of Raphael (serving as national sales



Lionel’s sales executives recognized the need for the firm to offer inexpensive sets to compete directly against Louis Marx & Co. and the A.C. Gilbert Co. The no. 1461S was one of two O-27 outfits priced under \$20 cataloged by Lionel in 1950. It came with three basic freight cars and a no. 6110 steam engine equipped with a smoke mechanism and Magne-Traction, but its no. 6001T lacked a whistle.



manager for two decades), Giaimo (following the estimable Caruso at the helm of production), and Bonanno (a brilliant and demanding leader of the designers in the Engineering Department).

Crack sales staffs based at the regional offices and the excellent assistants surrounding Giaimo, Bonanno, and Philip Marfuggi (who administered industrial relations at Lionel's factory) left both Cowens confident about the future. No surprise Joshua felt justified in enjoying the finer things in life – an elegant apartment on Park Avenue, a chauffeur-driven Bentley, and regular vacations with his wife to Europe and across the United States before sailing to Hawaii.

Announcing Magne-Traction

Thinking back, Joshua Cowen knew that certain years in Lionel's grand history stood out. He might have recalled 1930 as the time when the magnificent Standard gauge version of the famed *Blue Comet* passenger train made its debut. A decade later came additions to the roster of scale models and remote-controlled freight loaders. Clearly, 1940 had seen Lionel reach new levels of achievement.

What would 1950 hold for the corporation? The Cowens would have replied that the golden anniversary year was going to be notable, not for any single release, but for two changes affecting virtually everything in the line.

The first advance was called Magne-Traction. Under the leadership of Bonanno, Lionel had experimented with powder metallurgy, an industrial process by which granules of different metals were compressed into new shapes.

Engineers on Bonanno's staff combined powdered forms of magnetic metals to create wheels installed on Lionel's steam, diesel, and electric locomotives. The addition of these wheels increased the magnetic attraction between them and the track they ran on.

Lionel entered a new field when it acquired the Airex Corp., which manufactured fishing gear.

That, in turn, let electric trains stay on the rails when ascending or descending steep grades or traveling at fast speeds.

Lionel's engineers achieved their first triumph with powder metallurgy in 1949, when they installed magnetic traction on the new O gauge no. 622 Santa Fe NW2 diesel switcher and its O-27 twin, the no. 6220. Little fanfare accompanied the 1949 change, but Bonanno knew it would revolutionize the product line.

Powerful locomotives for 1950

For 1950, therefore, Lionel equipped all of its locomotives with Magne-Traction. The firm also renumbered those models so consumers understood that the Berkshire, the GG1, and the F3, among other engines, were new and improved.

The 1950 catalog boasted half a dozen new locomotives, most of them updated versions of older ones. For example, the no. 726 Berkshire became the no. 736, the no. 671 Turbine became the no. 681, and the no. 2333 Santa Fe F3 became the no. 2343. Even the inexpensive no. 1110 Scout steam engine was modified with the addition of Magne-Traction to be renumbered as the 1120.

Can't leave out the popular GG1, a path-breaking model of a classic electric-profile locomotive on the Pennsylvania RR. Lionel had struck gold in 1947 when it heralded its O gauge model of the GG1, numbered as the 2332. When this handsome model painted in Brunswick Green was updated with Magne-Traction for 1950, Lionel changed the product number to the 2330.

Looking at the new locomotives, we can conclude that the best were the 4-6-4 Hudson steamers, available in O and O-27 versions.

As the nos. 700E and 763, the Hudson had been Lionel's headliner from 1937 to 1942. After World War II, in 1946, Lionel had





cataloged a Hudson, but failed to mass-produce it. Four years later, this favorite locomotive of Joshua Cowen's returned to the line as the no. 773. Definitely impressive, it nonetheless lacked some of the details put on its predecessors; moreover, the new Hudson didn't qualify as a true scale replica.

More toy-like was the no. 2046, the O-27 cousin of the 773. This sharp newcomer combined the boiler of a Berkshire with the 4-6-4 wheel arrangement of a Hudson. Both the 773 and the 2046 steam locomotives came equipped with Magne-Traction, plus Lionel's patented smoke mechanism and cool whistle.

Also new was the no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA diesel, a model of a contemporary of the F3 developed by the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors. Lionel had not used the UP's Armour Yellow livery on a locomotive since last offering the no. 752W *City of Salina* streamlined power unit in 1941.

With the 2023 released in 1950, Lionel at last had a diesel for the O-27 expanding market. Had it contemplated a larger model? The yellow injection-molded plastic bodies used on a handful of F3s in 1950 and '51 suggest Lionel considered decorating some for the UP. Tantalizing further, two EMD six-axle E7 A-unit diesels lettered for the Union Pacific appeared in a Lionel advertisement printed in the December 1950 issue of *Railroad Model Craftsman* magazine.

Capitalizing on plastics

The second key change tied to 1950 was the conversion from stamped sheet metal as a primary material for rolling stock and accessories to plastics.

This sequence of events commenced in the late 1930s, when Lionel began using compression-molded Bakelite for an assortment of parts. Between 1940 and 1942, production personnel relied on plastics for various larger pieces. Examples included the body shells of the nos. 714 and 2954 scale and semi-scale boxcars as well as those of the nos. 2623 and 2624 Pullman heavyweight passenger coaches.

Injection-molded plastics became the rage after the war, and Lionel was quick to adopt the novel material. The no. 2452 gondola (new in 1945) was the first model to have an injection-molded body. Others followed, such as the nos. X2454 boxcars, 2465 double-dome tanker, and 2257 and 2357 Southern Pacific-type cabooses. The 2333 F3 and 2023 FA diesels had similar plastic bodies.

During the golden anniversary year, Lionel's engineers and factory supervisors stepped up the pace to replace metal items with plastic ones. For example, the venerable no. 45 automatic gateman

bid farewell after 15 years in the line, replaced by a plastic version. The brand-new no. 145 operated identically to its predecessor, yet with a retail price of \$5.95, still cost 55 cents less than a 45.

Another area reflecting the trend of substituting injection-molded plastic items for metal ones was the roster of passenger cars. Although the compression-molded heavyweights survived through the end of 1950, Lionel retired the no. 6440 series of sheet-metal cars. In their place arrived two new series of plastic models (a pair of O-27 Pullman coaches and a matching observation). These were the silver-and-gray no. 2420 Lionel Lines cars and the yellow-and-gray no. 2480s.

Injection-molded plastics became the rage after the war, and Lionel was quick to adopt the novel material.

Marketing Magne-Traction

When National Sales Manager Arthur Raphael and Advertising Manager Joseph Hanson mulled over the best ways to market Lionel's line, they faced a dilemma. The advent of Magne-Traction made almost every locomotive new "under the hood"; therefore, sales should be brisk. Too bad nothing about their appearances set the new models apart from their predecessors. How could Lionel persuade customers who already owned a 726 Berkshire to buy the new 736?

To judge from Lionel's catalogs and other advertising, executives concluded that proclaiming the benefits of Magne-Traction would appeal to loyal consumers. As for new buyers, Lionel sought to win them over by offering a range of outfits at prices equal to or lower than those sold the previous year.

The Cowens approved of this approach and waited to see results. Net sales data for the fiscal year ending February 28, 1951, proved the success of this strategy. Those figures were the highest recorded in Lionel's 50-year history.

The campaign promoting Magne-Traction as a revolutionary breakthrough in toy trains began on the front cover of the consumer catalog and never let up.

"More Climb ... More Pull ... More Speed with Magne-Traction, declared inset illustrations. Five pages explaining why Lionel trains were "a Million Miles ahead of everything" followed. Pictures and text described the breakthroughs that made Lionel the leader in the toy train field: puffing smoke, prototypical knuckle couplers, built-in whistles, die-cast metal trucks with solid steel wheels, non-derailing switches, quiet and durable worm-drive motors, and Magne-Traction.

Additionally, red-and-white Magne-Traction heralds stood out on each of the two-page spreads in the consumer catalog where Lionel showed off the 22 outfits and 11 separate-sale locomotives made available. No way anyone could miss the news.



Landmark display layout

The best way to appreciate the new locomotives was to see them in action. So Lionel designed a unique display to show what Magne-Traction could do.

This landmark display, designated by Lionel as the no. D-27 and known as the “Disappearing Train Layout,” measured 4½ x 8 feet. According to an article in the November 2001 issue of *Classic Toy Trains*, the layout came with an O-27 no. 2035 2-6-4 steamer and a no. 6001T tender as well as 13 no. 1002 gondolas. (These were special red, silver, or yellow cars offered only with this display.)



Outfit no. 2159W promised untold hours of fun for youngsters who received that O gauge train. In addition to a couple of exciting and entertaining animated cars (nos. 3461X log dump car and 3464 operating boxcar), the set featured the latest version of Lionel's popular model of a Pennsylvania RR GG1 electric-profile locomotive. The no. 2330 (equipped with Magne-Traction and a horn) was cataloged in 1950 only.

When the freight train entered a short tunnel, viewers expected the engine to exit before most of the cars had passed in. But it wasn't until the last car (there was no caboose included) had entered the first portal that the locomotive peeked out of the darkness. Quite a surprise, yet just as William Bonanno, a supervisor in the Display Department and brother of the chief engineer, had designed the D-27.

What made this mind-boggling illusion possible was Magne-Traction. The new feature enabled the locomotive to enter the tunnel, chug down a tight loop of track hidden beneath the tabletop, stay on the helix, and then ascend a steep grade back to the surface level. Cries of “How does it do that?” greeted the train, giving store owners the perfect cue to describe the marvels of Magne-Traction.

General comments about sets

Even if satisfied customers didn't trade in their old Turbines and GG1s, Lionel dealers trusted that sooner or later they would be won over. More important than reaching out to existing modelers, Lionel's leaders agreed, was widening their market. New outfits were essential to achieving this goal because once a family

The freight car roster cataloged in 1950 included several colorful if small models. To such familiar items as the nos. 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper, 6457 Lionel Lines illuminated SP-type caboose, 6462 New York Central gondola, and 6656 Lionel Lines stockcar, the corporation added the no. 6472 Lionel Lines refrigerator car. Also new to the line for 1950 was the towering no. 455 oil derrick and pump.

UNIQUE AND RARE ITEMS OF 1950

During each production year, Lionel made certain items in such limited quantities that collectors classify them as rare. Some were engineering prototypes and mock-ups of which only one or two examples were produced. Color samples, test runs, and sales samples were made, although in slightly greater numbers. Finally, Lionel authorized limited production runs at its factory.

The most coveted of any prototypes and mock-ups from 1950 is the no. 213 railroad lift bridge. Lionel never mass-produced this accessory, but a crude preliminary model was kept in the company's archives and an engineering sample, complete and operational, was made.

A unique item is a gold-plated F3 diesel, as illustrated on the cover of the December 1950 issue of *Popular*

Science magazine. No such diesel has ever been reported, though in 1949 Lionel presented a gold- and chrome-plated set of 2333 Santa Fe F3s to one of its distributors in honor of that firm's golden anniversary.

Desirable and more plentiful are no. 2023 Union Pacific diesels given gray-painted noses to match their roofs. Apparently, Lionel decorated a small number of these models in this way during the first production run. Then a supervisor, realizing that painting the noses gray consumed time and cost money, eliminated that step.

Another color variation is worth mentioning. For 1950, Lionel redesigned the corral for the no. 3656 operating cattle car as well as the interior guides on its stockcar. A few of the cars came with black heat-stamped lettering.

Finally, there are the no. 1002 gondolas specially painted for the wondrous no. D-27 "Disappearing Train Layout" display Lionel developed to publicize the power of Magne-Traction. These short and colorful freight cars earned special mention in *Collecting Model Trains*, a book written by toy train historian Louis H. Hertz in 1956. Discussing rare items created for display or presentation purposes, he refers to "Lionel gondolas made up in gold and other colors in 1950 for use on a special display piece for dealers."

Over the years, these specially painted gondolas have turned up in red, silver, and yellow. Priced somewhere around \$400 each, they likely represent items from displays that dealers sold separately or as part of Scout train sets.



Rare items associated with the 1950 production year include (clockwise from upper left) an engineering sample for the no. 213 railroad lift bridge, black-lettered versions of the no. 3656 operating stockcar, early-production models of the no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco diesels with gray-painted noses, and specially painted no. 1002 gondolas used on Lionel's no. D-27 display layout.

An overlooked newcomer in 1950 was the no. 2046 locomotive, a 4-6-4 small Hudson used as the motive power for a pair of O-27 freight sets. Here, this steam engine, which combined a Berkshire's boiler with a Hudson's wheel arrangement, leads outfit no. 1473WS, which offered a pair of Lionel's best operating models.



bought a set, it tended to add track, rolling stock, and accessories. Consequently, Lionel offered 10 O-27 and a dozen O gauge outfits in 1950.

Executives at Lionel evidently planned one more outfit, the trail-blazing no. 4333WS Electronic Control Set. A picture in the advance catalog alluded to the addition of two new cars. However, the specially equipped crane car and hopper weren't produced. Information in the consumer catalog remained as puzzling; it referred to a new version of the Turbine (no. 4681) that never has been reported. Examples of this unique set sold in 1950 were almost certainly just leftover inventory.

Speaking generally about the outfits Lionel cataloged during its golden anniversary year, we can describe them as routine. Many were, with the exception of their locomotives, carryovers from 1949. Even newly created sets tended to come with freight cars that became standard and mundane components. Only by looking at these models from the perspective of 60 years ago can we really understand their significance.

In 1950, the nos. 6465 double-dome tank cars, 3464 operating boxcars, 6462 gondolas, 6456 hoppers, and 6357 and 6457 SP-type cabooses were recent additions to the line. With each of them, Lionel had utilized the injection-molding of plastics to create a new version of a common piece of rolling stock.

Some of those models, notably the cabooses (one illuminated and one not) and the long gondola, looked more realistic than their immediate predecessors. Others, such as the hoppers and tank cars, lacked the near-scale dimensions soon to become so vital to model railroaders. For the moment, though, they served Lionel well.

Cataloging a basic boxcar, hopper, stockcar, tank car, and so forth wasn't anything new for Lionel. The company had been doing that at least since the 1910s. It had updated various freight cars periodically throughout the prewar era while ceasing production of older, less satisfactory O and Standard gauge models.

All the same, Lionel had departed from this traditional approach after World War II. Corporate leaders elected not to reissue the majority of the basic freight cars cataloged as late as 1942. Instead, they tolerated gaps, preferring to wait until they could fill them with improved models fashioned out of plastic. This process, launched in 1945 with the no. 2452 gondola, was all but finished four years later. Thus in 1950, the line could largely be kept as it was.

**What made
this mind-
boggling
illusion
possible was
Magne-Traction.**

Bargains galore for O-27 set buyers

Having rebuilt its freight and passenger car rosters and introduced the most powerful locomotives in Lionel's history, the men at the top had good reason to feel proud and optimistic in 1950. To increase sales, they chose to maintain prices from the previous year or, in a few cases, to actually lower them. Even when executives raised prices on sets, they often improved the contents.

Take the bottom-of-the-line set, the no. 1113 Scout three-car freight. It sold for \$14.95, a dollar less than a year before. Yet it now included a new locomotive with Magne-Traction. Or consider the no. 1457B four-car freight train. This O-27 work train led by a no. 6220 Santa Fe NW2 diesel switcher was identical to what Lionel had cataloged in 1949. Delighted consumers would have noticed that the set's retail price of \$39.50 represented a reduction of nearly \$10.

Even though the top O-27 outfit (no. 1475WS) still retailed for \$67.50, it promised more action than had its equivalent from 1949 (no. 1459WS). In place of a no. 2020 Turbine, Lionel packed a new no. 2046 small Hudson and 2046W streamlined whistle tender. The consist of the 1475WS featured a trio of operating cars, plus the new no. 6472 refrigerator car and the nice no. 6419 work caboose.

By the way, many of today's toy train enthusiasts yearn for an O-27 outfit that at the time didn't strike Lionel's sales force as a top-shelf item. All the same, the no. 1464W set, with its twin Alco diesel units and matching yellow-and-gray passenger cars, is currently treated as one of the most desirable postwar sets.

In a year acclaimed by Lionel as golden, the yellow diesels, coaches, and observation car most closely resembled that hue. Collectors prize what they laud as the "Anniversary Set," particularly because Lionel discontinued the three 2400-series cars, with their cool red stripes and silhouetted window strips, after 1950.

Great O gauge outfits

The picture improves when we examine the O gauge outfits. Start with the GG1 freight set. In 1949, the no. 2139W had boasted a no. 2332 single-motored unit, two operating cars, a hopper, and a caboose, for \$57.50. The no. 2159W, its match in 1950, came with a new 2330 double-motored GG1 with Magne-Traction and added a 6462 gondola. Amazingly, the retail price had been lowered by \$5.

Outfits headed by Turbines and Berkshires also looked more impressive. The no. 2173WS four-car freight set, pulled by a new 681 Turbine with Magne-Traction, came with a pair of operating



The consumer catalog issued by Lionel in 1950 promoted the advantages and thrills of Magne-Traction.

cars and the finest illuminated caboose. Yet rather than increasing the price, Lionel's leaders cut it from \$57.50 to \$52.50.

Similarly, the no. 2150WS three-car passenger outfit, also led by a 681 Turbine, cost less than the all-but-identical no. 2140WS from 1949, in spite of featuring an improved locomotive and plus two redecorated Pullman coaches and an observation car. For \$55, you got the brand-new silver-painted streamliners.

The finest Berkshire freight outfit for 1950 (no. 2165WS) sacrificed the no. 3656 operating cattle car and corral packed with its equivalent set in 1949. However, the new outfit had two operating cars (nos. 3461X log car and 3472 automatic milk car and platform). Better still, Lionel had dropped the price \$10.

The outfits bedazzling youngsters in 1950 and causing collectors to swoon these days featured Lionel's outstanding F3s and its classic 773 Hudson steamer.

Least expensive of those sets at \$57.50 was the pair of identical freight trains headed by Santa Fe (no. 2175W) or New York Central (no. 2185W) A-A diesel combinations. Both came with five cars, one of which operated (3464 boxcar).

Lionel increased the retail price by \$10 for its second pair of identical diesel freight trains. Both the nos. 2161W (Santa Fe) and 2171W (NYC) consisted of three operating cars (nos. 3461X log car, 3464 operating boxcar, and 3469X ore car), a no. 6520 searchlight car, and a no. 6457 illuminated SP-type caboose. A year earlier, the equivalent diesel set (no. 2151W) had lacked the log car.

The mighty Hudson with Magne-Traction pulled two outfits, one with ordinary cars and the other with highly desirable ones. The no. 2169WS freight came with five models, two of which (nos. 3469X and 3656) operated. The price tag of \$79.50 exceeded that of every set cataloged by Lionel in 1949 except the 4110WS.

What really turned heads in 1950 was the no. 2148WS Hudson passenger outfit. The 4-6-4 steam engine and tender (a no. 2426W at the end of its run) pulled three classic cars dropped after this year: nos. 2625 *Irvington* Pullman, 2627 *Madison* Pullman, and 2628 *Manhattan* observation, all equipped with silhouettes of travelers on their new window strips. This legendary O gauge set boasted a hefty retail price of \$85.

The mighty Hudson pulled two outfits, one with ordinary cars and the other with highly desirable ones.

An array of auxiliary items

Auxiliary items of all sorts had always helped Lionel capture kids and other customers who owned a train and wanted excuses to buy something else. Paging through a catalog, they might pounce on extra sections of track, a pair of switches, a tunnel or bridge, street lamps, or even a more powerful transformer.

"Something else" in 1950 could also represent an additional locomotive as the first step in converting a roster to engines upgraded with Magne-Traction. Lionel set up newly designed motive power in its list of separate-sale items.

Compared with what was offered in 1949, the prices of these items were about the same. Catalog illustrations, however, were bigger and bolder in 1950. The back pages showed other new secondary models with ties to existing ones.

Thus the remote-controlled milk and cattle cars introduced in 1947 and '49, respectively, gained non-operating companions in 1950. Company decision makers decided that a refrigerator car (no. 6472) and a stockcar (no. 6656) would make inexpensive yet attention-getting additions to the expanding freight car line.

Another type of auxiliary product arrived, perhaps a bit late, in 1950. The popular New York Central and Santa Fe F3 A-A combinations gained matching B units. Those unpowered models proved irresistible to folks owning these diesels.

Accessories conquer new fields

Accessories stand out in Lionel's golden anniversary time. A handful of new items, such as the nos. 252 crossing gate and 309 yard sign set, reflected the ongoing switch from metal to plastic. So too did the new 145 automatic gateman. For 1950, designers transformed the metal structure and crossbuck into plastic pieces while giving the figure a more human appearance. Further, they cleverly adapted his shack to become the foundation of the new no. 125 whistling shed.

Another injection-molded plastic newcomer was the no. 256 illuminated freight shed, replacing the no. 156 station platform dropped after 1949. The 256, with its white and green structure on a maroon base, blended well with another accessory, the no. 132 illuminated station. The latter, modeled after a typical small-town depot, no longer competed for attention with the no. 115 urban station, a metal survivor from the prewar years that had lingered through 1949.

Just as Lionel had given the roster of rolling stock a new look after World War II, so too was it revamping assorted accessories. This process of housecleaning continued through 1950, with a large prewar remnant (the no. 313 bascule bridge) dropped and three others (nos. 93 water tower, 97 coal elevator, and 164 log loader) cataloged for the final time.

Executives dared to toss out the 97 and 164 because those accessories had been superseded by the nos. 397 diesel operating coal loader and 364 conveyor lumber loader two years earlier. Now they prepared to replace another pioneering item, the 313 bascule bridge, with something that has become a legend.

That unique accessory, assigned number 213, was one of three immense, sophisticated operating items highlighting the closing section of the catalog.

The first of these monumental accessories was the no. 455 oil derrick and pumper. With two kinds of animation, it ably took Lionel into the oil business.



The roster of accessories available during Lionel's golden anniversary year of 1950 couldn't help but impress consumers and leave children wishing they could have them all. The nos. 125 whistling shed, 145 automatic gateman, 252 crossing gate, 256 freight station, and 309 yard sign set joined the first group of no. 310 billboards to be cataloged.

Next came the no. 456 coal ramp, which gave operators opportunities to unload coal in prototypical fashion. By remote control they delivered the new no. 3456 Norfolk & Western operating hopper to the top of the ramp. Pushing another button caused the car's load of coal to fall into a bin below, where it could be emptied into a 397.

The third illustrated accessory remains one of the great mysteries in Lionel's postwar history. With the bascule bridge due to be removed, engineers developed a model of one of the massive lift bridges erected not far from Lionel's plant.

Illustrations of the 213 railroad lift bridge appeared in both the advance and the consumer catalogs for 1950, not to mention magazine advertisements galore. All of that publicity suggested Lionel's sales staff had received sufficient orders for this accessory at the annual American Toy Fair to justify mass-producing it. But for reasons never documented, Lionel never manufactured the 213 lift bridge.

Truly a golden year

With sales booming, the father-and-son team running Lionel looked ahead with optimism. The Cowens liked how much press Lionel was receiving during its jubilee year, with a gold F3 shown on the cover of *Popular Science* magazine and stories about the corporation appearing in mass-circulation publications, such as *Collier's* and *Look*.

More excitement came in September, when *The Lionel Clubhouse*, a new 15-minute television series hosted by New York Yankees star center fielder Joe DiMaggio, debuted on NBC. That series represented merely one of several promotions of Lionel trains taking place on regional and national TV programs.

As 1950 came to a close and Lionel finished commemorating its first half-century in business, key executives at the world's greatest toy train maker felt sure it had been a memorable year for them. To be sure, the Korean Conflict had presented some problems, but Joshua and Lawrence saw the future as golden.



Snazzy streamlined passenger trains for the O-27 line

THE STORY BEHIND THE NO. 1464W "ANNIVERSARY SET" AND ITS SUCCESSORS

The consumer catalog for 1950, exciting though it was, did not overwhelm children with bright and vivid colors. What did stand out was a pair of diesels: the nos. 2343 Santa Fe EMD F3s and 2023 Union Pacific Alco FAs.

Kids were familiar with the Santa Fe diesels, which had dominated Lionel's O gauge roster since their debut in the catalog for 1948. The Alcos, however, were something new and bold.

Lionel's leaders used the Union Pacific diesels as the motive power for two outfits in 1950s, notably the no. 1464W three-car passenger train that included O-27 streamlined cars painted yellow and gray with red highlights and lettering to match the diesels. That set served the company well during its 50th anniversary, and its silver-painted successors did even more. Over the next few years, they pushed Lionel into the era of streamlined trains.

Challenge from Indiana

The years after World War II saw railroads across the United States taking steps to modernize their passenger fleets by purchasing longer coaches, diners, and other cars fashioned out of lightweight steel. The goal, in adding sleek and modern-looking rolling stock, was to attract more travelers. Streamlined trains like the *Super Chief*, the *Empire Builder*, the *California Zephyr*, the *Broadway Limited*, and the *Silver Comet* did that as they made headlines.

Children playing with miniature electric trains also wanted streamlined passenger cars, but Lionel and American Gilbert dragged their feet in shifting from models of heavyweight cars to the latest styles. Even the no. 2400 series of green-and-gray streamlined cars Lionel added in 1948 looked a bit old-fashioned.

Into an apparent gap in the market rushed an upstart firm based



the famous U.P.—these trains steal the show

No. 1464W "027"
DIESEL 4-CAR FREIGHT SET

Featuring the new UNION PACIFIC Diesel—with built-in WORK!

Back set equipped with the Great No. 1464W Diesel, 1000 Watt Trans-Former, with built-in reversing and directional control switches.

Price's value! Imagine in complete Lionel freight set—locomotive, streamlined and semi-trailer—no. 1464W. Only Lionel gives you this set. Read now this set is a masterpiece of Lionel's design engineering. This magnificent freight is the newest, most advanced thing on wheels. With Lionel Diesel-Engine pulling its power, it will pull long lines of freight at top speed around curves without derailing. Complete remote control operation. It's a beauty, and look at the price! From the brand new stock set. Set's \$4.95, 2 in. long. Each locomotive from \$10.95 to \$19.95.

\$47.50

Of the 23 train sets that Lionel cataloged in 1950, the no. 1464W probably did the most to celebrate the firm's first half-century in business. The yellow-and-gray paint scheme of the brand-new no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco diesels and the three matching O-27 streamlined cars boldly announced the golden anniversary.

in Indiana. American Model Toys, a business founded by Jack Ferris in 1949, staked out a unique place for itself by producing O gauge replicas of extruded aluminum passenger cars decorated for the New York Central and the Pennsylvania RR.

These cars could run on Lionel's three-rail track, and their couplers were compatible with the knuckle couplers installed on Lionel models. As a result, the New York Central cars could be pulled by Lionel's no. 2333 NYC F3s and the Pennsy cars could be attached to Lionel's no. 2332 GG1 electric.

In other words, O gauge enthusiasts were able to add two attractive passenger trains to their roster. They merely had to buy their motive power from the Lionel catalog and their streamliners from American Model Toys.

The situation became more threatening to Lionel when AMT introduced extruded aluminum streamlined cars lettered for the Santa Fe. Suddenly, a third train was possible. Once Lionel's very popular no. 2333 Santa Fe F3s were coupled to the matching passenger cars, kids could pretend to run *El Capitan* or the *Chief*.

Lionel moves fast!

The situation for Lionel's engineering supervisors and sales executives took on urgency as 1950 approached. That year, as everyone at the firm knew, Lionel would commemorate its golden anniversary. Corporate leaders wanted to energize the line and boost sales with something they could tie to the event.

At the same time, Lionel executives, quite aware of what AMT was doing, worried about the upstart firm robbing them of sales. Hobbyists infatuated with their Lionel diesels were clamoring for

passenger cars they could run with them. Few seemed to mind that another company was producing those streamliners.

So Lionel must have felt the need to move quickly to counter this rival. That feeling, along with a desire to promote the company's half-century in business, culminated in the release of a magnificent train designed to look like a coherent and realistic unit—the 1464W Union Pacific passenger set.

That O-27 outfit proved to be popular from the moment Lionel introduced it, and has since gained acclaim as a classic. The version of the 1464W offered in 1950 featured two no. 2023 UP Alco FA diesels (operating and non-operating) leading three matching small streamlined cars: nos. 2481 *Plainfield* Pullman coach, 2482 *Westfield* Pullman coach, and 2483 *Livingston* observation.

In addition to the two locomotives and three passenger cars, this set had eight pieces of curved track and five straights, a no. 6019 uncoupling/operating section, and a no. 1033 90-watt transformer. Some instruction sheets, a no. 310 billboard set, and a full list of Lionel service stations rounded out the contents.

Gray comes and goes

The 2023 Alco A units broke new ground at Lionel. At last, kids with O-27 rosters and layouts could claim a "covered wagon" diesel as their own. In subsequent years, Lionel brought out some other Alco FA-1 diesels with different paint schemes and road names. Later in the 1950s and well into the 1960s, many other Alcos showed up, although by then several key details had been removed.

But in 1950, Lionel's Alcos looked absolutely terrific. The best-looking variation of the 2023 is also the scarcest and most desirable. It had a black or clear plastic body that was spray-painted gray as the base coat. Workers at Lionel's plant then masked the roof and nose areas to retain that gray while the rest of the shell was painted a rich shade of yellow. Only a few models were done this way.

More common was the practice of leaving only the roof gray and painting the nose of the 2023s the same shade of yellow as the rest of the body shell. This was done on black plastic shells as well as the more plentiful yellow ones.

In retrospect, putting yellow paint over a yellow plastic shell wasn't the smartest idea. The color can seem "milky" and blotched 60 years later.

The earliest examples of the 2023s had gray-painted side frames for the four-wheel trucks. Before too long, Lionel changed to black-oxidized side frames.

The Alcos featured red heat-stamped lettering and numerals, plus a narrow red stripe along the roofline. The UP herald applied to the nose was a decal.

Other features on the body shell of each yellow Alco included a headlight lens, an ornamental horn, and marker lenses numbered "2023." The die-cast metal frame used for this locomotive came painted gray with a narrow red stripe.

Inside every powered diesel, laborers installed a motor, a three-position reversing unit, an operating horn, and a light. Magne-Traction was another selling point. The non-powered A unit came equipped with only a working headlight.

A trio of yellow cars

The three passenger cars packed inside each 1464W set box were new to the line, at least in terms of their decoration. The body shells used for them had been around since 1948. That was when Lionel introduced its first new passenger cars of the postwar era, the nos. 2400, 2401, and 2402 illuminated streamliners.



Less attention in 1950 went to O gauge outfit no. 2150WS, but this powerful steam passenger train introduced silver-and-gray versions of Lionel's classic streamlined Pullman coaches and observation, which made their debut in 1948.

Lionel used those shells in 1950 for the three cars that accompanied the Union Pacific Alcos. It painted the two illuminated coaches and observation car in the same rich yellow applied to the diesels. The roof was gray, just as it had been on the earlier green cars. In place of yellow stripes were two narrow red ones.

The cars introduced in 1950 had different names from those on the earlier 2400-series cars. Three other towns in northern New Jersey were selected. More dramatic were the window strips with silhouetted outlines of travelers. This detail became the standard on Lionel's passenger cars, heavyweight and streamlined.

Anniversary Set

There you have it – a three-car passenger set that was unquestionably a train. To be sure, the locomotives were lettered for the Union Pacific while the cars, like their green-and-gray predecessors still came with “Lionel Lines” above the windows. Otherwise, the rolling stock perfectly matched the twin Alcos.

Hobbyists have nicknamed the 1464W the “Anniversary Set,” under the assumption that Lionel developed this bold yellow train to announce that 1950 was its golden anniversary. Drawing such a conclusion seems safe, yet the text that accompanied the catalog illustrations of the two outfits led by the 2023s hardly mentions this important landmark in the history of this toy train giant.

The sole reference appears, not with the exciting passenger outfit, but with the run-of-the-mill freight. On page 13 of the consumer catalog, the copywriter described the 1467W as “Brand new this year in celebration of Lionel's Golden Anniversary. This magnificent freight is the swiftest, sleekest thing on wheels.”

The diesels get all the love

The all-new 2023 twin diesels dominated the text there and elsewhere in the catalog: “Colorful streamlined power plants, these diesels – famous for their record-breaking runs in the Far West.” The units were “Enameled in the authentic Union Pacific colors, and magnificently scale-detailed down to the last rivet.”

The addition of Magne-Traction merited attention. The diesels would “pull long lines of freights at top speed around sweeping curves without derailling.” Other features listed in the catalog included the remote-controlled horn installed with the motor in the lead locomotive, the headlights on both ends, and the operating knuckle couplers on the 22-inch-long Alco A-A combination.

Lionel also made the powered and unpowered Union Pacific locomotives available for separate sale in 1950, with a price tag of \$35. To judge from all the diesels on the vintage toy train market, a large quantity must have been produced.

Lionel did not make the passenger cars available for separate sale. Little wonder that far fewer examples of those cars appear on today's market. The relative scarcity of the yellow-and-gray streamliners might suggest, too, that Lionel had not received too many orders for this O-27 passenger outfit in 1950.

Why the 1464W kept changing

But paging through Lionel's consumer catalog for 1950 reveals something else of importance relating to this outfit. Three streamlined cars that looked much like the cars offered in the 1464W were available in an O gauge passenger set, the no. 2150WS, which was led by a no. 681 steam turbine and a no. 2671W tender.

For Lionel to upgrade rolling stock from its O-27 roster to its O gauge line was not unusual in the first years of the postwar period. Besides, the streamliners might justifiably be considered O gauge models because the first group of these cars (nos. 2400, 2401, and 2402) was put in an O gauge outfit in 1948 and '49.

But what does seem odd and worthy of comment was the fact that Lionel repainted and renumbered the trio of passenger cars that appeared in the 1464W. The cars in that set were painted yellow and heat-stamped in red. They were given new numbers and names: 2481 *Plainfield*, 2482 *Westfield*, and 2483 *Livingston*.

The three cars in the 2150WS came painted silver and lettered in black. They bore numbers unlike those that Lionel had added to its green-and-gray cars or its yellow-and-gray cars. However, their car names duplicated those on the earlier group of streamliners: nos. 2421 *Maplewood*, 2422 *Chatham*, and 2423 *Hillside* (all taken from towns located near the Lionel factory in northern New Jersey).

Why Lionel created two distinctly different looking groups of its small streamlined passenger cars can be answered when we remember that only the silver-and-gray models were available for separate sale (priced at \$6.50 each). The yellow-and-gray cars were intended solely as components of the 1464W set, which came with brand-new diesels decorated in the same elegant paint scheme.

Lionel wanted to be able to sell streamlined cars that youngsters could easily pair with any of its locomotives. The consumer catalog



When Lionel brought back the 1464W for a second year, it used the three silver-and-gray no. 2400-series passenger cars. For 1951, however, it paired them with Union Pacific Alcos decorated in a matching paint scheme to resemble a streamliner.

corroborates this point, as it noted in the separate-sale section that the silver cars were based on “deluxe cars used on many of the coast-to-coast trains.” So modelers far from the territory crossed by the Union Pacific could make good use of these generic cars.

Perhaps sales executives at Lionel were engaged in an experiment to see which set of streamliners proved to be more popular. They were counting orders and measuring sales in hopes of learning something important for the future.

More silver in 1951

The consumer catalog Lionel issued in 1951 revealed that executives planned to bring back the 1464W (as well as the freight outfit led by the same Union Pacific Alco FA units). However, the 2150WS – the O gauge set being discussed – did not return to the product line for a second consecutive year.

Readers of that new consumer catalog had quite a surprise coming to them when they reached the two-page spread that depicted the 1464W. Gone were the yellow-and-gray diesels and cars. The 2023 Union Pacific diesels now came with silver-painted bodies, gray-painted roofs, and black lettering.

Additionally, the 1951 version of the 1464W did not have the same trio of O-27 streamliners that its predecessor had boasted. Instead, the three cars packed with it were the same ones that had been found in the 2150WS set: nos. 2421 *Maplewood* Pullman, 2422 *Chatham* Pullman, and 2423 *Hillside* observation car.

These three beauties, each nearly a foot in length, came painted glossy silver and heat-stamped in black. They boasted interior illumination and window strips with silhouettes. Lionel's catalog made sure customers were aware of such details as the “ventilators and radio antenna on the boat-tail observation car.”

Seven possible reasons for adopting a silver scheme

1. The yellow scheme had been adopted to celebrate Lionel's golden anniversary. Afterward, it made sense to use a different scheme, so Lionel opted for silver while leaving the roofs of the locomotives and cars the same dark gray.

2. The Union Pacific had financed or somehow facilitated the use of yellow paint identical with its own. Executives at the railroad

decided not to renew this offer after 1950, and so Lionel had little choice but to go with silver.

3. Shortages of chromium occurred after the outbreak of the Korean Conflict in June of 1950, and chromium was essential to the production of yellow paint. With such paint in short supply and likely rising in cost, Lionel abandoned its use of that color and switched to silver, which complemented the gray.

4. Using yellow on the O-27 streamlined cars had limited their sales potential (just as had been true when Lionel painted its first models green with yellow stripes in 1948 and '49). To make these coaches and their observation car more popular, Lionel had

decided to paint them silver with a gray roof. This was a generic decorating scheme that would appeal to kids living in any region. Also, the cars would look good behind any Lionel steam or diesel locomotive.

5. Lionel acknowledged the challenge posed by AMT's O gauge models of streamlined passenger cars. Unable to offer anything to compete with those O gauge models (the no. 2500-series cars didn't come out until 1952), its leaders could only take its O-27 streamliners and paint them silver. The cars would look good with the matching silver Alcos and the Santa Fe F3 diesels.

6. Orders for the yellow-painted diesels and streamlined cars had fallen short of Lionel's hopes in 1950, and the silver passenger cars in the 2150WS outfit had turned out to be more popular. When deciding which scheme to bring back, executives went with the winning silver-and-gray paint scheme.

7. While orders for the yellow-painted diesels and streamliners had been disappointing, the silver models also did not perform as well as expected. Lionel, left with a number of the silver cars in its inventory, had no choice but to unload them in 1951, using them as the basis for the modified 1464W set yet not having sufficient stock to bring back the 2150WS set for its O gauge line in 1951.

What likely happened in 1951

Reading the list of possible explanations that I've compiled, I'm led to summarize them and conclude that Lionel's decision makers, prodded by what AMT was doing, made the smart move in 1950 to change the paint scheme on their 2400-series streamlined cars from a green-and-gray scheme (reminiscent of the heavyweight

“This magnificent freight [1467W] set is the swiftest, sleekest thing on wheels.”



The all-silver 1464W streamlined passenger train absolutely dazzled in the line Lionel offered for 1952. Be aware the Union Pacific Alco diesels began sporting a new catalog number in that year, going from 2033 to 2033.

cars owned by the Pullman Co.) to a silver-and-gray one. That scheme suggested the extruded-aluminum cars used on many railroads.

For the anniversary year at Lionel, those executives decided to add a group of streamliners decorated in a yellow-and-gray scheme that would go with the brand-new Union Pacific Alcos and be suitable for commemorating the firm's 50 years. This special outfit would be available for only 1950, although I'm sure that if sales of the first 1464W had gone through the roof it would have returned.

After cutting back the train line because the demands of the Korean Conflict made it difficult to manufacture as many trains and accessories as in 1949 and '50, Lionel wisely chose to bring out only one passenger outfit with the silver-and-gray streamliners in 1951. And that was the updated 1464W.

As a side note, Lionel had priced both the 1464W and 2150WS at \$55 in 1950. A year later, when it merged the two to create an O-27 set that had all three silver-and-gray streamliners pulled by matching Alco FA units, the price tag had increased significantly. The nearly 5-foot-long 1464W sold for \$66.50 in 1951. And the separate-sale price of each of the streamlined cars had jumped to \$7.75.

The best train in 1951 didn't come from Lionel

Of course, Lionel might have tried something else with its silver-and-gray streamliners in 1951. For example, it could have offered an O gauge outfit that featured either the no. 2343 Santa Fe F3 A-A combination or the no. 2344 New York Central diesels pulling three of these passenger cars. Throw in the B unit that matched these two sets of F3 diesels and you would have had a pair of terrific sets!

Why the executives planning the line for 1951 failed to see the obvious remains a mystery. They must have been aware that at the same time American Model Toys was publicizing its near-scale extruded-aluminum streamliners that came with authentic New York Central or Santa Fe car names and markings.

The 1464W returns in 1952

Even though Lionel brought out near-scale aluminum streamliners in 1952, the company was not finished with the small plastic streamlined passenger cars it had put to good use in 1950 and '51. The two Pullmans and the observation car returned in 1952, although now the roofs were painted silver and not gray.

The change to all-silver cars was done to facilitate the decorating process. Now the roof did not require any masking or additional work; instead, the body and roof could be sprayed with glossy silver paint and be left to dry before the shell was heat-stamped in black to add the Lionel Lines name and the car number.

Lionel again cataloged the 1464W as a three-car outfit led by the two Union Pacific Alco FA diesels. Those engines had been renumbered as "2033."

Otherwise, the 1952 version of the set was a repeat of what Lionel had offered in 1951. The outfit box was the same, though it might have a preprinted OPS stamp. The diesels once more came in a master carton, which was placed inside the set box. The cars came in their own component boxes with wrapping.

Another use for the silver cars

Since Lionel had offered only one outfit with the plastic streamliners in 1951 and since it now had extruded-aluminum streamliners, we might expect that the 1464W would be the sole set to have the silver-and-silver models, which were available for separate sale for \$7.75 each. This assumption would be erroneous.

Decision makers elected to create another O-27 set with the 2400-series passenger cars. The no. 1484WS included a no. 2056 small Hudson steam engine and a no. 2046W streamlined whistle tender pulling the same three cars as the 1464W plus a brand-new Pullman. Lionel had added a third coach to the series for 1952, the no. 2429 *Livingston*, which appeared in this set and for separate sale.

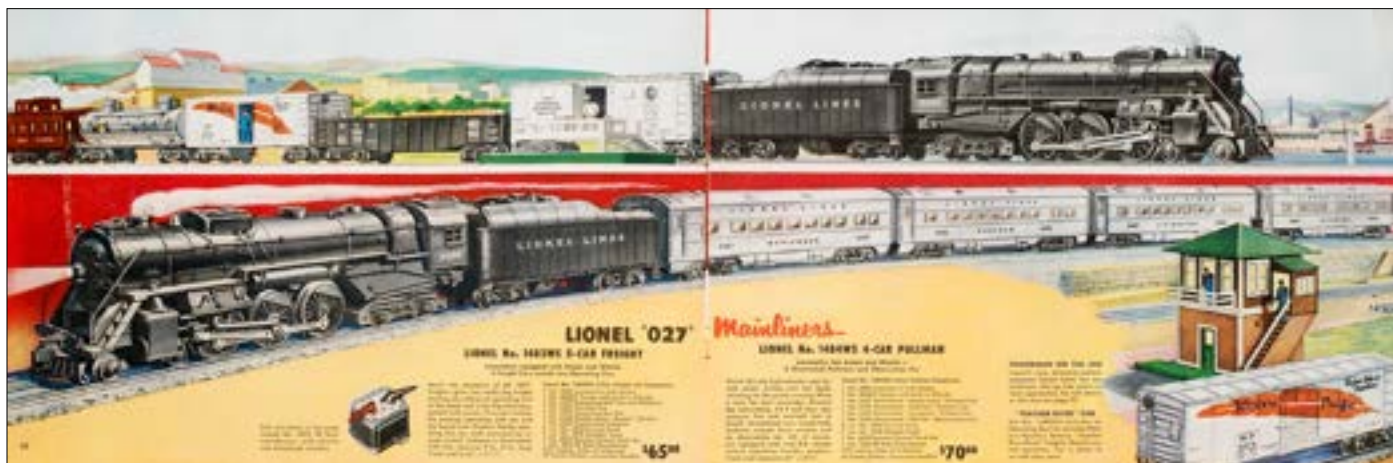
The four-car steam passenger train, priced at \$70, was the most expensive and therefore the top-of-the-line O-27 set for 1952. Compared with the 1464W, it was a bargain. For a mere \$3.50 more than the passenger set, the 1484WS offered another model plus the smoke and whistle that everyone loved about a steamer.

Incidentally, the \$70 retail price of the 1484WS exceeded the bill of even the top O gauge freight outfit (the no. 2189WS, which featured a Berkshire pulling five cars, three of which operated). It equaled the pair of F3 A-B-A four-car freights, which had as much track as the 1484WS. Only the no. 2190W Santa Fe Super Speedliner passenger outfit cost more than the 1484WS did in 1952.

Back once more in 1953

The saga of Lionel's magnificent 1464W streamlined passenger outfit didn't end in 1952.

The catalog for 1953 showed the same impressive silver-painted



At the top of the O-27 line for 1952, Lionel placed this great and often overlooked four-car passenger outfit (no. 1484WS). The new no. 2056 small Hudson pulled the trio of silver cars, along with a newcomer, the no. 2429 *Livingston* Pullman.

train and described it in roughly the same words. Again, the Union Pacific Alco FA passenger outfit sold for \$66.50. The two diesels once more pulled the nos. 2421 *Maplewood* Pullman, 2422 *Chatham* Pullman, and 2423 *Hillside* observation car.

The explanation for the return of this star in silver? Two possible – and contradictory – answers. Either sales of the 1464W had been so strong in 1952 that executives could justify bringing back this three-car diesel streamliner for another year. Or sales had fallen short, and Lionel was left with inventory that had to be sold. Therefore, executives insisted on cataloging the outfit another year.

Knowing how carefully decision makers at the firm monitored the orders that came in and aligned production with demand, I doubt that thousands of the 1464W had failed to sell in 1952. It's difficult to imagine Lionel's leaders making such an egregious mistake and being forced to offer a poorly performing set.

So I have to conclude that the 1464W reappeared in 1953 because it had sold well in the two previous years. For an outfit to appear in Lionel's postwar line with the same number for more than a single year was unusual; for the 1464W to show up four consecutive years may have been unparalleled in that era.

Different for 1953 was the sole passenger outfit headed by a steam engine and tender. No longer at the head of the O-27 roster, the no. 1502WS switched a no. 2055 small Hudson for the 2056 used the previous year. Further, this newly cataloged locomotive

pulled only three streamlined cars, the same trio as were packed with the 1464W. The retail price of \$57.50 was in the middle of the line.

As a final note, the 2429 *Livingston* Pullman returned as a separate-sale item only in 1953. Not illustrated and barely mentioned, it sold for \$7.75.

Legacy of the 1464W

After cataloging the 1464W from the golden anniversary year through 1953, Lionel decided to delete it. All three of the all-silver streamlined cars with black lettering once included with this outfit were gone, as was their overlooked sibling, the 2429 Pullman. Replacing them was a trio of silver cars with snappy red lettering, each given a new number and the name of another New Jersey town.

Virtually hidden at the back of the 1954 consumer catalog in the illustrated pages of locomotives available for separate sale was the 2033 Union Pacific FA duo. Never before had Lionel offered this combination or the silver 2023s for separate sale. Plainly, it had leftover inventory of the 2033 diesels to get rid of.

This situation in 1954 suggests the saga of the 1464W had run its course after four years. For Lionel to have offered the same silver train for three years after the spectacular debut of the yellow-and-gray UP set in 1950 leaves little doubt about the commercial success and importance of this O-27 streamliner. No matter what the color scheme, the 1464W set always looked great and ran well.



In 1953, besides cataloging the 1464W unchanged from the previous year, Lionel offered the no. 1502WS steam set. It used a new small Hudson (no. 2055) and included only three all-silver cars, now omitting the 2429 *Livingston* Pullman.

Joltin' Joe's Lionel TV show

BACKSTAGE AT THE *LIONEL CLUBHOUSE* TELEVISION PROGRAM

In the autumn of 1948, Lionel first ventured into commercial television by producing the 13-week series *Tales of the Red Caboose*. The show received less-than-spectacular reviews at the time and generated no discernible increase in sales. For those reasons, Joshua Lionel Cowen was reluctant to try any new ventures into TV.

But two years later, NBC approached Joe Hanson, Lionel's advertising manager, with an offer to sponsor a Saturday show starring Joltin' Joe DiMaggio, the great outfielder for the New York Yankees. Everyone, including Cowen, was impressed with that concept. The Yankees had won the World Series in 1949 and would again in 1950, and DiMaggio was a legend in his time.

The deal sailed through. *Lionel Clubhouse* debuted in September 1950 and ran every Saturday afternoon from 5:30 to 5:45 for 13 weeks. Hanson decided to use the show to promote Magne-Traction, the new feature that enabled Lionel engines to haul long lines of cars up and down steep grades. That meant demonstrating the new locomotives at every possible moment.

Time for a layout

Hanson looked for help from Diorama Studios, a business in New York City that had built many dioramas and the new layout in Lionel's main showroom. For *Lionel Clubhouse*, Bob Sherman, on staff at Lionel, designed an 8 x 8-foot layout that consisted mainly of a giant loop of elevated O gauge track. Then Bill Vollheim and Arthur Zirul at Diorama got down to work.

The finished layout wasn't much more than that towering loop. It started in one corner of the layout and, while circling the table, rose to an amazing height of 15 inches above ground level, where it leveled off onto a plateau. The loop continued down off the plateau, circled under its own ramp, ran through a tunnel underneath the plateau, and returned to join the ramp again.

Diorama employees ran a no. 2175W Santa Fe F3 diesel freight outfit up and down that loop. The set came with no. 2343 A units (one powered and one dummy), along with four cars and an SP-type caboose. They added five more freight cars to create a massive train that performed flawlessly every time.

In addition to the Santa Fe set, there was a no. 681 steam turbine at the head of a no. 2150WS passenger set with nos. 2421 and 2422 Pullmans and a no. 2423 observation. That locomotive, also equipped with Magne-Traction, made it halfway around the perimeter of the table before meandering through the center of the layout. Sadly, viewers hardly noticed that train because it really couldn't compete with the spectacular Magne-Traction loop.

Workers added only a little landscaping to the layout and scattered a few Plasticville structures. Most significantly, there were



Joe DiMaggio (center) and Jack Barry (second from left) pose in a weakly focused photo with kids from the Greenwich, N.Y., Boys Club on the set of *Lionel Clubhouse*, a TV series from 1950. Bob Sherman, Bill Vollheim, and Art Zirul built that layout at Diorama Studios to demonstrate the advantages of Magne-Traction.

no Lionel accessories. Those were demonstrated on side displays where the TV cameras of the time could better focus on them.

Conversations with the Clipper

The producers of *Lionel Clubhouse* invited a different Boys Club from the metropolitan New York area to attend the filming each week. The youngsters admired the electric trains and listened as Jack Barry, the show's host, sat beside the Yankee Clipper. The two of them conversed with other famous baseball personalities, mostly DiMaggio's teammates on the Yankees.

The opening episode featured Phil "Scooter" Rizzuto, the team's shortstop and eventual winner of the American League's Most Valuable Player award for 1950. Rizzuto and DiMaggio were close friends and had been together during World War II when they served in the Army Air Corps at Hickam Field, Hawaii.

Arthur Zirul had met them there in 1944 when he borrowed some sporting equipment. They renewed that acquaintance six years later on *Lionel Clubhouse*. Their conversation consisted of Art saying "Hi" to DiMaggio and him replying "Hi" to Art.

Further reminiscing, Art recalls how, when a scheduled guest for one episode failed to appear, he was pressed into service as an "expert" on Lionel trains. (During the early days of live TV there was no way to record segments for use in an emergency.)



Dressed up with scenery, Lionel lamps and signals, and more realistic structures, the same layout takes on an entirely new look. The late Bill Vollheim, a Diorama Studios employee, took this shot, which was used in a Lionel pamphlet in 1951 (*The Romance of Model Railroading*) and reproduced in the April 1992 issue of *Classic Toy Trains* magazine.

Someone put an engineer's cap on Art's head, and he did his best to answer Barry's questions about the layout while DiMaggio sat by and listened without saying very much.

Art speculated that DiMaggio's reticence might have been a reason why *Lionel Clubhouse* was not a big success. DiMaggio had not yet learned to do a selling job on TV (a skill he learned in later years). Perhaps he was also worrying that his baseball career might be over. Injuries forced him to retire from the Yankees the next year, and Lionel did not renew his contract.

The 13-week series ended in December of 1950, and Lionel showed no real interest in extending the run. The bare-bones layout was returned to Diorama Studios and transformed into an attractive diorama for Vollheim to photograph. As readers of *Classic Toy Trains* in the 1990s might remember, Bill's pictures appeared in pamphlets that Lionel gave out in the early 1950s.

Layout lives on

As the accompanying color shot reveals, Bill, Bob, and Art built rudimentary yet effective scenery along the upgrade leading to the viaduct. They landscaped the hills with lichen and added a tunnel portal painted on illustration board to the inner track. Assorted Lionel signs, lights, and signals filled up the empty ground. Scratchbuilt structures and a few commercial kits (left

over from the Lionel showroom layout) replaced the Plasticville models used for the original layout.

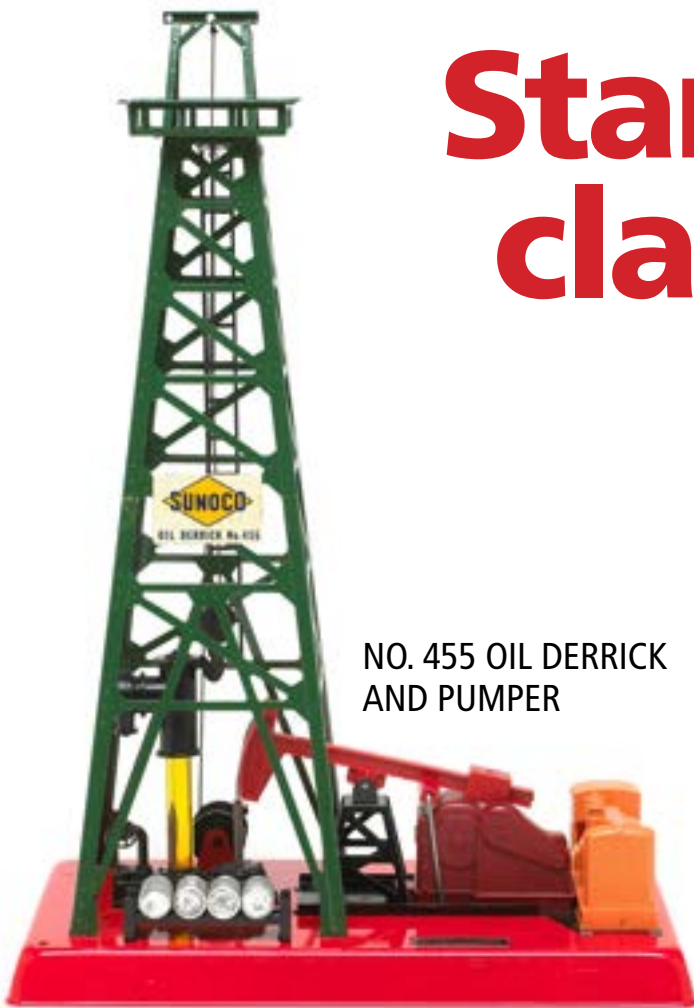
It didn't take the crew at Diorama long to create that setting, so reminiscent of a railroad town in Pennsylvania or New Jersey. Even though the trains they set up looked slightly scratched, the scene turned out reasonably well. A black-and-white version of that image was published in *The Romance of Model Railroading*, a promotional booklet released by Lionel in 1951.

About the same time, in an effort to induce Lionel to return to television, NBC offered to sell the company a solid block of air-time on Saturday mornings at what amounted to a bargain price. Lionel could use that time however it chose, even rent it to another company or keep it for future investment.

Somewhat surprisingly, Joshua Cowen turned down that rather generous offer. He made a speech at the Advertisers Club in New York to the effect that black-and-white television was a poor way to advertise toys. He was going to keep the bulk of his advertising dollars in his favorite medium, the comic pages of Sunday newspapers, where he thought the brilliant colors showed off Lionel trains to their best advantage.

Too bad Cowen didn't wait a few more years for the advent of color TV. With that block of time and advertisers sure to demand parts of it, he might have become a rich man – again!

Stars of the class of '50



NO. 455 OIL DERRICK
AND PUMPER

The no. 455 oil derrick and pumper made its debut in 1950, a splendid addition to Lionel's growing roster of accessories and a great symbol of the firm's progress in the toy train marketplace. No other toy train manufacturer had ever developed an operating item to accompany its fleet of petroleum cars, and now, in its golden anniversary year, Lionel had one that delighted kids with two forms of animation.

Pause a moment to think about that fact. None of Lionel's rivals during the first half of the 20th century – not Ives or American Flyer before World War II or Marx or Gilbert after the war – had devised an ancillary item, even a static one, to enhance the play value of their oil tank cars. For 1950, Lionel's ingenious staff of engineers had come up with an animated derrick and pumper that looked realistic.

More complicated story

Lionel evidently acknowledged the deficiency in its line because its brilliant development engineer, Frank Pettit, wracked his brain in the 1940s to invent a companion to the single- and double-dome Sunoco tank cars being cataloged. According to Pettit's memoirs, he built mock-ups of an oil storage facility and a gasoline delivery truck, but neither was put into production.

Finally, in early 1950, came the announcement of an operating oil derrick, one its manufacturer called the "Oklahoma" Oil Gusher." Was this the fancy name Lionel's marketing executives had bestowed on the 455 at its inception? Not at all. That title belonged to an accessory being heralded by a newcomer to the toy train field as realistic in every detail, right down to the simulated

crude oil bubbling up a clear vertical tube installed in the center of the plastic derrick.

The Colber Corp., a business located near Lionel's factory in northern New Jersey, sought to carve out a niche for itself in the booming toy train market. The no. 109 oil derrick, available assembled and as an easy-to-build kit, made excellent use of the bubbling mechanism added to colored Christmas tree lights. Colber sold its "Oklahoma" Oil Gusher under its own name while producing the same item for Gilbert's American Flyer line of S gauge trains and accessories.

Yet even before Colber's accessory burst on the scene, Lionel's engineers had been refining a rough prototype of an oil derrick built by an outsider. Lou Shur, who owned Madison Hardware Co. in New York City, the best-known retail outlet dealing in Lionel electric trains, gave Joshua Cowen that mock-up. Cowen handed it to Pettit, and the process of creating a workable model began.

Glorious in dark green

The 455 looked impressive next to Lionel's various oil cars. The dominant feature was the 14½-inch-high metal tower (inspired by a Mobil Oil prototype) that came painted dark green (the same paint used on some examples of the no. 394 rotating beacon). Inside the derrick, Pettit mounted a short glass tube partially filled with lightweight oil that boiled when heated. Nothing out of the ordinary here, since the Colber and Gilbert derricks did the same thing.

What distinguished Lionel's oil accessory, though, was a second type of animation generated when a bimetallic switch activated a solenoid and plunger mechanism. The plastic "walking beam" (based on one from the Parkersburg Rig & Reel Co.) rocked back and forth to simulate oil being pumped from the ground.

Next to that assembly, Lionel's designers installed an orange plastic diesel generator. That model, derived from a General Motors prototype, had been put to good use in 1949. Engineers had developed it for the new no. 6520 searchlight car. For that car the generator might be dark green or maroon, along with orange.

As an aside, Bonanno might have been responsible for the development and addition of the walking beam, as he was awarded the patent for the 455.

With each 455 came four solid aluminum oil drums to be placed on a black plastic rack affixed to the red-painted metal base (5½ x 9¼ inches, stated the catalog). Also included was a no. 455-53 "billboard" (a sheet-metal placard painted white) with a Sunoco herald matching the one on Lionel's tank cars.

Truly, a landmark accessory that overshadowed what Colber and Gilbert offered (a point Lionel underscored by pricing the 455 at \$7.95, almost twice what its rivals charged for their oil derricks). The 455 distinguished the Lionel line during its jubilee, particularly after it eliminated the no. 213 lift bridge.



NO. D-20 DISPLAY

Every year in the 1950s – and for decades before Lionel celebrated its first half-century in business – sales executives had offered to retailers static displays as well as entire layouts to help demonstrate its trains and accessories while boosting sales.

A department based at Lionel's factory in northern New Jersey had the responsibility of designing and then mass-producing those promotional items. Each year, the laborers working under the direction of supervisors Joe Donato Jr. and William Bonanno finished hundreds of colorful, thrilling displays to be sold.

Lionel put out a booklet early in the year showing the static displays and the operating layouts available for authorized dealers to purchase so they could demonstrate the trains and accessories they intended to sell. Clients would then submit orders for displays, and those items would be shipped to them when ready.

A range of displays

Only small quantities of these displays have survived. Most of the attention given by collectors focuses on operating layouts, which may range in size from 4 x 6 feet to 5 x 9 or even 8 x 8 feet. The array of accessories installed around the track takes your breath away, and you wonder how Lionel's display personnel figured out where to put everything and how to wire it all.

For retailers with less money to spend or more limited space to promote electric trains, the small static displays offered by Lionel had great appeal. Less than \$100 brought them an eye-catching item filled with accessories that would attract attention from youngsters and adults and be sure to increase sales.

Background of the D-20

In 1950, Donato, Bonanno, and the men assigned to their department came up with the no. D-20 to promote many of the new as well as a few of the older operating accessories featured in Lionel's consumer catalog.

Looming over the back row of that three-level display was a trio of metal accessories sure to spice up any layout. Lionel introduced the no. 395 floodlight tower in 1949, when it came painted yellow. Eventually, the stamp-steel tower was done in silver, with later versions not being painted. The no. 394 rotating beacon (another newcomer in 1949) could also come with its metal tower left unpainted.

In the middle stood a no. 455 oil derrick and pumper. The green-painted tower and an orange plastic generator came attached to a red-painted base. Animation on the 455 included a glass tube partially filled with a lightweight oil that bubbled at a low temperature to simulate flowing oil and a "walking beam" on the pump that rocked back and forth to suggest oil being pumped.

Another newcomer was the no. 145 automatic gateman in the middle row. It represented a plastic upgrade of the no. 45, a metal version that had entered the line in 1935. Three carryovers from prewar days were adjacent. The nos. 153 block signal and 151 semaphore remained in the line through 1959 and 1969, respectively. The no. 1045 operating watchman was dropped after 1950.

Finally, the front row contained two lampposts: nos. 58 lamppost (deleted after 1950) and 71 (added in 1949 and kept in the line through 1959). The no. 252 automatic crossing gate was a plastic replacement for the no. 152, while the no. 154 automatic highway signal never left until the end of the postwar era in 1969.

1951

A STATIC MARKET
AND WARTIME DEMANDS
HELD BACK THE COMPANY

Sticking with the established line

If corporations can be said to have a heartbeat, then Lionel's was really pulsing by the time 1950 drew to a close. Everything there seemed to be racing during that momentous year for Joshua and Lawrence Cowen and the firm they led!

The commemoration of Lionel's 50th anniversary was capped by a grand celebration for officers and employees. Meanwhile, the product line thrived, thanks to the introduction of Magne-Traction, the increased reliance on injection-molded plastics, and ongoing improvements in production processes. The range of train sets had never been broader, and the roster of operating cars and accessories kept growing. In so many ways, 1950 had been a golden year!

Perhaps the triumphs characterizing Lionel's jubilee year would have overshadowed 1951 regardless of external events. That heartbeat would have needed time to slow down and return to its normal rate. Too bad for Lionel that the Korean War launched in 1950 and the economic setbacks ensuing hurt the company, compelling it to reduce its line and cut back on innovation in 1951.

What was missing in 1951?

From offering almost two dozen outfits in its catalog for 1950, Lionel slashed the number of sets to a mere 13 a year later. All five of the O gauge outfits represented items brought back for a second year – nothing was new!

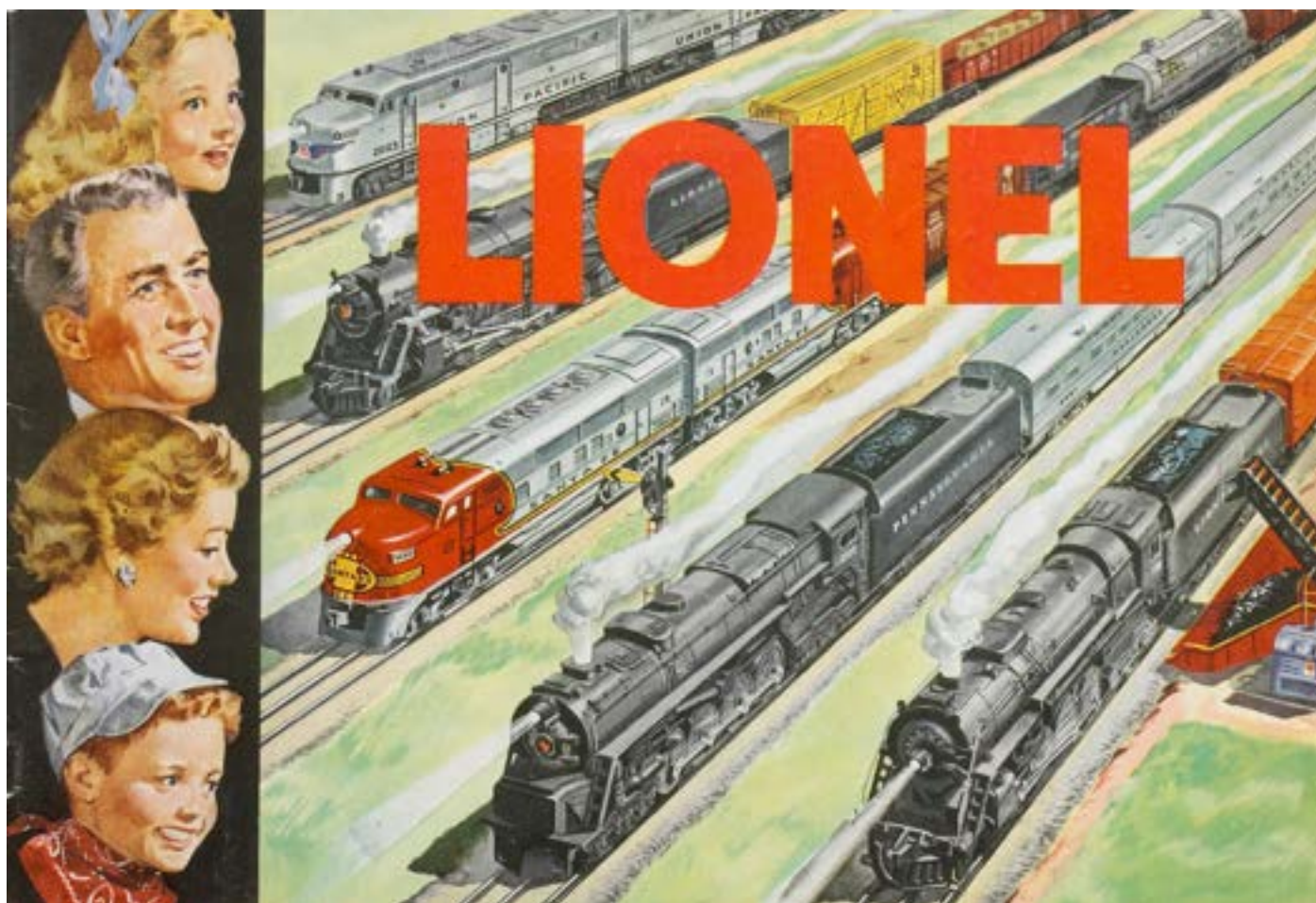
Besides relying on sets unchanged or barely modified from the previous year, Lionel delivered no really new locomotives, passenger cars, or accessories in 1951. The three new freight cars at the lower end of the line in the no. 6000 series were little more than revised versions of the first Scout cars. Other models might come with different numbers and paint schemes, but otherwise were the same.

To make matters worse, Lionel decided to drop some attractive engines and cars. Missing from the line in 1951 were such stars as the nos. 622 and 6220 Santa Fe NW2 diesel switchers and 773 Hudson steam locomotive and tender. Another casualty was the no. 2330 Pennsylvania RR GG1 electric; Lionel wouldn't revive this landmark model until cataloging the no. 2340 in 1955.



The outfits cataloged in 1951 reflected the problems caused by shortages of vital raw materials and ample supplies of older trains. Those conditions might explain why executives brought back the no. 2175W Santa Fe five-car freight set. This top-of-the-line O gauge train, scarcely changed from its 1950 predecessor, had a different tank car and a higher price (\$70, as opposed to \$57.50 the year before).





1951

The finest steam and diesel locomotives manufactured by Lionel during the challenging year of 1951 posed for the front cover of its consumer catalog. The family illustrated hardly cared that so many items were mere carryovers from the previous year.

The roster of freight cars experienced some serious losses. Retired, at least temporarily, were crane cars and wrecker cabooses. That meant Lionel wouldn't be cataloging a work train in 1951. The last of the all-metal tank cars from the postwar era, the no. 6555 Sunoco single-dome oil car, also fell by the wayside.

Fans of passenger cars mourned then and still do the fateful decision of Lionel's major leaders to quit making and selling the magnificent no. 2600 series of illuminated heavyweight coaches. Those near-scale beauties, entering the line before the war, had survived for several years afterward and been strong favorites.





Accessories large and small bid farewell. Two “dinosaurs” going back to prewar days – nos. 97 coal elevator and 164 log loader – were no longer financially feasible because they required so much sheet steel. Deleted as well after 1950 were the nos. 26 bumper, 30 water tower, 58 lamppost, 70 yard light, 93 water tank, 150 telegraph pole set, 314 girder bridge, 317 trestle bridge, and 1045 operating watchman.

As a final note, the Electronic Control Set failed to make an appearance in 1951. It surely was the victim of unrealistically high expectations and low sales.

Effects of the Korean War

Reductions in the line, especially the number of sets available, likely reflected more than just the steady yet not accelerating demand for electric trains. There's little doubt the cuts also occurred in response to the higher costs of raw materials caused by the Korean Conflict. What Lionel – and its principal rival, the A.C. Gilbert Co. – had to pay for the metals it needed influenced its decisions.

One immediate effect of the war's impact on supplies of materials was the removal of Magne-Traction from some of Lionel's motive power. Executives realized that, due to wartime exigencies, they could not obtain adequate amounts of the magnetic materials needed to equip all their models with that great feature.

Gone from the line cataloged in 1951 was, for example, the no. 2036, a 2-6-4 steamer from 1950 equipped with Magne-Traction and an operating headlight but no smoking mechanism (it was paired with a no. 6466W whistle tender). In its place arrived the no. 2026. The newcomer had a different wheel arrangement (2-6-2) and a smoke mechanism, but wasn't equipped with Magne-Traction.

Interestingly, even with those steam and diesel locomotives Lionel did manufacture and catalog in 1951, its leaders must have worried about being able to produce sufficient quantities. As proof, keep in mind that the consumer catalog did not contain a list of



Beginning in 1951, Lionel substituted plastic doors for the metal ones it had previously used on the no. 6454 boxcars.



engines available for separate sale. Maybe the need for die-casting metal left top personnel uneasy about supplies of raw materials.

The Korean Conflict put pressure on Lionel in a second way. No longer could leaders be confident they could buy enough of the yellow paint necessary for engines and cars. That fact contributed to the decision to paint the shells of the Union Pacific Alco diesels silver and not yellow (gray roofs remained the norm).

Also out of the catalog was the no. 395 floodlight tower, last seen in yellow. However, Lionel returned it, along with the 317 trestle bridge, to the list of accessories in 1952.

Wartime demands touched Lionel in a third way. As had happened during World War II, the Engineering Department shifted personnel and resources from trains to design and make precision instruments for the armed forces. Of course, young men laboring at the factory were drafted and left their jobs behind to serve.

Clearly, the United States being at war in Korea affected Lionel in many ways that limited its product line in 1951. The solution for corporate planners was to revamp locomotives, hold back on innovation, and reduce the quantity of sets.

That wasn't all. Inflation mushroomed across the country, with retail prices skyrocketing by more than 20 percent. Federal officials reacted to this chain of events by establishing the Office of Price Stabilization. That agency set guidelines for a vast array of consumer items, which included electric toy trains.

Consequently, Lionel had to restrict its marketing policies while stifling efforts to boost prices too high. Yet that didn't mean the firm relied strictly on unsold inventory to fill orders. Changes

The no. 2035 steam locomotive and no. 6466W tender pulled three of the seven O-27 outfits cataloged in 1951. That 2-6-4 had Magne-Traction, along with a two-tone whistle and a smoke mechanism. It led four basic cars in set no. 1469WS.

in trucks and pickup rollers indicated that production runs of key locomotives took place in 1951. Also, Lionel took leftover set boxes and stuck adhesive labels over their printed prices so it could alter what it charged, even if complying with federal guidelines restricted price increases.

The catalog opens with a bang

Youngsters picking up a copy of the 36-page consumer catalog (down from 44 pages in 1950) wouldn't have noticed at first glance the reductions in the trains and accessories. The cover illustration carried on traditions of spirited images filled with three-rail trains shown in realistic and eye-catching scenes.

There followed five picture-packed pages extolling the many advantages of owning a Lionel train. Readers saw boys oohing and ahhhing over the puffing smoke, two-tone whistle, knuckle couplers, die-cast trucks with steel wheels, and the myriad details distinguishing Lionel rolling stock and accessories. One full page focused on the firm's direct worm drive motor, with another devoted to the many advantages of Magne-Traction, "Another Sensation Lionel 'Exclusive.'"

One more impressive element in the opening section of the



The black plastic contrasted with the brown-painted shells and the white heat-stamped lettering and graphics.



The Erie, Southern Pacific, and Pennsylvania RR boxcars looked better, although not as realistic.



consumer catalog was the description and depiction of a complete railroad system anyone getting the bottom-of-the-line Scout three-car freight set (no. 1119) should consider assembling. For less than \$50 (the outfit cost \$17.75), you could have a layout with switches, a freight station, signals, and billboards.

A few O-27 sets stand out

Consumers proceeded to examine the other seven O-27 sets, finding that only a few were worth asking Santa to bring.

The two outfits priced at less than \$40 had a 2026 steam locomotive with smoke and three basic freight cars.

The no. 1477S attracts attention these days because it came with a trio of newcomers derived from earlier Scout models: nos. 6012 gondola, 6014 Baby Ruth boxcar, and 6017 caboose.

The no. 1463WS cost \$35.75 or \$5.80 more than the 1477S for three reasons. Its no. 6466 tender had a built-in whistle, its cars (nos. 6462 gondola, 6465 tank car, and 6257 caboose) belonged to the standard O-27 roster, and it included a better transformer (the no. 1033 rated at 90 watts).

Three of the remaining O-27 sets boasted on the point a no. 2035 2-6-4 steam engine with Magne-Traction, a smoke mechanism, and a whistle built in its 6466W tender. Then it was just a matter of

which freight cars and how many sections of straight track Lionel packed with this reliable performer.

Begin with the no. 1469WS, back for a second year. It had four cars, but none operated. Lionel had raised the set's retail price from \$39.95 to \$48.50, with only the six barrels in the 6462 gondola to account for this increase.

Next was the no. 1471WS, a five-car train with two operating models (nos. 3461X lumber car and 3469X ore dump car) and a no. 6454 boxcar, all for \$70. By the way, the five logs with the 3461X came stained brown, even though the illustration in the consumer catalog erroneously showed them as white.

For the same price of \$70, consumers were able to purchase outfit no. 1481WS. It included a couple of operating cars (nos. 3464 boxcar and 3472 milk car) and a 6462 gondola with barrels. This set, like the 1471WS, finished with a 6465 double-dome tank car and a 6357 illuminated SP-type caboose.

Incidentally, the doors used on the operating and non-operating boxcars underwent a notable change midway through the year. Lionel started using plastic doors in place of the metal ones that had been standard since the cars debuted.

Costing a little less were two diesel outfits. The no. 1467W duplicated the freight set with the same number Lionel cataloged in 1950. The four cars had not changed; only the no. 2023 Union Pacific diesels were slightly different, going from yellow to silver paint schemes. And the price was hiked \$10 to \$57.50.

As for the no. 1464W, that passenger train had undergone a change in color while going from \$55 to \$66.50. The yellow Alco UP diesels pulling three matching cars passed into history, replaced by silver models with the same gray-painted roofs but different names imprinted on them. You might recall that Lionel had introduced these three models in its no. 2400 series back in 1950.

Five O gauge stalwarts

Lionel's sales executives elected to fill the O gauge roster with only five outfits, each of which had been cataloged during the previous year. This approach seemed curious, explicable only by



Lionel introduced a mere three new freight cars in 1951, all of them at the lower end of the product line. Perhaps the nicest of the trio was the no. 6014 Baby Ruth boxcar.



assuming the corporation had on hand plenty of leftover inventory. Then bringing back those sets appeared a logical decision.

Nothing particularly exciting about the no. 2167WS, a three-car freight led by a no. 681 Turbine. Its price rose from \$39.95 to \$47.75, yet its consist did not change.

Paired with the 2167WS in the catalog was the no. 2163WS, a four-car freight with a no. 736 Berkshire on the point. From \$49.95, the price of that outfit leaped to \$60, with the only modification being the substitution of a no. 6465 Sunoco double-dome plastic tank car for a no. 6555 single-dome metal tanker.

The 681 and its no. 2671W tender also headed a four-car freight set, the no. 2173WS, which again came with two operating cars. The milk car and dump car heightened the train's play value, as did the deluxe no. 6457 illuminated caboose. The outfit, which went from selling for \$52.50 to \$62.50, also had a 6465 double-dome tank car instead of a 6555 model as in 1950.

Occupying the upper echelon of the O gauge line were the five-car freight consists pulled by the no. 2343 Santa Fe F3 A-A duo or its no. 2344 New York Central twin. Outfit nos. 2175W and 2185W, listed at \$57.50 in 1950, now were \$70.

Turning to the cars in these sets, we find that only one operated, the 3464 boxcar. In 1950, Lionel had not been consistent in its choice of road names, meaning, a Santa Fe boxcar might be packed with New York Central F3s and vice versa. That trend continued a year later, despite the fact that the only road name depicted or mentioned in the 1951 consumer catalog was Santa Fe.

The substitution of the 6465 car for the 6555 also touched these sets. And the no. 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper shown in the 1950 consumer catalog as black was maroon in 1951; whether actual outfits duplicated this change is a mystery.

A line all but complete

The best explanation for why the line Lionel released in 1951 was quite limited related to the impact of the Korean Conflict on necessary materials and the presence of leftover inventory due to inflated sales projections and orders.

Without undermining either factor, another possible reason for Lionel adopting a cautious approach for 1951 comes to mind. Put simply, executives may have viewed their roster as complete as it needed to be to attract adequate sales.

By this time, Lionel was producing plastic boxcars (operating and non-operating), tank cars, gondolas, and cabooses aimed at different price levels. Add in the hopper, refrigerator car, and stock-car (operating versions of all three cars existed) used in both O-27 and O gauge sets. Then consider that the company finished its roster with reliable log and ore dump cars plus a searchlight car.

The updated version of the elegant outfit no. 1464W featured no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA diesels painted silver instead of the yellow used in 1950. The color scheme of the three O-27 streamlined passenger cars had been similarly changed. In addition, the two Pullmans and the matching observation car carried different numbers and car names.

Among the basic types of freight cars used by railroads, only a flatcar was missing. That was because Lionel dropped the die-cast metal no. 6411 after 1950 and had not developed a plastic version. Otherwise, the firm made all the kinds of models, including streamlined passenger cars, it arguably needed to please buyers.

Final thoughts on 1951

In conclusion, Lionel's leadership found itself in a strangely balanced position in 1951. Unable to produce and market everything it might have wanted to, the Cowens and their chief lieutenants could still offer enough to satisfy customers.

At the same time, though, leading executives couldn't avoid noticing how competitors managed to fill niches neglected by Lionel and make money at its expense. Therefore, the circumstances dictating how the corporation operated in 1951 very likely would not be permitted to continue, not for a firm determined to dominate and remain far ahead of the field. Changes awaited in the next year.



Among the operating accessories returning for another year in the Lionel catalog was the popular and noisy no. 397 diesel-type coal loader. Lionel advised pairing it with a no. 456 coal ramp.

Lionel trains starred on Broadway in 1951

THE PROPS WERE THE BEST PART OF A SHORT-LIVED MUSICAL

Although most of Lionel's promotional activities were directed towards the television industry in the early 1950s, the company was open to lending its name and equipment to any medium that would generate free publicity. Advertising manager Joe

Hanson's motto was, "If it will help promote Lionel – and it won't offend your mother – do it!"

So Joe was thrilled when, in March or April 1951, he received a request for a layout with a passenger set to be used in a new Broadway show, *Flahooley*, written by E.Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy, authors of the hit musical *Finian's Rainbow*.

Flahooley was supposed to be one of the big hits of the '51 Broadway season, to rank with *Kiss Me Kate* and *South Pacific*. Its cast featured Ernest Truex, Irwin Corey, Barbara Cook, Yma Sumac, and the Bil Baird Marionettes.

Joe authorized Diorama Studios, which handled promotional projects for Lionel, to construct a 4 x 6-foot O gauge layout to be sent to the New Haven, Conn., theater where the show was being tried out before its Broadway premiere. Lionel also shipped two no. 2343 Santa Fe F3 diesels and several heavyweight passenger cars.

Scouting the problem

About a month later, as the opening night approached, Lionel's advertising office received a frantic call from the producer of *Flahooley*. There was something wrong with the trains!

Joe sent Arthur Zirul from Diorama Studios to troubleshoot the layout because he had helped build that display. Since the only information conveyed was that the trains "wouldn't work," Art brought two cartons filled with different engines and cars.

When Art arrived at the theater, he was overwhelmed by a sense of pandemonium. Nothing seemed to be ready for the opening on Broadway, due to take place in a mere three days. Stage sets that were supposed to open and close like giant folding doors kept jamming. Electricians were running back and forth on the stage trying to find a short circuit.

In the orchestra pit, groups of musicians were playing different melodies. Dancers were learning last-minute routines, and the stage manager was shouting at everyone.

When Art came on stage, dragging the two boxes of Lionel trains, the stage manager rushed up to me and said, "Where the hell have you been? I called your office yesterday!" Since Art was unaware of the assignment until 3 hours before, all he could do was blink and try not to look guilty.

The set designer then explained the situation. The trains were essential to the end of the first act. They were supposed to symbolize the toy industry, in which B.G. Bigelow (the lead character) was a mover and shaker (not unlike Lionel's Joshua Lionel Cowen).

In the scene, Bigelow, who is contemplating some weighty problem, insists his assistants leave his office. He orders his secretary to cut off all incoming telephone calls and tells her that he will not see any visitors, "not even the Department of State!"



Ernest Truex, the star of *Flahooley*, a flop on Broadway in 1951, posed with the small layout Lionel built for this musical. The Santa Fe F3s shown here did not make the final cut. Instead, a far less glamorous Lionel engine showed up on opening night.

MAGAZINES COURTESY RON ANTONELLI



Flahooley seemed to have everything going for it: bankable stars, a great writing team, winning songs and dances, and Lionel electric trains. But critics savagely reviewed the Broadway musical, and it quickly closed.

Then Bigelow locks the door to his office and pushes a button on his enormous desk. An O gauge layout rises up majestically from inside his desk. “Mr. B” grabs an engineer’s hat, puts it on his head, and prepares to run his railroad.

What the audience is supposed to see, right before the curtain falls, is a darkened stage with a passenger set running around an oval of track with its whistle tooting and its lights ablaze – while music from the orchestra pit swells into a mighty fanfare. What a plug for Lionel!

The only trouble was that the train kept falling off the track.

It seems that the layout had to be tilted forward so it could be seen from all parts of the theater. Unfortunately, when the layout was tilted at any angle over a few degrees, the heavy Santa Fe diesels fell off the track as they rounded the turn on the downside of the oval.

Art experimented with the other engines he had brought. All the O gauge stalwarts failed: the GG1 electric, no. 736 Berkshire with Magne-Traction, even the no. 681 Turbine. As for the no. 622 diesel switcher, the set designer rejected it out of hand, commenting that it didn’t look like a locomotive at all. He wanted something that symbolized toys and trains.

At that point, Art decided to dig deep down in the boxes he had packed. He remembered coming up with something he had taken along only as an afterthought: a lowly no. 1120 Scout steam engine. It was the cheapest, most unreliable piece of equipment Lionel had in its train line.

Art put the Scout locomotive and three cars on the track and started them up. To his great surprise, the little passenger train circled the track effortlessly!

The set designer joined Art in running back and forth down the aisle, checking the view from all parts of the theater. Finally the angle of the operating layout was fixed, and everyone was satisfied.

That much-maligned Scout engine, pulling three O-27 passenger cars, did the job. The best part, according to Art, was that in the dark you couldn’t tell its size at all.

Short-lived triumph

When Art returned to New York City the following day, he recommended to Hanson that Lionel supply the show with several Scout engines to be certain the set designer and other members of the crew always had a working locomotive available.

Sad to say, Art’s planning proved to be unnecessary.

Flahooley opened on Broadway May 14, 1951, to terrible reviews. For example, *Billboard* (the entertainment industry’s principal news-weekly) complained that the show “is one of the most confusing song-and-dance plots on record and has had little help via the general tone of its writing.” *Flahooley* closed shortly thereafter.

That was unfortunate, Barbara Cook recalls. Making her Broadway debut in *Flahooley*, she has gone on to a brilliant career as a performer on New York’s stage and in its cabaret life.

Barbara says that Harburg and Saidy hoped to combine fantasy with commentary on political and economic circumstances in postwar America by looking at the toy industry. That concept, which had succeeded in their previous effort, fell flat here.

Art’s days on Broadway were finished. The only consolation he said was learning that the little Scout steam engine worked perfectly at each of the handful of performances of *Flahooley*.



Insights into the making of Lionel's consumer catalog

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE NO. 6656 STOCKCAR TAKE ON IMPORTANCE

Producing Lionel's annual consumer catalog represented the most important and demanding responsibility for the corporation's creative Advertising Department. The small staff – usually consisting of a manager and his assistant, a copywriter, and an art director – spent months during the late spring and summer in postwar years designing that catalog so as many as a million copies could be released in the early autumn.

What remains so impressive about this intense effort, which involved outside artists as well as the staff on Lionel's payroll, is how accurately catalog descriptions and illustrations replicated what the company actually manufactured and sold. Therefore, discrepancies assume significance for toy train historians.

As a result, an illustration of the no. 6656 Lionel Lines stockcar appearing in the consumer catalog for 1950 and returning in 1951 captures our attention. It offers insights into how Lionel developed this essential document for customers.

Prewar roots of Lionel's stockcars

The introduction of the 6656 in 1950 revived a long-standing tradition at Lionel. Since its earliest years, the company had made miniature versions of the familiar pieces of rolling stock seen throughout the United States and Canada transporting cattle, pigs, and other animals to stockyards and slaughterhouses.

Cattle cars were constant parts of the Standard and O gauge rosters from 1906 on. The no. 13 made its debut in that year, which was when Lionel told the world its new trains were to be judged "the standard." A longer model with an improved appearance, the no. 113, joined the line in 1912. Both the 13 and its peer stayed in the catalog through 1926, when the classic no. 213 joined them.

Lionel cataloged the 213 through 1940, when it quit offering Standard gauge trains. The slightly less-impressive no. 513 cattle car made its debut in 1927 and was cataloged as part of the Standard gauge line through 1938.



Lionel enthusiasts familiar with the no. 6656 stockcar will realize at once the consumer catalog for 1951 erroneously depicted that common model as brown with white graphics and not yellow with black ones.

O gauge modelers had even more choices with stockcars. When Lionel plunged into this smaller size in 1915, one of the first models it announced was the no. 802 (cataloged through 1926). The no. 821 stockcar likely joined the line a decade later in 1925, yet lasted for only another year.

After revamping its freight car roster for 1927, Lionel consistently offered stockcars in its O gauge line. The no. 805 remained in the line through 1934, the no. 813 through 1942, when the prewar era came to a close. In addition, Lionel cataloged the no. 656 stockcar at the low end of its line between 1935 and 1942.

Two better models, the nos. 2656 and 2813 stockcars, held places between 1938 and 1942. However, Lionel did not develop a scale or semi-scale cattle car for the nos. 700 and 2700 series of models it cataloged between 1940 and '42.

Background of the 6656

Plainly, Lionel was accustomed to manufacturing O gauge stockcars and envisioning them as integral parts of its freight car rosters. Yet for unknown reasons, it failed to bring out any sort of cattle car between 1945 and '48.

This curious trend was broken with the release of the no. 3656 operating cattle car and corral in 1949. Lionel heralded an operating model that should be used in conjunction with a metal platform equipped with a vibrating motor. Miniature rubber cows could be loaded and unloaded by remote control, along with being transported in the new orange-painted O gauge replica of a compact stockcar.

How odd for Lionel to bring out an operating version of a



Lionel introduced the 6656 stockcar in its advance catalog for 1950. The black-and-white illustration in that catalog from early in the year suggested a light-colored model with dark lettering – like the yellow-painted car with black graphics Lionel mass-produced. Missing was the Armour adhesive sticker put on each sliding door, as was done with the no. 3656 operating cattle car depicted on the same page.

The introduction of the 6656 in 1950 revived a long-standing tradition.

basic freight car before ever cataloging a non-operating model. Yet that's exactly what happened with the stockcar after World War II. Why the firm delayed in having any type of car with open sides and moving doors remains a mystery, especially when you realize that it saw cattle cars as vital for its line throughout the prewar decades.

Sensibly, a non-operating stockcar did make its debut in 1950. The no. 6656 was part of one O-27 outfit and could be purchased by itself for \$3.95.

The 6656 had much in common with Lionel's no. 6454 boxcars. Like those freight cars, it measured 9¼ inches long and was equipped with opening doors, metal steps at each end of its frame, and a metal brake wheel.

The earliest version of the 6656 stockcar came painted a bright shade of yellow and decorated with black heat-stamped lettering, along with a matching circle-L herald. Interestingly, they had as well the adhesive Armour emblem on their doors that Lionel had affixed to the initial versions of its operating stockcar, the 3656.

Less desirable and far more common are the remaining two variations of the 6656. The first stockcar was identical to the earliest version, except that it lacked the Armour emblem. Next appeared models painted a darker shade of yellow and using a metal frame that did not have any steps. Lionel quit cataloging the 6656 after 1953, by which time it had raised the car's separate-sale price to \$4.75.

Varying catalog depictions in 1950

When Lionel decided to bring out a non-operating version of its cattle car in 1950, executives must have been relieved to know



The first time Lionel correctly depicted a yellow car as part of set no. 1467W was in the 1952 consumer catalog. It substituted no. 2032 Erie Alcos for the Union Pacific engines used as the motive power in 1950 and '51. Too bad the 6656 continued to be shown with metal steps at each corner in 1952 and '53, long after Lionel had removed those neat yet costly details from the stockcars it produced.

that production supervisors would be able to base the new car on the existing 3656. The same would likely be true for advertising personnel seeking to describe and illustrate the new model.

The text accompanying a color rendering of the 6656 in the consumer catalog for 1950 seemed accurate: "New in the Lionel line! Stock cars add realism to big freight hauls. Openwork planking and supporting girders are completely accurate. Lattice-type sliding doors can be opened and shut manually."

Further, the illustration on page 33 of that catalog showed a yellow car with black Lionel Lines lettering to the right of the door. Also there were car data and the circle-L herald. Even the brake wheel and four steps could be discerned.

Turning to pages 12 and 13 of the consumer catalog for 1950 really muddies the waters. The one outfit to include a 6656 was the no. 1467W, a four-car freight set headed by the brand-new no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA combination. Those two yellow-painted diesels led three returning models (nos. 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper, 6465 Sunoco double-dome tank car, and 6357 illuminated Southern Pacific-type caboose).

If the design of the 6656 duplicated that of the 3656 added the previous year and the new stockcar's yellow paint scheme with black graphics had been accurately shown elsewhere in the 1950 catalog, then why was the car depicted in this freight set a brown model with white Lionel Lines lettering and graphics?

Either the artist had made a mistake – difficult to believe, considering the effort and expense Lionel devoted to producing an accurate catalog for customers – or he was depicting a different version of the new stockcar. The latter idea gains credence when we look at a preproduction version of the 6656 painted brown.

This unusual model turned out to be one of two paint samples of non-operating stockcars photographed for the fifth volume of

Greenberg's Guide to Lionel Trains, 1945-1969 (published in 1993). Besides the unstamped brown car, there was a green-painted mock-up with white heat-stamped lettering and an Armour sticker. Look closely at this stockcar and you'll notice the number under the emblem is "3656."

Not correcting the error until 1952

As fascinating as realizing that Lionel's advertising executives either missed the illustration of the brown stockcar or deliberately let it get into print in 1950 is discovering the same mistake occurring in the consumer catalog for 1951. That sheds light on how they assembled the consumer catalog in the early 1950s.

Decision makers had chosen to catalog again the two O-27 sets led by Union Pacific Alcos. The nos. 1464W three-car passenger outfit and 1467W four-car freight train returned virtually unchanged from 1950. The streamlined cars had silver- and not yellow-painted shells (gray roofs were still the norm), plus new names and numbers. The hopper, stockcar, tank car, and caboose were the same.





The outside illustrator who depicted the 6656 as a brown stockcar for the 1950 consumer catalog might have been copying the preproduction model on the upper shelf that came painted a dark shade of brown. Another paint sample was painted green and given white lettering and graphics. The number used on that mock-up was that of the 3656 operating car.

To save on expenditures, advertising personnel could use the same two-page illustration they had printed in 1950. Only the color of the diesels had to be altered (minor modifications to the passenger cars' lettering were required, too).

As for the freight set, only the coloring of the UP combination needed changing. Executives might have realized the stockcar wasn't brown, but they probably thought consumers, particularly youngsters, would accept or not even catch the error. Better from their perspective to save money by reusing the same illustration.

Advertising personnel could at last correct their errors in 1952. Their counterparts in sales decided to offer the no. 1467W four-car freight set once more. And the same quartet of models made up the diesel-led O-27 train.

However, the motive power had been switched from Union Pacific Alcos to the brand-new no. 2032 Erie combination. Those handsome black-and-yellow diesels looked great with the black Lehigh Valley hopper and yellow stockcar. Fortunately, the 6656 was now depicted accurately as a yellow car with black graphics. Also, the artist had swapped the positions of the double-dome tank car and open hopper.

Still a couple of problems

So was everything right in Lionelville? Actually, not quite.

The 6656 stockcar illustrated as part of the Erie Alco diesel freight set on pages 8 and 9 of the consumer catalog for 1952, along with the stockcar depicted in the separate-sale section on page 29, was not the latest model. Instead, the earlier one with four steps was illustrated.

To make matters worse, Lionel relied on those color renderings one more time for the consumer catalog it issued in 1953. The 1467W had not been altered in the least (neither had the 1464W passenger outfit shown beneath it on pages 10 and 11). No surprise, therefore, to discover that the separate-sale 6656 still had its metal steps.

What these errors in the color of the 6656 stockcar and the presence of its metal steps in the various illustrations reveal is how advertising executives often had to compromise their wish to accurately portray the electric trains in hopes of reducing costs. Reusing pieces of artwork proved to be economically advantageous, and decision makers did so when necessary, rationalizing their decisions by saying youngsters would never notice.



Left to right: The earliest version of the 6656 had a frame with steps and a shell painted bright yellow, with black heat-stamped graphics and an Armour sticker. Next came a car whose frame lacked steps and didn't have the Armour emblems. The third variation also lacked steps and came painted a darker shade of yellow.

Stars of the class of '51



By this point, you have figured out that, because of the challenges posed by the Korean Conflict, 1951 was a far from stellar year for Lionel. That conflict affected negatively the production and marketing of toy trains in 1950 and '51. Consequently, Lionel cut back the number of outfits cataloged in 1951; many of those offered duplicated exactly or came close to what had been made in 1950.

Leafing through the consumer catalog might have been a disappointing experience for youngsters whose memories of what had been available in 1950 were strong. Fortunately for them, at the back of the catalog they could gaze upon evocative illustrations of several neat accessories and superb operating cars. A favorite in that quiet year would have been the no. 3472 automatic milk car.

Birth of a classic in 1947

The 3472, cataloged between 1949 and 1953, was a modified version of the ground-breaking model that made its debut and changed toy train history in 1947. As I described in my book *101 Classic Toy Trains: Best of the Postwar Years*, the idea for a car that unloaded miniature metal milk cans originated in the mind of Richard G. Smith, a free-lance inventor who offered plans and prototypes to the A.C. Gilbert Co. for its American Flyer S gauge line as well as to Lionel.

Smith, aware of how designers had relied on electromagnets and plungers for cars that dumped barrels or coal, invented what

his 1944 patent application titled “Toy Railroad Accessories.” Influenced by the ejection mechanism utilized on the prewar no. 3814 operating merchandise car, Smith devised an operating car that threw out small silver cans – the basis of the no. 3462 operating milk car.

Engineers at the Lionel plant, starting with Joseph Bonanno, the head of the department and continuing with his assistant Abram Gash, refined what Smith had created until they had a model that ran like a charm and awed kids and adults who watched the 3462 in action. They received a patent for the model in 1954.

An operator parked the 9¼-inch-long milk car over an uncoupling track section and pressed the button on the controller sold with it. That caused the plunger inside the car’s solenoid to be pulled down. Activating a mechanism moved the figure inside the milk car, thereby creating the illusion that he was working. An arm on that mechanism was really responsible for pushing the cans (already loaded through a roof hatch) out the door and onto a metal platform.

Updating the original milk car

The transition from coil couplers to magnetic ones that influenced the entire roster of rolling stock led Lionel to renumber its automatic milk car for 1949. Thus was born the 3472, which looked almost identical to its predecessor.

The updated version of the archetypal operating car measured 9¼ inches in length. Major traits included a polystyrene body shell that initially was painted white but soon came unpainted. The milk car had a matching roof hatch, black heat-stamped lettering and a circle-L Lionel logo, and aluminum (early) or plastic side doors.

The sheet-metal frame had steps at the four corners and was attached to the shell with two large spring clips. The roof hatch was lengthened in 1950. Staple-end trucks were used into 1951, when bar-end ones became the norm. The delightful figure that appeared to do all the work was made out of white vinylite.

Each 3472 came with a box of seven magnetic cans and a no. 3462P-1 sheet-metal platform painted white with a green-painted base and gray steps.

Whether purchased separately for \$11.50 or acquired as part of one O-27 outfit (no. 1481WS five-car freight train) or one O gauge outfit (no. 2173WS four-car freight), the automatic milk car was certain to produce smiles in 1951.

NO. 3472 AUTOMATIC MILK CAR





NO. 2026 LIONEL LINES STEAM ENGINE AND TENDER

Pinpointing the best additions to the cataloged line in 1951 turned out to be a very challenging assignment because Lionel brought out not even a handful of new items in that year. The demands of the Korean Conflict forced executives to cut back on what they offered. As a consequence, they saw no need to add very much.

Looking over the roster of locomotives available during that year, I discovered a number of models deleted from what Lionel had cataloged during its golden anniversary year. The Hudson was gone; so were the GG1 and NW2 switcher. The Berkshire and Turbine returned without changes, as did the F3s. Where I found something new was toward the lower reaches of the steam engines. The focus should be turned, therefore, on the plain no. 2026.

Not the first 2026

As before the war, Lionel needed to provide steady performers at a variety of price levels. The most powerful and best-looking locomotives could carry hefty tags, but smart marketing dictated offering reliable engines at midrange and low-end points.

No surprise to see Lionel engineers and sales leaders introducing a number of steam locomotives in the years after World War II. Turbines and Berkshires dominated the upper end. At the opposite extreme were steamers with 0-4-0 and 2-4-2 wheel arrangements. Occupying the middle of the O-27 and O gauge lines were engines with 2-6-2 and 2-6-4 wheel arrangements.

For 1947, Lionel developed the no. 2025 steam locomotive for its O-27 product line. This 2-6-2 represented a modified version of the no. 225 cataloged before World War II. The updated 2-6-2 (assigned the number 675 for the O gauge roster) was promoted as a replica of the Pennsylvania RR's famed class K4 Pacific. Nice, except that the full-size steamer had a 4-6-2 wheel arrangement.

A year later, Lionel's designers put a different boiler on the 2-6-2 chassis to create the no. 2026 for the O-27 line. The die-cast metal shell featured the smokestack and steam chest in different locations; other than those cosmetic changes, the pair of 2-6-2 steamers scarcely diverged. Both came with a smoke mechanism and an operating headlight, plus were coupled to a whistle tender.

The 2026 returned for a second year in 1949. Once more, it had a black-painted body with silver rubber-stamped cab numbers, an

ornamental bell and whistle, wire handrails, a die-cast metal trailing truck, and a three-position reversing unit. Typically, production supervisors equipped this 2-6-2 steam engine with spoked drivers; scarce examples came with Baldwin disc drivers.

New model of the 2026

Lionel's leaders dropped the 2025 and the 2026 after 1949. Replacing them in the middle of the O-27 group of steamers for 1950 was the no. 2035, which had a 2-6-4 wheel arrangement. The 2035, equipped with Magne-Traction, took over the spot held by the 2-6-2 steamers. (The no. 2036, another new 2-6-4 in 1950, was used at the low end because it didn't have a smoke mechanism.)

Then came the troublesome year of 1951, when Lionel deleted some locomotives to cut production costs. Out of nowhere, or so it seemed, emerged the familiar 2026. But designers had revamped it, transforming it from a 2-6-2 to a 2-6-4 and installing the die-cast metal boiler developed for the 2036 a year before.

The new 2026 still came with a black-painted body, spoked wheels, an operating headlight, a smoke mechanism, and a three-position reversing unit. So far, so good, until consumers realized that the newcomer lacked Magne-Traction.

Whereas the initial 2026 had been given a full complement of driving hardware, the new model had only drive rods and side rods. Instead of a die-cast metal trailing truck, there was now a cheaper one fashioned out of sheet metal.

Whistle or not in 1951

Lionel used the 2026 as the motive power for a pair of three-car freight outfits put at the low end of its O-27 roster in the consumer catalog for 1951. The no. 1477S included basic cars (nos. 6012, 6014, and 6017), all new for the year. However, the no. 6466T tender coupled to the 2026 did not come with a whistle. With outfit no. 1463WS, Lionel assigned the new 2-6-4 a no. 6466W tender, which featured a two-tone whistle to go with the better models it pulled.

The 2026 seldom earned much attention, though it did survive through 1953. Yet this low-end 2-6-4 characterized the sort of steam engine Lionel's major executives believed they needed to get through the rough year of 1951.

1952

THE POSTWAR LINE CAME OF AGE
IN A NUMBER OF WAYS

Seeing momentum pick up again

The year was 1952, a time when, for America and Lionel, links with the past were being cut. For the U.S., the notion that it never lost a war was being shaken by the military and diplomatic stalemate resulting after more than a year of fighting in Korea and the truce talks that dragged on into the summer of the following year.

Changes seemed to be accelerating in cultural and social areas. For example, familiar forms of entertainment – the Saturday night picture show and dramas broadcast over radio networks – were giving way to television. Some TV shows were new in 1952, notably *I Love Lucy*. Others, such as *Dragnet* and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, had jumped from radio to the new medium.

The sports world saw its own breaks with the past. All were bittersweet, as great champions fell by the wayside and new heroes climbed to the top. Rocky Marciano knocked out heavyweight boxing champion Jersey Joe Walcott, himself the conqueror of the legendary Joe Louis. The New York Yankees captured the World Series for the third year in a row, only this time the stars were young (Mickey Mantle and Yogi Berra); Joe DiMaggio, wracked with injuries, retired.

As for Lionel, the broken ties that it experienced, like those endured by the nation, symbolized growth as well as loss. A revitalized line of electric trains, a few of which dispensed with older, established models, and more outstanding operating accessories translated into rising sales that jump-started a corporation stymied in significant ways by the Korean War through nearly all of the previous year.

But the unexpected death of Arthur Raphael, executive vice-

president, national sales manager, and confidant of both Joshua Lionel Cowen and Joshua's son Lawrence (the president of Lionel), dampened the spirits of his associates. Raphael's passing and the aging of "Pop" Cowen left no doubt that a new generation was taking control at Lionel and striving to build a prosperous future.

Putting the year in perspective

To understand Lionel's situation in 1952, it's best not to look ahead to the glory years just over the horizon. Even comparisons with 1950 should be made with caution because company leaders had been inspired by Lionel's golden anniversary to accomplish so much then. Instead, we must measure Lionel's roster of trains and accessories against what had been released the previous year, recognizing again how the conflict raging in Korea had affected the firm in 1951.

Keep in mind how disappointed the Cowens and their chief lieutenants must have felt as they watched 1951 unfold. After all, they had just finished celebrating the 50th anniversary of the company's founding a year earlier.

Exciting events and a superb line had resulted in the best sales year in Lionel's history. Little wonder that the movers and shakers at Lionel had looked ahead with optimism when 1951 dawned. Sadly for them, complications related to the Korean War made the new year one of unfulfilled expectations. The number of out-fits cataloged fell, virtually no new cars made their debut, accessories were deleted, and Magne-Traction had to be removed from several locomotives.

When viewed as a whole in this way, the train line could, with



reason, be judged as having declined. Not surprisingly, net sales and net income dropped.

The impact of federal price controls

What also contributed to a weaker financial picture in 1951 were federal price controls instituted in response to the threat of runaway inflation. Less than a year after the Korean Conflict erupted in June of 1950, retail prices had escalated more than 20 percent. The Harry Truman Administration established the Office of Price Stabilization (OPS), which issued tough guidelines to hold down inflation.

For Lionel, the creation of the Office of Price Stabilization meant, as Raphael had explained in a letter dispatched to all authorized Lionel dealers in August of 1951, that retail ceiling prices for all Lionel products were in effect. Store owners had to tag all items in their inventory with special gummed labels furnished by Lionel.

"Future deliveries," the letter went on, "will be marked by us before shipment." The latter practice continued into 1952. As a consequence, Lionel executives reported with dismay, prices established in 1951 couldn't be increased, regardless of whether manufacturing trains became more expensive for the firm.

Experience with wartime changes

The silver lining in this dark financial cloud hanging over Lionel's corporate headquarters in New York City was experience. Its leaders had marched into war before and knew how governmental intervention could hamstring their efforts. They likely stock-piled some raw materials in the waning months of 1950 in anticipation of potential shortages and federal restrictions. More definitely, they raised prices before the OPS was created to give Lionel a competitive edge.

A new generation was taking control at Lionel and striving to build a prosperous future.

Take a look at the consumer catalog for 1951 and you'll see that the O gauge outfits, which were identical to those offered in 1950, cost on average 19 percent more. The prices of rolling stock jumped by at least 18 percent, and accessories carried price tags that typically were 16 percent higher. One popular item, the ZW transformer, sold for 20 percent more in 1951 than it had in 1950.

When the OPS dictated its pricing guidelines, Lionel had taken steps to guarantee that the hit it took with outfits, some pieces of rolling stock, and accessories wouldn't be especially painful. Monitoring prices made sense.

Unfortunately for the Cowens, wartime shortages of vital raw materials had left them no alternative in 1951 but to suspend the separate sale of steam and diesel locomotives. When they sought to resume that practice with some older motive power in 1951, they discovered to their regret that Office of Price Stabilization rules meant they had to return to the prices for those steam engines they had established in 1950.

Looking ahead with some optimism

The picture at Lionel was, therefore, rather mixed as the firm entered the new year of 1952. On the positive side, inflation was under control across the country and more of the raw materials necessary to produce trains were available. Consequently, items too costly to be produced the year before, notably the nos. 317 trestle bridge and 395 floodlight tower, could be returned to the catalog.

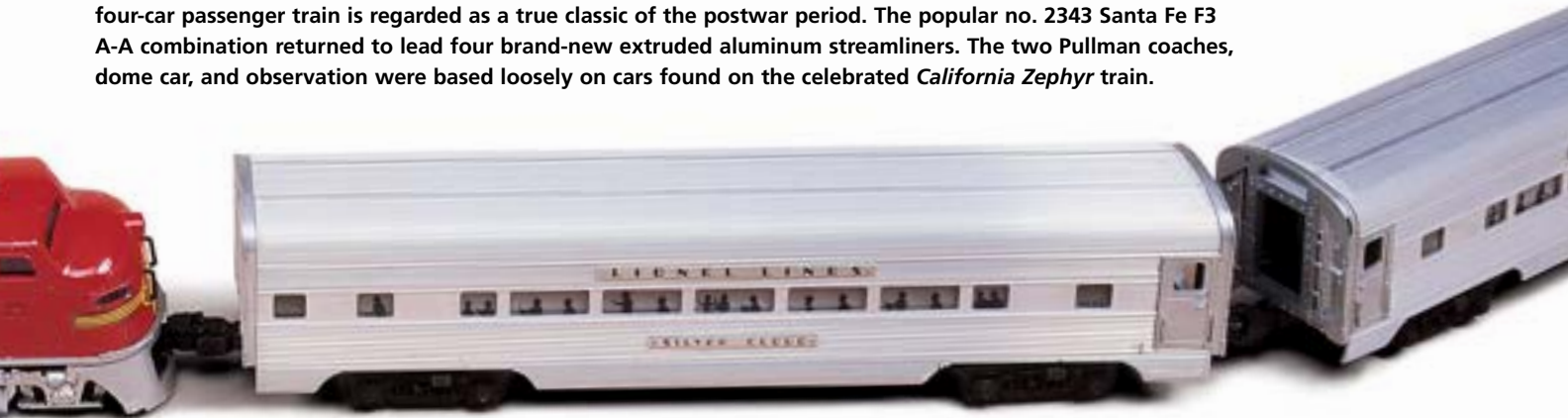
On the opposite side of the ledger, engineers and production supervisors still confronted shortages of basic materials. Most important to them, the Alnico magnetic material, essential for forming locomotive axles, remained scarce.

Reluctantly, key personnel decided that because of these circumstance none of the steam locomotives cataloged in 1952

1952



Outfit no. 2190W stood proudly at the head of the cataloged line for 1952. Known as the Super Speedliner, this four-car passenger train is regarded as a true classic of the postwar period. The popular no. 2343 Santa Fe F3 A-A combination returned to lead four brand-new extruded aluminum streamliners. The two Pullman coaches, dome car, and observation were based loosely on cars found on the celebrated *California Zephyr* train.





could be equipped with Magne-Traction. Also, sufficient supplies of steel were hard to procure, which probably explained why Lionel turned to a dull-looking alloy for making its track sections.

The Cowens and the men handling sales and advertising could at least take comfort in realizing that the widespread passion for toy trains had not abated. Kids poring over comic books and Sunday newspaper advertisements and adults viewing variety shows on television still caught the excitement of Lionel trains.

Families visiting department stores, appliance shops, hardware stores, and other retailers stocking electric trains caught it, too. They never quit gazing in awe at the displays shipped by the hundreds from the Lionel factory located in northern New Jersey.

Executives there and at the corporate office in New York City faced the new year with worries. But, like the Republicans who were optimistic they could recapture the White House, Lionel's brain trust sensed that 1952 would bring better times.

A superb catalog conveys hope

One of the best indications of Lionel's confidence was the illustration used for the front cover of the annual consumer catalog. A smiling boy wearing an engineer's cap towered above an immense concrete bridge over which a Lionel work train chugged ahead. Below the span emboldened with the name "LIONEL" stood an impressive array of diesel and steam motive power, most, though not all, of which was available.

Those four steam locomotives and two diesels, their headlights beaming into the distance and smoke wafting from the stacks of the steamers, waiting impatiently to take off down their tracks and bring untold delight to youngsters (heralded in the catalog as the "Men of Tomorrow [who] Choose Lionel Today").

Besides a great catalog, what made the line for 1952 memorable was the number of new items.

What was shown inside the catalog only confirms the impression that a new time was about to begin. Unlike the previous consumer catalog, which devoted its opening pages to outlining and illustrating the many advantages of Lionel locomotives and cars, the 1952 version got right down to business.

Starting on page 3, youngsters and their parents were treated to some of the finest illustrations ever to grace a toy train catalog. The vivid colors and brilliant images of freight and passenger trains dashing through industrial, rural, mountain, and prairie scenery surpassed the depictions found in earlier catalogs.

Brief yet imaginative descriptions of the nine O-27 and eight O gauge outfits (an increase from the number cataloged in 1951) accompanied the attractive pictures. Pages depicting the "New, Realistic Lionel Accessories," separate-sale locomotives and rolling stock, track, and transformers concluded this classic "wishbook."

Consumers comparing the catalog for 1952 with the one from the previous year would have sensed from the get-go that life had improved in Lionelville. Besides more train sets, they discovered a nice assortment of new and old engines offered for separate sale, a revised roster of freight cars (no new operating models, however), and a solid selection of the small ancillary items Lionel always used to fill out its line. Above all, the look and feel of the catalog distinguished it.

Increased demand for trains

Besides a great catalog, what made the line for 1952 memorable was the number of new items. Lionel might be struggling to obtain adequate materials, but it insisted on developing some new locomotives, rolling stock, and accessories.

Whether it was the announcement of those brand-new items at the annual American Toy Fair or simply the ongoing desire of families to own an electric train, executives became aware that



The motive power heading O-27 outfit no. 1467W changed from a pair of Union Pacific Alco FA diesels to the brand-new Erie models. The no. 2032 A-A combination looked smashing with the nos. 6656 Lionel Lines stockcar, 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper, 6465 Sunoco double-dome tank car, and 6357 Lionel Lines illuminated SP-type caboose.



demand for Lionel sets and models remained high, even more than they had anticipated going into the production year.

Enhanced demand caused Lionel – fortunately – to reverse a decision announced in February 1952 by Sam Belser (Raphael's top associate and a longtime member of the New York sales force). The letter sent under Belser's signature to Lionel's authorized distributors and retail accounts stated that the firm intended to hold production to a level equivalent to that of the previous year.

Quickly, however, Lionel's leaders learned this decision was premature. So eager were customers to buy toy trains that executives saw no choice but to keep manufacturing models until activity at the plant nearly reached full capacity.

Heightened demand for locomotives, cars, and other items allowed sales executives to take some liberties with their pricing structure in spite of the fact that OPS rules remained in effective. Their ingenuity would bolster profitability.

New steam locomotives elude government restrictions

Lionel, determined to raise revenue, elected to offer several locomotives for separate sale in 1952, a reversal of what it had done in 1951. There was only one problem: According to OPS guidelines, when a business went about pricing products, it had to revert to the most recent amount charged. In that case, models Lionel had not sold separately in 1951 would have to be listed at 1950 prices if they had not been changed. This rule threatened to limit what Lionel might earn.

Despite the fact that Lionel's revamped Turbine (no. 671rr) lacked Magne-Traction due to the shortages of metals caused by the Korean Conflict, it remained a solid-selling locomotive. Coupled to a no. 2046W streamlined whistle tender, that 6-8-6 steam engine led this superb O gauge freight set. Outfit no. 2187WS featured five cars, including a pair of neat operating models (nos. 3469 ore dump car and 3472 milk car). The train ended with Lionel's finest caboose, the no. 6457, an illuminated model based loosely on a Southern Pacific prototype.

Ah, but don't forget how clever Raphael and his staff and Bonanno and his staff could be. They likely conferred and decided the solution was to bring out new locomotives that were only slightly different from their 1950 counterparts. Or the newcomers would sport paint schemes or numbers not used two years before.

Let's look first at the eight steam locomotives cataloged in 1952. Two low-end models – the nos. 1110 and 2026 – returned from 1951 but weren't offered for separate sale. Neither were a couple of others new to the line in 1952 – the nos. 675 and 2034. That left four steamers, none equipped with Magne-Traction.

The very fact that these four models lacked Magne-Traction made them different. Two – the nos. 2025 and 2056 – were new to the line, so Lionel was free to sell them at whatever price it chose: \$30.50 and \$37.50, respectively.

What about the final two steam locomotives? Both were O gauge models at the top of the line. Once executives decided to release the popular Turbine and Berkshire without Magne-Traction, they were free to revive earlier versions. They designated these two the nos. 671rr and 726rr and assigned them prices greater than what



Lionel assigned a retail price of \$69.50 to O gauge outfit no. 2189WS, and that five-car freight train was worth every dollar. On the point was the no. 726rr Berkshire steam engine with a 2046W whistle tender. The set that combination led came with three great operating cars (nos. 3461 log dump car, 3520 searchlight car, and 3656 cattle car and corral) and nos. 6462 gondola, and 6457 illuminated SP-type caboose. The play value of this top-of-the-line steam set must have been astronomical!



Lionel had charged in 1950 for models with Magne-Traction: \$37.50 for the Turbine (up from \$32.50) and \$43.50 for the Berkshire (up from \$37.50).

Diesels are more complicated

Next, we can consider the eight diesels shown in the consumer catalog for 1952. Six of them were new in some way, with only the nos. 2343 Santa Fe and 2344 New York Central F3s having been cataloged in 1951 (and 1950). Of those eight diesels, only four were used as the motive power for an outfit – two in the O-27 line and two in the O gauge.

Lionel, which had dropped its model of the Electro-Motive NW2 switcher after 1950, revived this diesel in 1952 by introducing the nos. 623 Santa Fe and 624 Chesapeake & Ohio. But those two beauties (neither used in a set) lacked a ringing bell, as put in the older nos. 622 and 6220. Lionel kept the price at \$25.

The Alcos presented a more complicated story. Three A-A pairs appeared in the catalog. The nos. 2031 Rock Island and 2032 Erie were new for 1952; the no. 2033 Union Pacific units were numbered differently from their 2023 siblings. Therefore,

Lionel could, following Office of Price Stabilization guidelines, charge what it liked for them.

However, there was no logic behind what Lionel did. The Rock Island units appeared in the catalog as separate-sale items only (priced at \$38.95) and were the sole Alco combination to be used in that way. The other two combinations served as the motive power for a couple of outfits being returned from the 1951 line.

The Erie A-A duo was used only as the motive power of outfit no. 1467W, a four-car freight set identical to the version cataloged with no. 2023 Union Pacific units the previous year. The all-silver UP diesels headed set no. 1464W, a three-car passenger train unchanged from the one Lionel cataloged with 2023s in 1951.

Finally, we turn to the F3s. New to the line was the magnificent no. 2345 Western Pacific duo, available only as a separate-sale item for \$47.50. Joining it were the New York Central and Santa Fe A-A combinations, which had not been modified.

Why, then, did Lionel raise their price \$5 from the \$42.50 it had designated in 1950? No answer to this mystery comes to mind. Either the copywriter made a mistake when preparing the catalog or sales executives saw an opportunity.





Some prices fell

Consumers shrewd enough to notice those price hikes must have been pleased to see that the retail prices on popular operating cars had fallen. The nos. 3461 lumber car, 3464 operating boxcar, 3469 dump car, and 3472 automatic refrigerated milk car and platform sold for less in 1952 than they had just one year in the past.

To provide a couple of examples, people shelled out \$9.50 for a 3472 in 1950, \$11.50 in 1951, and \$10.50 in 1952. The price of a dump car went from \$7.75 in 1950, up to \$8.95 a year later, and then down again in 1952 to \$8.50.

Lionel also reduced the retail price on accessories, such as the nos. 145 automatic gateman, 256 freight station, and 397 operating diesel-type coal loader.

When the 145 made its debut in 1950, consumers were charged \$5.95. A year later, it sold for \$7.25, only to be reduced to its earlier level for 1952. The no. 364 conveyor-type lumber loader, \$12.50 in 1950 and \$14.50 in 1951, was listed at \$13.95 for 1952. Even something as simple as a no. 154 highway signal recorded changes: \$4.75 in 1950, \$5.25 in 1951, and down to \$4.95 in 1952.

Were company leaders feeling generous in 1952? Perhaps. Or

Lionel did something curious in 1952 when it decided to create an O-27 passenger set that blended its all-silver streamliners with a brand-new steam locomotive. For the often-overlooked outfit no. 1484WS, the no. 2056 small Hudson pulled four cars, including the new no. 2429 Livingston Pullman coach.



maybe they assumed they could lower some prices because five additions to the accessory line and a reissued no. 395 floodlight tower were going to overshadow those standbys.

Yet another possibility was that key personnel at Lionel were feeling heat from competing toy train manufacturers. This heat came in different forms, from inexpensive sets made by Louis Marx & Co. and A.C. Gilbert Co. to handsome models of new streamlined passenger cars from American Model Toys. Regardless of the reason, Lionel could take nothing for granted in 1952 if it wanted to retain its dominance.

Paying attention to the low end

When the Cowens and fellow executives at Lionel's corporate headquarters articulated their sales philosophy, they knew that boxed sets represented Lionel's bread and butter. Wisely, they made sure to have terrific ones in the new line.

Even the low end of the catalog offered some good deals. That had been true at Lionel for several years. The rationale was twofold. First, the family that paid less than \$20 for a train could be counted on to buy more sections of track, switches, and an accessory or two in the coming years. Second, the same family wouldn't hesitate to snub Lionel and purchase a train sold by a rival if Lionel ignorantly or arrogantly neglected that lower segment of the market.

After all, Marx had built an international reputation by appealing to those households with less to spend. Gilbert was chasing after it as well in 1952. That company's S gauge American Flyer line included a two-car freight set (no. 521T) retailing for a mere \$15.95. Lionel had to counter with something comparable.

And it did. The no. 1119 three-car Scout freight outfit sold for \$17.75. Kids receiving this rudimentary set could dream of the "complete railroad" shown with their train in the catalog. "A full-size pike" was available "for a few dollars more," the text promised, though there was only an image and not a list of items.

UNIQUE AND RARE ITEMS OF 1952



Each of these items can be considered scarce and desirable, though far from rare. Nevertheless, collectors hunt for like-new or better examples of the nos. 3520 with serif lettering, 6457-25 SP-type caboose with its original box (found only in O gauge set no. 2177WS), 455 oil derrick and pumper with a red-painted top platform, and any of the replacement shells issued for no. 6454 boxcars.



“Of course,” the copywriter went on, “you needn’t build this whole setup at once – you can buy the additional items at your convenience.” Just be sure to “Consult your Lionel dealer for details.” The message was subtle yet unmistakable and certain to win the loyalty of every boy starting with a Scout set.

A memorable O-27 roster

The O-27 roster continued to keep pace with whatever Gilbert offered. Lionel answered the American Flyer no. 501T three-car freight set with the no. 1465 three-car freight (the second semi-Scout outfit). Led by a no. 2034 steamer with a headlight, this low-end set had the same \$22.50 price tag as the 501T.

More expensive yet matching the midrange American Flyer sets were three trains headed by Lionel’s new no. 2056 small Hudson. Kids demanding play value preferred the no. 1483WS five-car freight train. It had two animated cars – the 3472 milk car and the new no. 3474 Western Pacific operating boxcar.

Passenger fans opted for the no. 1484WS four-car Pullman outfit. Led by the 2056, it featured a quartet of illuminated plastic streamliners. Three of them were familiar from previous years (nos. 2421, 2422, and 2423). The fourth car, the no. 2429 *Livingston* Pullman, was introduced to the line during that year.

At the top of the O-27 line, at least as far as collectors go, are two trains pulled by Alco diesels. Start with the 1467W four-car freight outfit. Headed by the brand-new 2032 Erie twin units looking sharp in black and gold, it consisted of four familiar pieces of non-operating rolling stock and a no. 1033 transformer.

Meanwhile, the 1464W three-car Pullman set had the new 2033 all-silver Union Pacific Alcos on the point. Those snappy engines pulled the tried-and-true 2421 and 2422 Lionel Lines Pullmans and a matching 2423 observation car.

Mid-range O gauge outfits

Youngsters lucky enough to dream of receiving an O gauge train had lots of slick sets to consider. The Turbine, renumbered as the 671rr, might have lacked Magne-Traction, but it boasted plenty of power. Its 20 wheels pulled the no. 2179WS four-car freight train (including a no. 3464 operating boxcar, with plastic doors in

Familiar models either returned to the line in 1952 after missing a year or boasted new paint schemes and road names. All four of these newcomers were posed with their boxes on which were printed OPS information and retail prices. Clockwise from upper left: nos. 6419 Lackawanna work caboose, 6460 Bucyrus Erie crane car, 2031 Rock Island Alco FA diesels, and 624 Chesapeake & Ohio Electro-Motive Division NW2 diesel switcher.

place of metal ones) and the finest of the illuminated Southern Pacific-type cabooses (the no. 6457).

The 671rr was also put to work heading the no. 2187WS five-car freight outfit. That overlooked set featured two models useful for carrying bulky cargo (6456 hopper and 6462 gondola) and a couple of operating cars (3469 ore dump car and 3472 milk car). At the end rode a detailed and illuminated 6457 caboose.

A couple of bits of information worth remembering about Lionel’s midrange O gauge sets.

First, locomotives packed with the 2179WS outfit tend to have “671rr” stamped below the cab windows. Those Turbines that came with the 2187WS set are usually marked “671,” even though the two steam engines were identical.

Second, the least expensive set, no. 2177WS, included a car that has long confused collectors and is scarce: the no. 6457-25 red caboose. Don’t confuse it with the common brown version of the 6457. By the same token, be sure to save the original box for the brown model, which is harder to find than a 6457-25!

Most desirable O gauge sets

The top-of-the-line steam engine for 1952 was the Berkshire, cataloged as no. 726rr. In outfit no. 2189WS that 2-8-4 steam locomotive and no. 2046W tender pulled a consist loaded with play value. Each car was special, in particular, the nos. 3656 operating cattle car and corral, newly designed 3520 searchlight car (revolving as it rode the rails), and 3461 lumber car with six stained logs.

But steam seemed slightly passé by the early ’50s, especially with Lionel expanding its roster of diesels. For the first time, it stocked a set with an A-B-A combination. Lionel had brought out B units two years before (nos. 2343C Santa Fe and 2344C New



The engineers at Lionel put the finishing touches on several outstanding accessories cataloged for the first time in 1952. Those additions to the line included (clockwise from upper left) nos. 356 operating freight station, 450 signal bridge, 157 station platform, and 362 operating barrel loader. The lithographed baggage load on the 356's cart was produced for only a brief time before Lionel pulled it. The load turned out to be heavy enough to interfere with the movement of the two trucks.

York Central), but strictly as separate-sale items. Decision makers at the firm had kept the B units in the line in 1951, with their price rising 15 percent to \$13.75.

Now, though, Lionel cataloged "Triple Unit Diesels" at the head of identical four-car freight outfits. Both the nos. 2191W Santa Fe and 2193W New York Central came with three mundane cars (the nos. 6456-50 red hopper, 6462 gondola with six barrels, and 6656 stockcar), along with a no. 6457 brown SP-type caboose.

Even so, consumers weighing the merits of rival freight trains couldn't have missed the fact that Gilbert's diesel four-car freight was pulled by only an A-B while Lionel's was led by an A-B-A and cost just \$5 more (the retail price was \$70). Better yet, you had two road names to choose from with Lionel.

Path-breaking passenger outfit

At the peak of the product line for 1952 stood a path-breaking new passenger outfit that reflected Lionel's preoccupation, not with the American Flyer line, but with a new and small producer of O gauge trains located 1,000 miles to the west. To appreciate the beauty of the sleek, shiny no. 2190W Super Speedliner, we must recall the challenge posed by American Model Toys.

This Indiana-based business started manufacturing extruded aluminum streamlined passenger cars in 1949. Eight different O gauge models eventually filled out the line, all of them equipped with knuckle couplers compatible with Lionel's. Ingenious youngsters were soon running their cars from American Model Toys

(lettered for New York Central or Santa Fe) behind Lionel F3s with the same road names.

What an affront to the lion! Executives in New York City and at the Lionel factory couldn't have been pleased with AMT's incursion. They hastily moved ahead with plans to develop their own streamlined passenger cars, which were designed after prototypes manufactured for railroads by the Budd Co.

The first hint of what Lionel was doing appeared in the advance catalog for 1952. Released in time for the annual American Toy Fair in March, it showed "Lionel's New Super Speedliner." The 86-inch-long train consisted of a Santa Fe A-A combination pulling two Pullmans, an "Astra-Dome," and an observation car.

What's intriguing is the fact that the four passenger cars illustrated did not carry names derived from the Santa Fe. They had nameplates from the *California Zephyr*, a streamliner that ran on the Western Pacific for part of its journey.

This detail suggested that Lionel's executives intended to offer an O gauge passenger train consisting of these streamlined cars and pulled by the new 2345 Western Pacific F3 A-A units. What a sight that would have been, especially if the streamliners had featured an orange stripe to match their motive power.

Sadly, it wasn't to be. By the time Lionel printed its consumer catalog in the summer, it had changed the nameplates to the generic "Lionel Lines" probably because they would look good riding behind any of the three road names on its F3s.

The engines packed with outfit 2190W were decorated for the ever-popular Santa Fe. Their Western Pacific cousins didn't head a single outfit in 1952, not even one of those with the brand-new no. 3474 Western Pacific operating boxcar.

Why Lionel tantalized consumers with Western Pacific diesels and a freight car, only to quarantine them outside its list of sets remains a mystery. There's no doubt, though, that Lionel had big intentions for its new aluminum streamliners, which kept the "Silver" series of names used on the actual *California Zephyr*

The illustration used on the front cover of the consumer catalog beautifully captured the absolute joy that a youngster felt when playing with a Lionel electric train.

streamliner. These cars more than answered the challenge AMT had posed.

Accessories gain new momentum

Maybe it's because Lionel tended to stick accessories in the back of the catalog, but those exciting items usually get overlooked. That's a pity because some terrific ones made their debut in 1952. For example, the nos. 157 station platform and 450 signal bridge added interest and realism to Lionel layouts.

The no. 157 represented an updated version of the prewar and early postwar no. 156, although the new model had an injection-molded base and roof instead of Bakelite. Most of the metal billboards differed from their predecessors. The 450 also brought back memories of an earlier accessory, in this case, the gigantic no. 440N Standard/O gauge signal bridge, which Lionel had last cataloged a decade earlier in 1942.

The headliners for the year were the nos. 356 operating freight station and 362 operating barrel loader, which was the perfect companion for 6462 gondolas.

Viewers knew the 356 was something special. Unlike the no. 256 freight station, this newcomer was fully operational and illuminated. Two baggage carts moved around the platform, with each entering and leaving the station house.

In initial production, one of the carts was equipped with a tin lithographed baggage load. Unfortunately, the *Lionel Service Manual* observed that the added weight caused sufficient differences in the speed of the two trucks and so had to be discarded. Lionel sold its inventory to dealers, notably Madison Hardware Co. in New York City. Those items were available for sale through the 1980s.

Both the advance and consumer catalogs for 1952 depicted yet another new animated accessory, the no. 445 operating switch tower. However, careful reading of the *Lionel Service Manual* reveals that it wasn't released until 1953.

The nos. 317 trestle bridge and 395 floodlight tower returned after a one-year hiatus caused by limited supplies of steel. When cataloged in 1949 and '50, the tower had been painted stamped steel; in 1952, it was unpainted aluminum.

Of course, not every accessory was affected by shortages of vital materials during the Korean War. The 455 oil derrick and pumper, for example, still came with a green-painted tower, with occasional examples having a red-painted platform. That neat



variation and the no. 125 whistling shed with an unpainted green plastic base are the two accessories from 1952 that lead Lionel collectors on a merry chase.

A rewarding year for Lionel

Excellent accessories, gorgeous Western Pacific F3 and Erie Alco diesel combinations, and a classic streamlined passenger outfit – these are the best of many new items that distinguish 1952 in Lionel's postwar history.

Other additions include revivals of two favorites last seen in

1950: the nos. 6419 wrecker caboose and 6460 crane car. Also deserving of attention is the substitution of plastic doors for metal ones on new 6454 boxcars and the 3464 and 3474 operating boxcars.

The new trains, by and large, surpassed those cataloged by Lionel in 1951, even with all the steamers missing Magne-Traction and the new nos. 623 Santa Fe and 624 Chesapeake & Ohio NW2 switchers not having bells. A better line nicely translated into higher profits, as shown at the end of the 1952 fiscal year.

Net sales reached \$28,159,463, the most in Lionel's history. Keep in mind, however, that for the first time the amounts attributed to its wholly owned subsidiaries, Airex Corp. and Airex Manufacturing Co., were also included in those figures, perhaps to make the bottom line look better to the thousands of stockholders.

Lionel's net profit, with Airex's added to the equation, totaled \$1,561,890. This sum amounted to just slightly more than that recorded for Lionel's 1951 fiscal year. Evidently, neither the Airex fishing gear nor the defense work done under contracts with Washington made much of a difference financially.

The firm's welfare continued to depend on the health of the train market. How successfully Lionel capitalized on the love affair with these toys would, as the late Arthur Raphael had preached to his sales staff, determine its future.

At the peak of the product line for 1952 stood a path-breaking new passenger outfit.

Lionel engages the Western Pacific

THE STORY BEHIND THE WP DIESELS AND ROLLING STOCK

During the years after Lionel resumed toy train production in 1945, Chief Engineer Joseph Bonanno and his team helped develop a number of outstanding models of steam, diesel, and electric locomotives for the product line. The types of freight cars increased remarkably, so sales executives could assemble a variety of great outfits each year. There was something for every customer.

But in one curious respect, Lionel's expanding roster of trains proved to be rather limited between 1945 and 1951. Not many road names were offered.

Lionel designated its steam, electric, and diesel locomotives for the fictitious Lionel Lines or one of four large railroads probably known to youngsters living throughout the United States: New York Central, Pennsylvania, Santa Fe, and Union Pacific.

The same rule applied nearly as uniformly to rolling stock. Exceptions were Lackawanna work cabooses; Erie and Southern Pacific boxcars; and Lehigh Valley and Norfolk & Western hoppers. Baby Ruth candy bars and Sunoco oil products were used because those firms had negotiated deals with Lionel.

This situation changed dramatically in 1952. Leading the way out of this somewhat provincial world were eye-catching models decorated for the Western Pacific, a regional railroad with virtually no presence east of the Rocky Mountains. Why Lionel developed the nos. 2345 F3 A-A combination and 3474 operating boxcar leave us pondering events at the company even as we admire these beautiful replicas.

Lionel's F3s hit the market

When Lionel executives were laying the groundwork for the development of O gauge models of Electro-Motive Division F3 diesels, they worked with representatives from General Motors as well as two of the principal railroads of the time: the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe and the New York Central. Both rail lines provided financial assistance in exchange for having their paint schemes and names used on the initial Lionel F3s (General Motors had its emblem added).

Consequently, the magnificent replicas promoted in the consumer catalog for 1948 came decorated for those nationally known railroads. The no. 2333 A-A combinations led four-car freight sets and were sold separately for \$42.50.

Lionel continued to offer Santa Fe and New York Central F3s for the next three years. In 1950, it upgraded the diesels with



Magne-Traction and assigned them new numbers: 2343 for the Santa Fe duo and 2344 for its New York Central twin. In addition, it created non-operating B units to go with the A-A pairs.

Expanding the diesel roster in 1952

The diesel roster at Lionel grew in 1950, when it added O-27 models of an Alco locomotive wearing Union Pacific livery. Again, decision makers had selected one of the country's largest and most celebrated railroads. Perhaps because the UP competed against the Santa Fe, Lionel refrained from decorating an F3 in its paint scheme, putting UP colors on a different type of diesel.

When corporate leaders started considering another road name for their diesels can't be determined. With 1951 characterized by challenges caused by the Korean War and national price controls, they probably set aside their investigation during that year, with the intention of returning to it when able for the next year.

When new diesels hit the market in 1952, Lionel had adopted three paths.

First, the toy train giant revived its model of an NW2 switcher, though leaving off the ringing bell. Lionel brought back the Santa Fe name and adding a new model painted for the Chesapeake & Ohio, based in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Second, Lionel added Alco A-A combinations decorated for the Erie and the Rock Island to the silver Union Pacific duo. It thereby covered the Northeast to Chicago with the Erie, then the Upper Midwest to the area west of the Great Lakes with the Rock Island, and the remainder of the country with the UP.



Lionel enhanced its roster of F3 diesel locomotives by adding a third road name in 1952. The magnificent no. 2345 Western Pacific A-A combination joined the 2343 Santa Fe and 2344 New York Central duos, yet was not designated as the motive power for any cataloged outfit, especially not the top-of-the-line no. 2190W Super Speedliner. Mystery surrounds the Western Pacific engines and the proposed streamlined passenger cars that Lionel might have selected them to pull.

More important still to modelers 60 years ago and collectors today was the fact that Lionel was expanding the list of names for its F3s. Shown accurately and described enthusiastically in the consumer catalog were the nos. 2345 powered and unpowered A units neatly painted and lettered for the Western Pacific.

What a surprise the announcement of Western Pacific units must have been. The WP was a regional line with a limited reputation and not on a par with big lines like the Pennsylvania, the Southern Pacific, the Burlington Route, or the Southern, any of which would have made sense as additions to the F3 roster.

Finally, a third road name for F3s

The year 1952 has an odd place in Lionel's postwar era. Collectors tend to gloss over that year's additions because what came out in 1954 and even 1953 is more interesting and important.

Viewed from another angle, the items introduced in 1952 pale in comparison to those from 1950, the firm's golden anniversary.

When considering Lionel's postwar F3 diesels, however, 1952 stands out. The roster gained a third road name after four years of offering only models decorated for the Santa Fe (2333 and 2343) and the New York Central (2333 and 2344).

In 1952, Lionel brought out A units painted and lettered for the Western Pacific. The 2345 models and their successors (the 2355 cataloged in 1953 only) boasted silver-painted bodies with orange-painted noses and middle side stripes. A WP decal spread across each nose. The chassis were also painted silver, as were the pilots and side frames. A two-piece ornamental horn stood atop each A unit.

Under the plastic shell of each powered Western Pacific F3, designers put a pair of horizontally mounted motors equipped with Magne-Traction and a three-position reversing unit. There



When Lionel introduced the 2190W outfit in its advance catalog for 1952, it lettered the streamlined passenger cars for the *California Zephyr*, a famed train handled by three railroads on its journey between Chicago and San Francisco. One of the lines involved was the Western Pacific, which likely cooperated with Lionel to prepare those cars and the nos. 2345 F3s and 3474 operating boxcar.



Lionel executives who were responsible for the product line abandoned plans to decorate the new streamliners for the *California Zephyr*. Instead, as the full-color consumer catalog for 1952 revealed, the models would be lettered for the fictitious Lionel Lines and be pulled by the popular versions of the firm's F3 diesels with Santa Fe markings.



News that the Western Pacific had ordered 20 special boxcars from Pullman-Standard decked out in silver with bold orange feathers likely influenced Lionel's decision to issue a new operating boxcar painted and lettered in the same scheme. A photograph of one of the new Compartmentizer Cars appeared in the Western Pacific's annual report for 1952 to inform shareholders of this latest purchase of rolling stock.

were lights inside each diesel. Pilots had operating couplers, and die-cast metal fixed couplers were installed at the opposite ends.

Regardless of what consumers thought about the diesels, they must have been thrilled to find a third road name. The company had taken a rather cautious, almost timid approach when it came to names for its models after the war.

Also in 1952, Lionel added a Western Pacific operating boxcar (no. 3474) with that railroad's distinctive feather stretching across each of the silver sides.

The toy train giant was offering two different types of toy train models promoting a railroad that, for all intents and purposes, had no presence in the Midwest, the South, or the Northeast.

Why did Lionel opt for the Western Pacific, which it promoted with an O gauge diesel model and an operating boxcar in 1952? To make things more puzzling, why did Lionel choose not to use the 2345 units as the motive power for any outfit cataloged in 1952? Instead, those diesels were offered for separate sale only, the sole F3s in Lionel's postwar history never to have been used in a cataloged set.

To arrive at some tentative answers to the questions surrounding the 2345 Western Pacific diesels, along with the all-but-identical no. 2355 WP A-A combination cataloged in 1953, we need to look at the toy train marketplace in the early 1950s and recall the challenges confronting Lionel about 60 years ago.

Answering a competitor in 1952

If you paged through the Lionel consumer catalog in 1952, you won't have trouble remembering the big news. Toward the back of that catalog you learned about Lionel's first near-scale extruded aluminum streamlined passenger cars. The two coaches, dome car, and observation (car nos. 2531, 2532, 2533, and 2534) let Lionel answer the challenge being laid down by a smaller rival.

Since 1949, American Model Toys (later renamed Auburn Model Trains) had offered similar O gauge models aimed specifically at filling a niche in the domestic toy train marketplace. It wanted consumers who already owned Lionel diesels to buy its compatible streamlined cars to create realistic passenger trains.

To entice kids and adults who had purchased Lionel's New York Central or Santa Fe F3s to select AMT passenger cars, that enterprising firm did more than put nameplates with those railroads on its attractive models. It also affixed the names of full-size streamlined cars on them to enhance their realism.

Lionel's engineers, aware of how the market was changing, had worked hard to combat the AMT challenge by rushing through the design and production of its near-scale aluminum streamliners. Further, evidence suggests Lionel wasn't going to stop at just making better passenger cars; it would create a unique train.

The cars made by AMT, when coupled to the appropriate Lionel F3s, enabled consumers to run versions of such celebrated streamliners as the New York Central's *20th Century Limited* and the Santa Fe's *Super Chief*. To respond, Lionel would have to bring out its own version of a famous American streamliner.

The California Zephyr in O gauge

The first indication decision makers sought to make that goal a reality appeared in the advance catalog for 1952. Lionel advertising executives prepared this document early in the year, with the aim of distributing copies to the company's accounts late in the winter. Shown in the advance catalog was an O gauge outfit, the no. 2190W, nicknamed the Super Speedliner. It featured the brand-new streamlined passenger cars.

What made those cars a surprise was their being shown as lettered for the *California Zephyr*. That train operated between Chicago and San Francisco under a joint operating agreement between three railroads: the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, the Denver & Rio Grande Western, and the Western Pacific.



Lionel had big plans for its 3474 Western Pacific operating boxcar, or at least it did early in 1952 when the advance catalog was assembled. The new model was shown as a component of three outfits, including this pair of O gauge freight sets.

The O gauge train inspired by the *California Zephyr* revealed how Lionel intended to compete with and ultimately best AMT. Going toe to toe with AMT, its leaders realized, would have required Lionel to release locomotives decorated for one of those three railroads. Otherwise, there was no reasonable claim to having an O gauge version of the *California Zephyr* streamliner.

Yet when Lionel illustrated the Super Speedliner in its advance catalog, it showed the four *California Zephyr* streamliners pulled by no. 2343 Santa Fe A-A F3 diesels. To add to the confusion, the nameplates on the cars – *Silver Canyon*, *Silver Platter*, and *Silver Arroyo* – came from cars on the Burlington Route.

But the oddities didn't quit there. Turning the page in the advance catalog brought readers to locomotives available for separate sale. There were the 2345 Western Pacific F3s with twin motors, Magne-Traction, and a horn for \$47.50. Curiously, the diesels were described as having "Coloring [that] is brilliant red and grey." Does that statement bring to mind Santa Fe warbonnets?

Evidently, Lionel's sales executives decided to play it safe. They assigned their most popular F3 diesels, decorated for the Santa Fe, to pull the top-of-the-line passenger outfit for 1952. Customers wanting to run a miniature version of the *California Zephyr* had to buy the WP diesels and the quartet of streamliners.

Then came the consumer catalog

Six months later, when Lionel released its full-color consumer catalog to the public, the picture, literally and otherwise, had changed. And not for the better as far as the Western Pacific and the *California Zephyr* were concerned.

The WP F3s were going to be separate-sale items only. Not one set used them. What Lionel called its "O' Gauge Twin-Unit 'Big Boy' Diesels" were hidden, with no picture on the front cover or a mention until the last few pages.

There, amid the roster of diesels on pages 24 and 25, was a Western Pacific A unit. The diesel coupled to it was concealed behind an inset of the F3 B units, so an inattentive reader might think Lionel was offering an A-B combo.

As for the streamlined passenger cars, anything that could have linked them with the *California Zephyr* had vanished. The

nameplates on the cars shown on pages 20 and 21 of the catalog identified them as parts of "Lionel Lines."

Debut of a neat operating boxcar

Besides the Western Pacific F3s, Lionel brought out an operating boxcar decorated in that railroad's new "feather" scheme already winning approval from rail enthusiasts. The 3474 received less-than-accurate treatment in the advance catalog, though Lionel did correct those errors in the 1952 consumer catalog.

Until 1950, the WP had painted its boxcars in the reddish brown familiar to anyone who had watched trains. It had decorated those cars with a small herald highlighted by a silver feather against a black background. The feather alluded to the railroad's route through the Feather River into the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

For 1952, the Western Pacific decided to join the handful of railroads then painting their boxcars in hues that caused them to stand out. It ordered 20 aluminum cars from Pullman-Standard equipped with steel gates inside to separate the interior into sections and thus better protect partial loads as well as fragile freight.

Known as "Compartmentizer Cars," these boxcars were delivered wearing silver paint and a bright orange feather decorating each long side. To the right and above the feather was the slogan, "Rides like a Feather," to remind shippers of Western Pacific's commitment to careful cargo handling.

Railway Age and *Trains & Travel* magazines announced the WP's unveiling of its 20 special boxcars in December 1951. To Lionel's credit, it would have a replica within months. The 3474 would be silver and have decaled across each side the same slogan and a large feather (it would be yellow and not orange).

Perhaps because Lionel was still debating how to mass-produce and then use the 3474 Western Pacific operating boxcar, errors about it weakened the description given in the advance catalog. There, it was depicted as part of three outfits: one O-27 (no. 1483WS) and two O gauge (nos. 2179WS and 2183WS). Black-and-white images showed it as a dark model with a darker feather across each side - almost an orange or yellow boxcar with a red feather and white letters.

In addition, the WP car was mistakenly referred to as the

When considering Lionel's postwar F3 diesels, however, 1952 stands out.

1952



By the time the consumer catalog was issued in the early autumn, Lionel decision makers had changed their plans. The 3474 appeared in only one outfit, the no. 1483WS, an O-27 five-car steam train that included a second operating car.

“3464” in the listings of the three outfits and the separate-sale cars. Doing so suggested the New York Central and Santa Fe operating boxcars with that number would not be returning to the line (truth be told, neither of those models was shown in the advance catalog for 1952).

The consumer catalog corrected these inaccuracies. The WP car was labeled “3474” and shown as a silver model with an orange feather and black lettering. Now, though, it was a part of only the O-27 outfit. The older 3464s had replaced the newcomer in the O gauge sets designated as having an operating car.

A diminished presence for the WP

How the Western Pacific’s star seemed to fade at Lionel in 1952! Once there was the possibility of WP F3s pulling an outfit based on the *California Zephyr*, plus a Western Pacific operating boxcar being used in three steam sets.

The reality, however, was that *California Zephyr* passenger cars were never made (if preproduction models were developed, wouldn’t collectors love to know what happened to them?). Lionel’s consumer catalog for 1952 followed the advance catalog in specifying the 2345 A-A diesel combination as remaining a separate-sale item only.

The 3474 ended up in only one set. The consumer catalog did not list it with the models available for separate sale (the 3464 Santa Fe model was the only operating boxcar shown in that section). Notwithstanding this evidence, the 3474 must have been offered for separate sale during the year because a box with the car’s number, name, and OPS price information was letterpressed in 1952.

Connection of Lionel and the WP?

The question that immediately comes to mind is, what led to this change of heart at Lionel? Maybe, though, the better question to ask is, why had the toy train company paid so much attention to the Western Pacific in the first place?

Unfortunately, despite having examined old files at Lionel and worked with the Union Pacific, which, after mergers, currently owns the Western Pacific archives, I have yet to uncover any documents that shed light on the matter.

As frustrating is the fact that the individuals at Lionel and the

Western Pacific who would have been involved in negotiations between the two firms are no longer alive. The trail, such as it ever was, has long since disappeared.

I can only speculate that executives at Lionel, aware of what AMT had done, felt pressured to respond with their own O gauge streamliners. Identifying those models with a particular full-size passenger train made sense, which might have been the reason Lionel decided to reach out to the Western Pacific.

Or did that regional railroad reach out to Lionel? Decision makers at the Western Pacific, like executives at many other American railroads, recognized that having their name and herald emblazoned across the sides of miniature locomotives and cars would bring great promotional benefits to them.

Leaders of the Western Pacific might easily have contacted Lionel and pressed their case. Their appeal would have come at a moment when the toy maker was increasingly open to decorating its trains with graphics from businesses beyond the few that dominated the nation’s rail transportation.

Interestingly, 1952 stands out because Lionel did offer models of contemporary locomotives whose graphics advertised slightly smaller railroads that might not have been known every-

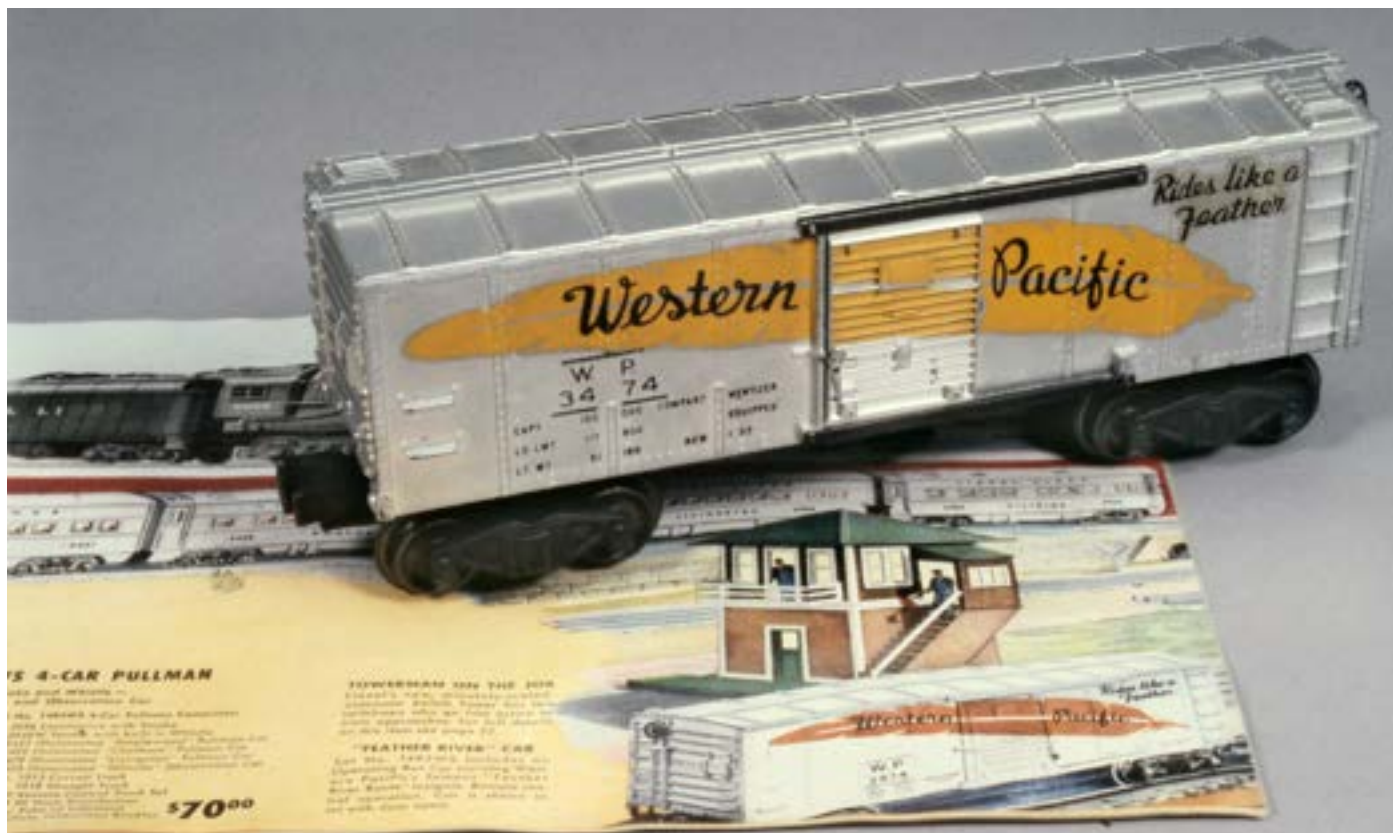
where. The Chesapeake & Ohio’s name appeared on a new NW2 diesel switcher (no. 624). The Rock Island made an appearance on a new Alco diesel (no. 2031).

These new diesels, like the WP models, suggest that Lionel’s executives wanted to solidify the nation-wide appeal of their trains. Younger men, notably President Lawrence Cowen, would have seen how cities in the Midwest and along the Pacific Coast were growing. As was happening in Major League Baseball, businessman and municipal boosters they were taking steps to reach beyond the Northeast and capture the interest of people west of the Mississippi River.

Why reject the *California Zephyr*?

Perhaps Lionel and the Western Pacific negotiated an agreement whereby the railroad provided blueprints and possibly financial assistance in exchange for the toy maker bringing out a locomotive and a car with its name. They might also have hammered out the assorted details permitting Lionel to label its

Lionel brought out an operating boxcar in that railroad’s new “feather” scheme.



Illustrations of the 3474 operating boxcar used in the consumer catalog for 1952 incorrectly depicted it as white car with an orange feather, probably because the artist was using a color photograph of an actual Western Pacific boxcar. The Lionel model came painted silver, and the feather decal across each side and through the door was a dark yellow.

brand-new group of O gauge streamlined passenger cars for the *California Zephyr*.

What happened to this terrific idea? The thought of Lionel's new silver passenger cars decked out with orange stripes to coordinate with the dominant color of its brand-new Western Pacific F3s is simply too good to miss!

One possible answer is that Lionel's officers got cold feet about offering an entire set based on a train associated with the Rocky Mountains and the Far West. So they put Santa Fe F3s at the head of the four *California Zephyr* cars.

Meanwhile, the past success of using New York Central and Santa Fe diesels in the top-of-the-line O gauge freight outfits meant there was no spot for the 2345 Western Pacifics. Those fine diesels became separate-sale items.

Another scenario: could Mike Sweyd, who oversaw Lionel's operations in the West, have been a key player in the negotiations? He passed away in 1952, and his worsening condition earlier in the year might have derailed Lionel's plans.

Still speculating, we can imagine that buyers arriving in New York City in March of 1952 for annual American Toy Fair had the opportunity to study the preliminary product line as seen in the advance catalog. The orders they submitted – or chose not to submit – conveyed to Lionel their opinions of key items.

Outfits and models ordered in good numbers would, logic dictates, have been made unless problems arose with their production. The eventual absence in the line of *California Zephyr* cars leads to two conclusions: either orders faltered or Lionel didn't get permission to use that name. Either way, mass-production of those models at the Lionel factory would have failed to gain proper authorization.

Declining interest in a WP boxcar?

Similarly, wholesalers and distributors handling Lionel trains and accessories might have expressed a lack of enthusiasm for an operating boxcar decorated for the Western Pacific.

Still another possible explanation might reasonably focus on how the 3474 was produced and decorated. Specifically, the labor required for employees to put a large decal of a feather on each side of the 3474 could have taken longer and been more expensive than Lionel anticipated.

If this scenario rings true, then fewer Western Pacific operating cars would have been available. Therefore, Lionel might have had no choice but to limit the 3474 to one set and substitute 3464 models in the other sets with an operating boxcar. The company did develop an instruction sheet for the 3474, dated 5-52.

Frustrating mysteries in 1952

Mysteries about the links between Lionel and the Western Pacific may never be answered with assurance. Only the appearance of key documents can shed light on what was going on prior to and during the 1952 production year. For the two companies had to have been in contact about designing and producing the F3s, streamlined passenger cars, and operating boxcar. Chance – the sheer odd fact that Lionel fastened on to this one railroad for so much – has to be ruled out.

There's no doubt that Lionel had big intentions for its new aluminum streamliners, which maintained the "Silver" series of names used on the real *California Zephyr* streamliner. These cars more than answered the challenge AMT had posed, even if they never were cataloged with the new Western Pacific F3s.



A gorgeous full-color illustration of a railroad yard created for Lionel's consumer catalog for 1952 shows additions to the train line, including the four accessories: nos. 356 operating freight station, 362 barrel loader, 445 operating switch tower, and 450 signal bridge.

The greatest year for accessories

FOUR CLASSICS ENTERED THE LINE IN 1952

So much was expected of the hard-working, imaginative engineers who were employed by Lionel in the postwar era. Working under the demanding gaze of their chief, Joseph Bonanno, those designers, model makers, and draftsmen generated ideas, drawings, and mock-ups of locomotives, transformers, rolling stock, and operating accessories throughout the golden years of the early 1950s.

More triumphs from Bonanno's department

The Engineering Department's most celebrated triumph for the production year of 1952 would unquestionably be the four extruded aluminum passenger cars sales executives heralded as making up the Super Streamliner, an outfit led by twin Santa Fe F3s. With those two Pullmans and matching dome and observation cars, Lionel finally had what it needed to compete with American Model Toys.

Yet no matter how much time and energy members of Bonanno's staff spent on the streamlined cars, they hardly exhausted their creative energies on that one project in 1952. To the contrary. That year witnessed the debut of four impressive, strong-selling operating accessories. Other years might have seen the introduction of as many items, but this one stood out during the postwar heyday, especially after the no. 213 lift bridge had been canceled in 1950 and nothing new arrived in 1951.

Check out the new freight loader

The initial information given to the toy industry about what Lionel had to offer for 1952 appeared in the advance catalog. Besides more outfits than the previous year, the new line promised four operating accessories, including the first new freight loader since the no. 456 coal ramp debuted in 1950. Great news because Lionel had deleted three other freight loaders since 1949.

The new no. 362 barrel loader commanded the most attention. That 19-inch-long remote-controlled freight carrier resembled in its elongated rectangular shape the no. 364 conveyor log loader that Lionel had introduced in 1948. However, the 362 featured a towering figure. The vinylite worker did not have anything to do with the actual operation.

The barrel loader was among the first of many items to capitalize on the "Vibrotor," a motor devised by Frank Pettit, Lionel's development engineer, to generate motion via vibration. The concept, so simple, proved versatile.

In the case of the 362, an operator flipped the accessory's on/off switch to initiate the vibration able to cause upright wood barrels put in the lower holding area to tip over. The shaking barrels moved up a long yellow-painted sheet-metal inclined ramp until they reached the elevated deck, where they rolled over a tilting brown plastic gate into an empty freight car sitting on an adjacent section of track.

A second vibrating accessory

Remember how in 1950 Lionel had introduced the no. 256 freight station? That inanimate structure, designed as a wayside freight and passenger facility, stood out with its picket fence complete with three tin lithographed billboards. The 256 boasted interior illumination in its white plastic depot and a green roof.

Two years later, for the no. 356 operating freight station, engineers modified the maroon plastic base to include a metal platform. In the center of the platform they put an electromagnetic coil and housing assembly. Pressing the button of a controller sent AC voltage to energize the coil. Once activated, the coil caused the metal platform to vibrate vertically.

An operator placed on the exposed track of the platform two plastic carts, each of which had been equipped with two rubber pads on the bottom. Those pads enabled the shaking carts to move ahead, as though their tiny figures were driving them forward in a counterclockwise direction to pick up or deliver suitcases.

A trip, or latching mechanism, held one truck inside the station until the second one entered. The incoming cart hit a release trigger, which sent the first truck back on its journey. Tin lithographed baggage loads, available early on, were deleted when Lionel realized they interfered with the carts' movement.

The return of the signal bridge

One of the most memorable and desirable operating accessories Lionel cataloged in the 1930s until the end of production in 1942 was the magnificent no. 0440/440/440N signal bridge. That massive sheet-metal item, fitted with two round light displays, looked at home on O gauge or Standard gauge railroads.

Lionel chose not to revive that classic after World War II. It waited until 1952 to announce an operating signal bridge. The no. 450 proved to be the only electrically illuminated model developed by any major American toy producer during the postwar era (the Plasticville U.S.A. signal bridge from Bachmann Bros. was for looks only).

The 450, in spite of being smaller than its prewar counterpart, looked great. Black-painted towers fashioned out of stamped steel, each astride a gray plastic base, supported a black metal bridge wide enough (7½ inches) to span a double-track main line. There were two heads with a green and a red light.

The 450 enhanced the appearance of an O gauge (or an S gauge) layout. By itself, however, the signal bridge would not control the movement of trains. Fortunately, an operator could do so using the contactor packaged with the 450.

The entertaining switch tower

The fourth operating accessory cataloged for the first time in 1952 likely brought to mind the automatic gateman – after all, the same Lionel employee designed them. Romualdo Camuso, a general foreman at the company's plant, devised the no. 445 operating switch tower using the same underlying concept.

By inserting a contactor beneath a line of track and wiring the switch tower to it, a modeler ensured that a passing train caused the two figures installed on the accessory to move. One blue vinylite laborer flew down the maroon plastic staircase while his buddy zipped from the green plastic balcony into the open doorway of the white plastic structure (opposite of how the automatic gateman worked).



Sales executives at the Lionel showroom in New York City had a compact layout built there to demonstrate for buyers the new accessories. This image from the December 1952 issue of the *Illinois Central* magazine reveals that preproduction models of those operating items had been used on the display. Learn more about that display and other layouts in the New York showroom in *Lionel's Showroom Layouts*, an exclusive special publication from *Classic Toy Trains*. Order your copy by calling 1-800-644-5533.

Showing the world

As soon as members of Lionel's crack advertising team had completed the advance catalog early in the year, they had to collaborate with sales executives on promoting the new accessories.

The time for developing answers was brief because by the end of February wholesalers, distributors, and buyers for department stores and major retailers would be flooding New York City during the American Toy Fair. Hundreds of people would be stopping by the Lionel showroom to learn about additions to the line and then submit their orders for merchandise.

Sales personnel, pressing for something to demonstrate how exciting the four additions were, probably recommended a display. Since the 1920s, Lionel had sold layouts to retailers, who would run trains and accessories to convince customers that new items were worth buying. The same hope, applied to wholesalers and distributors, explained why Lionel put operating displays in its regional sales offices in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco during prewar and postwar days.

Photographs of a compact layout appearing in press releases and brief news items about Lionel throughout 1952 revealed what Lionel had erected in its famed showroom in New York City to demonstrate the quartet of new accessories. These pictures, one of which is reproduced here, showed preproduction models of the four.

Like the store displays Lionel sold at the time, this one was flat, with grass covering all areas except where the tabletop has been left bare to suggest a road. The accessories crowd the end in a haphazard manner. In fact, the operating freight station straddles part of the highway. Still, there is much to learn here about how executives promoted their exciting new accessories and streamliners in 1952.

Besides more outfits than the previous year, the new line promised four operating accessories.

1952

Stars of the class of '52

The no. 3520 searchlight car garnered compliments when Lionel introduced that updated version of a classic operating model in 1952. Not the first such car to occupy a place of prominence in a catalog since the end of World War II, it nevertheless deserved praise for improved performance and a striking look.

Lionel waits until 1949

The idea of mounting one or even a pair of miniature floodlights on a toy railcar was hardly new when toy train production began again after peace returned in 1945. Yet it was the A.C. Gilbert Co. that broke the barrier after the war, offering the no. 634 operating floodlight car in its American Flyer line of S gauge trains.

We'll never know why Lionel did not catalog its first postwar searchlight car until 1949. In that year, the no. 6520 made its debut as a set component and a separate-sale item. That car boasted a look unlike any Lionel searchlight car seen before World War II. Its design departed from a simple flatcar with a light mounted to a pressed steel frame.

Lionel's model makers took the die-cast metal depressed-center chassis they had created for the no. 2461 transformer car (new in 1946) and adapted it to hold a modern-looking metal searchlight. With the 6520, as was true of the Flyer car, the light could be switched on by remote control, but rotated strictly by hand.

Designers at Lionel did something beyond just substituting a rugged and heavy depressed-center flatcar for a plain flat model.

They came up with a small generator, to be molded out of plastic and mounted at the end of the 6520 opposite from the floodlight. And this cool generator came in green, maroon, or orange.

Besides creating a model that looked up to date and felt hefty to a child, Lionel improved its searchlight car by developing a brand-new floodlight that, like the generator, seemed to be in the right proportion to the car. Now, the firm had a new operating model that looked right on an O gauge or an O-27 work train.

Where to go next with operation

The only drawback with the 6520 searchlight car related to its operation. The remote-control aspect of turning the floodlight on or off enhanced the model. However, the simple fact that the light still had to be maneuvered by hand did not.

Lionel Development Engineer Frank Pettit had been tinkering with vibrating mechanisms, and he adapted what he had devised for the searchlight car. As a result, once the light was illuminated, tiny rubber "fingers" on its base rubbed against the round platform beneath it so the light could rotate automatically when turned on.

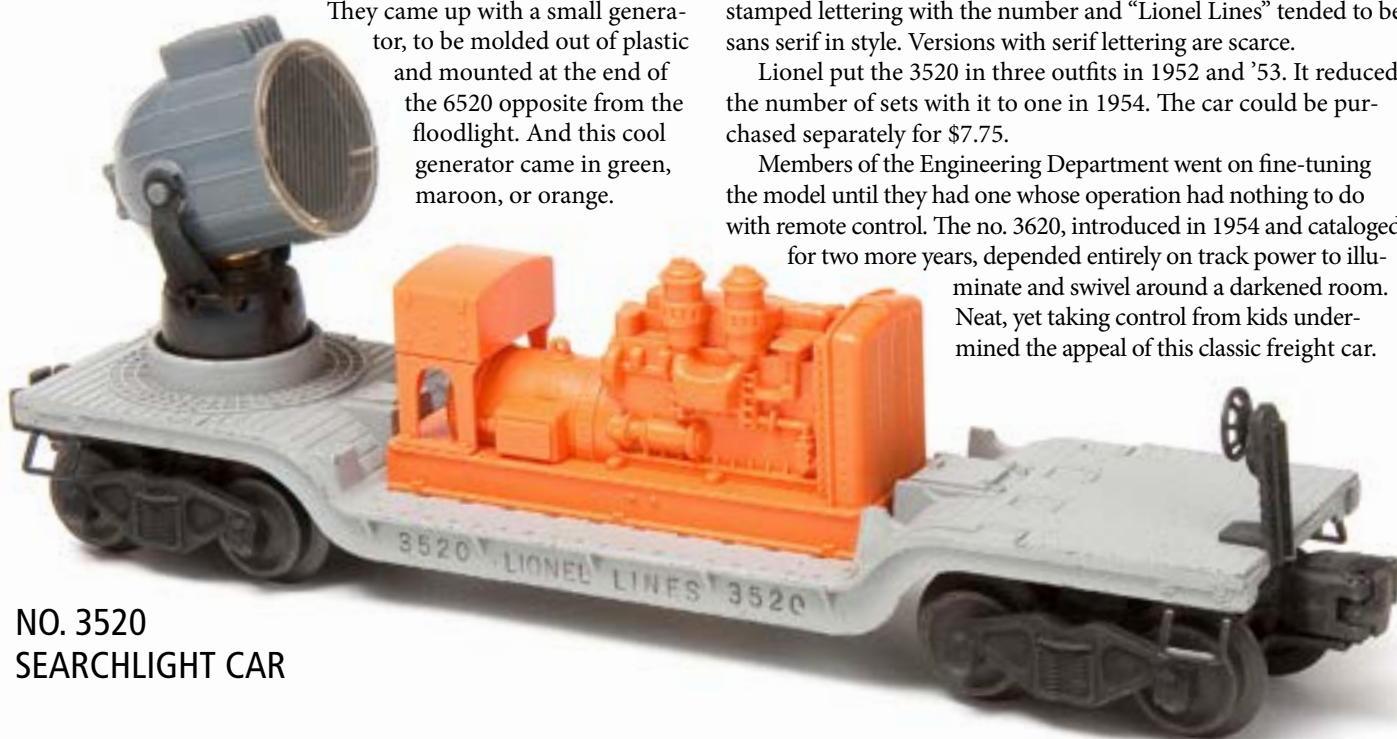
Talk about realism! The improved searchlight car, designated no. 3520 and introduced in 1952, promised more control over how the light went on and off and where it shined. True, the generator came only in orange, but the operation was better.

A solid performer

The 3520 car featured a gray-painted die-cast metal frame with metal steps at each corner. A brake stand was secured in place at the end opposite of the floodlight. The searchlight assembly might be chemically blackened or bright aluminum. The black rubber-stamped lettering with the number and "Lionel Lines" tended to be sans serif in style. Versions with serif lettering are scarce.

Lionel put the 3520 in three outfits in 1952 and '53. It reduced the number of sets with it to one in 1954. The car could be purchased separately for \$7.75.

Members of the Engineering Department went on fine-tuning the model until they had one whose operation had nothing to do with remote control. The no. 3620, introduced in 1954 and cataloged for two more years, depended entirely on track power to illuminate and swivel around a darkened room. Neat, yet taking control from kids undermined the appeal of this classic freight car.



**NO. 3520
SEARCHLIGHT CAR**



NO. 624 CHESAPEAKE & OHIO NW2 DIESEL SWITCHER

The noteworthy trend at Lionel during the early postwar period of decorating models in eye-catching color schemes took a giant step forward in 1952. Along with the orange-and-silver Western Pacific F3s (no. 2345), the corporation introduced the handsome yet brawny no. 624 Chesapeake & Ohio NW2 switcher. The blue-and-yellow diesel impressed viewers and became a strong member of the locomotive roster.

Not the first NW2 in the catalog

The 624 wasn't the first O gauge model of an Electro-Motive Division NW2 diesel switcher to join Lionel's line. That honor goes to the no. 622 Santa Fe, introduced in 1949 with its identical twin, the no. 6220 for the O-27 market.

Incidentally, Lionel's designers were more than likely to have copied the work of a competitor and not developed their own model of this hard-working diesel switcher. General Models Corp. had already put an O gauge model of the NW2 on the market. Personnel at Lionel, according to former employees, had indeed bought one before starting to see how they could create something similar.

However, the 622 and 6220 were not mere imitations of the GMC model. They were the first Lionel locomotives to feature Magne-Traction. And they came with a bell that rang automatically as they traveled. Too bad they weren't pretty.

Lionel brought back both of these black-painted locomotives for the line available in 1950. Minor changes in their decoration occurred, but otherwise what Lionel offered in its jubilee year hardly differed from what it had sold in 1949.

During the critical year of 1951, Lionel decided to delete both of its Santa Fe diesel switchers. Perhaps executives wanted to abandon the husky little guy.

A newcomer based on a real engine

Whatever decision makers might have been thinking about the NW2, they cataloged it again in 1952. Besides a modified version of the Santa Fe (the no. 623, issued without a ringing bell), they produced a far more colorful switcher, the 624, nicely decked out in blue with yellow details and lettered for the C&O.

Some traditionalists protest that the 624 is unlike anything then plying the rails. Sorry, but Lionel based its blue-and-yellow diesel on a Chesapeake & Ohio prototype. That eastern and midwestern railroad had painted its 57 NW2 units in this gaudy style. Blame the C&O for breaking the mold of black switchers.

To Lionel's credit, it followed suit and presented an O gauge model that stood out in a world dominated by black steamers and dark electrics painted a single color. The 624 carried forward the trend launched in 1948 by the no. 2333 Santa Fe F3 in silver and red and advanced by the no. 2023 Union Pacific Alcos in yellow and gray in 1950.

Respect for this beauty

Appreciation of the 624 C&O switcher's beauty starts with its vivid blue-painted body on top of a matching die-cast metal frame. Highlights include a bright yellow stripe painted at the edge of the frame and twin smokestacks molded out of yellow plastic that was left unpainted. Also on the roof are an unpainted black ornamental bell and an unpainted black radio wheel in front.

Yellow decals with the name of the railroad and its herald steal the show. Beware of flaked or scratched decorative elements, including the yellow number on each side of the cab. Always examine the silver horns and handrails for problems.

The 624 came with two-axle Magne-Traction, a three-position reversing unit, and dual operating couplers. An operating headlight at each end helped the 624 stand out, particularly because Lionel had eliminated the bell from its NW2.

Lionel cataloged the 624 through 1954, yet it never used this handsome and rugged diesel switcher as the motive power for an outfit. The C&O diesel switcher appeared as only a separate-sale item during those three years, priced at \$25.

Too bad because the 624 would have looked great with a silver or orange boxcar, a red gondola, and a silver tank car as a low-end freight. Or better with a searchlight car, a crane car, and a work caboose as the components of a work train.

Designers eliminated seven of the 10 stanchions on each side of the plastic body shell for 1953 and '54. They also deleted a small General Motors decal on later versions. Otherwise, the 624 diesel switcher never changed during its years in the cataloged line.

1953

MANY TRIUMPHS – AND A FEW
MARKETING MISTAKES –
CHARACTERIZED THIS KEY YEAR

Taking the right track for success

The fundamental tension that had gripped Lionel since the middle 1930s played a significant role in the triumphs associated with the company's production and sales in 1953. A trend given new life the previous year gathered momentum and set the course engineers, salesmen, and corporate leaders would follow well into the latter years of the decade. For that reason alone, 1953 has great significance.

Too often, however, Lionel enthusiasts overlook what happened at the firm in 1953, so enamored are they of the trains and accessories cataloged the next year. That's understandable. Outstanding locomotives, beautiful rolling stock, and wonderful sets distinguished the product line cataloged in 1954. Collectors have long argued that 1954 represents the zenith of Lionel's post-World War II history.

Nevertheless, several excellent steam engines, freight cars, and operating accessories made their debut in 1953. Sad to say, Lionel did not always present its new models in the best manner. Where the firm's engineers came through with flying colors, its marketing executives seemed for a few reasons to fall short.

The place of realism before the war

The fundamental tension alluded to in the introductory remarks touched concepts of what Lionel should be producing and where it ought to carve out a place for itself in the marketplace. To put it bluntly, the corporation had never quite decided whether it was a toy company putting out playthings to entertain children or a model railroad manufacturer offering realistic replicas intended to please older hobbyists.

Uncertainties about what Lionel should be making might have been present from the earliest days of the company's existence. Without question, though, they had arisen in the 1930s, when technological innovations enabled Lionel to design and mass-produce realistic, even scale replicas of equipment being run on American railroads. What the firm would do remained unclear.

Improvements in the die-casting of metals were followed in the 1930s with an extraordinary boom in the use of plastics.



Compression molding and later the injection-molding of various synthetic materials suddenly made it possible for engineers at Lionel to create models that looked like faithful reproductions of full-size steam locomotives and tenders as well as various freight and passenger cars.

Which, as most Lionel enthusiasts are aware, was just what that company did toward the close of the prewar era. Among the classic scale and near-scale models introduced between 1937 and 1941 were the nos. 227 Pennsylvania RR steam switcher, 700E New York Central 4-6-4 Hudson, 715 Shell tank car, 716 Baltimore & Ohio hopper, and 2623 Lionel Lines heavyweight Pullman.

At the same time, however, Lionel never abandoned its commitment to selling electric trains whose proportions, colors, and prices shouted to consumers that these locomotives and cars were simply toys. No one above the age of five could mistake the ubiquitous little steamers and Baby Ruth boxcars for true replicas of what was being operated on full-size railroads in the late 1930s.

Need for innovation after the war

The same dichotomy in the product line and the same tension about what Lionel ought to be emphasizing (in terms of corporate image and profitability) were evident after the war. Realistic models of a 2-8-4 Berkshire steamer and an EMD F3 diesel spoke to one tradition at the company; assorted other engines and short flatcars and boxcars spoke to another. Lionel wanted it both ways, with consumers happy to be able to choose between the two.

The market seemed willing to let Lionel hold on to the best of both worlds through the end of the 1940s. By and large, top executives calmed their nerves by putting out a few realistic pieces while increasing production of the toys that seemed likely to bolster the financial welfare of the firm and bring smiles to kids.



Lionel heightened its commitment to producing more realistic O gauge models in 1953 with the release of a number of pieces of near-scale rolling stock. The superb outfit shown here, the no. 2211WS, illustrated this notable trend, with its nos. 6464-75 Rock Island boxcar and 6417 Pennsylvania RR porthole caboose. A pair of operating cars (the nos. 3461 log dump car and 3656 operating stockcar with corral) added to the enjoyment. Even better, the updated version of the popular 6-8-6 Turbine steam locomotive was back. The no. 681 came fully loaded with Magne-Traction, along with a smoke mechanism and a no. 2046W whistling tender.



As was becoming a habit at Lionel, sales executives made certain the catalog featured a set priced at less than \$20. Families on a budget were sure to enjoy outfit no. 1500, which was led by the new no. 1130 2-4-2 steam locomotive with an operating headlight (the no. 6066T tender lacked a whistle). Three basic freight models completed the train.

Yet the challenges posed by upstart entrants in the toy train field prevented Lionel from resting on its laurels and being content as a toy producer. The rise of scale model railroading and the emergence of competitors like the A.C. Gilbert Co. and American Model Toys pushed Lionel to keep innovating and take its products in the direction of greater and greater realism. A line that seemed balanced and almost complete to some observers struck others as filled with serious holes.

Therefore, to maintain supremacy and relevance, Lionel's decision makers concluded they would once more have to promote innovation in the direction of greater realism. For all intents and purposes, that meant revising significantly the roster of freight and passenger cars so those models looked longer and more realistic. Otherwise, the inroads made by American Flyer and AMT would grow.

Two noteworthy steps in modifying the line took place in 1952. Most obvious was the introduction of four near-scale extruded aluminum models of the streamlined passenger cars capturing attention across the United States. The great no. 2500 series overshadowed the cars AMT had been issuing and demonstrated how successfully Lionel could address rivals and beat them at their own game.

Less noticeable yet still important was the development of a piece of rolling stock that reflected the changes in decoration affected full-size railroads. The no. 3474 Western Pacific operation boxcar assumed the bold and exciting look the Western Pacific and others were adopting to promote their services and take business from their major competitors. As American railroads changed, so would Lionel.

Excellent steam engines, freight cars, and operating accessories made their debut in 1953.

Where Lionel stood in 1953

In retrospect, then, it becomes apparent that Lionel's leadership was facing challenges of two kinds in 1953. The nature of these challenges involved more than the need to bring additional trains to market so sales would multiply. The appearance and performance of those trains took on greater importance because consumers wanted reasonable prices and more realistic trains with extra features. So the ways Lionel aimed to reach the public became more important.

On the one hand, Lionel had to retain the segment of the toy market wanting inexpensive train sets. It had to compete vigorously with, among others, Louis Marx & Co. at the lower end of the market without compromising the quality of its electric trains. For Lionel had built a reputation on the excellence of its products.

On the other hand, Lionel had to overcome competitors in the toy and scale model fields whose trains boasted greater realism and additional detail. Here, the upstart AMT (now calling itself Auburn Model Trains) and the established American Flyer line of S gauge models from the Gilbert Co. proved to be the most formidable foes.

Neither of these challenges was new. Lionel had been striving to enhance the realism of its models since the 1930s, sometimes





doing so aggressively and sometimes halfheartedly. Competition for the limited dollars of kids and families with little disposable income had been a fact of life for Lionel for half a century.

Unfortunately for Lionel, Arthur Raphael, a member of its inner sanctum, had died in June 1952. As executive vice-president and national sales manager, he had long enjoyed the trust of Joshua and Lawrence Cowen, the team at the helm. Only slowly would Alan Ginsburg, who replaced Raphael, feel at home there.

Greater realism wins out

Raphael, like the elder Cowen, had learned to balance on the tightrope that ran across the model railroading hobby between action-packed toys for kids and realistic scale models for their fathers. His experience and brilliance had enabled him to fine-tune the selection of O and O-27 trains Lionel offered each year.

By and large, the Cowens and Raphael had preferred to develop small, toy-like trains and imaginative operating accessories likely to entrance children. They had sought to offer a wide assortment of sets and a moderately sized roster of locomotives and cars that might find buyers in almost every budget range.

Pressure from consumers plus a lingering desire to enhance Lionel's reputation as a producer of realistic, more serious models

grew at the middle of the century. Although Lionel abandoned its near-scale metal tank cars in favor of shorter plastic models, it gradually expressed a renewed commitment to realism.

A turning point was the debut of the no. 6462 long gondola in 1949 and the announcement of the no. 773 4-6-4 Hudson a year later. But Lionel quit offering a scale Hudson after 1950. Then there were only the four streamlined passenger cars in 1952, developed in response to the dynamism of AMT.

What started slowly and hesitantly picked up speed in 1953. In this notable year, Lionel brought out some landmark boxcars (including an operating version), an automobile car, a triple-dome tank car, and a porthole caboose.

Those freight cars reflected a superb balance between toy-like color and scale realism that engineers pursued for several years.

Among the best of the O-27 layouts cataloged by Lionel in 1953 was the no. 1507WS. A no. 2046 small Hudson led that five-car freight train, which included a couple of the excellent new cars: the nos. 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tank car and 6468 Baltimore & Ohio double-door boxcar. Don't overlook the no. 3472 operating milk car; no other cataloged outfit came packed with that classic animated car in this outstanding year for Lionel.





Brand-new for 1953 and offered only that year was the no. 685 small Hudson, which Lionel designated as the motive power for O gauge outfit no. 2201WS. Coupled to this 4-6-4 equipped with Magne-Traction was a no. 6026W whistling tender. The highlight of the four-car freight consist was the brand-new no. 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis boxcar, mistakenly shown as green and not Tuscan in the consumer catalog.

At the same time, they found ways of creating low-end trains that did not look or run like low-end trains.

The major challenges confronting Lionel were met with confidence and cleverness in this important year. Engineers based in New Jersey and executives working in New York City had good reason to be proud of what they unveiled in 1953.

Marketing the new line

The engineers and production supervisors at Lionel's factory had held up their end of the bargain to improve the line. Now it remained to be seen what Lionel's marketing team would do to promote the new trains and accessories.

As was typical, advertising personnel, working under the direction of Advertising Manager Joseph Hanson, showed off the new outfits and models in mass-circulation magazines, juvenile publications (including comic books), and Sunday newspapers. In addition, spots appeared on radio and television.

Even so, the primary method of showing off and marketing Lionel's line was its catalogs. First came the black-and-white advance catalog. Aimed at retailers and distributors, it reached them in late February. Six months later, after Labor Day, more than a million copies of the full-color consumer catalog went out.

The latter, a 40-page "wishbook" coveted by youngster everywhere, shed light on the strategies used by marketing and sales executives. Generally, their plans made sense and contributed to the nearly \$33 million in net sales Lionel reported for the fiscal year. Yet sometimes the "best and brightest" at the corporation fell short and missed opportunities.

Analyzing the catalog's cover

Any analysis of the design and content of the annual consumer catalog rightly begins with its front cover. The color illustration there contains simple images of four trains. Smart move by the creators, except that only one train duplicated an outfit actually in the catalog (the top-of-the-line no. 2190W four-car streamlined passenger train).

Of the four locomotives shown on the front cover, three were new additions for 1953. Technically, however, the nos. 681 Turbine and 2046 small Hudson were reissues, having been part of the line in 1950-51. (Who knows the reason for incorrectly showing a tender lettered for the New York Central behind the 2046?) Also, the no. 2353 Santa Fe F3 diesel was just a revamped no. 2343.

Truly new locomotives were nowhere in sight. The nos. 685 and 2055 small Hudsons and the no. 2037 2-6-4 steamer were hardly spectacular additions. Still, longtime customers would have preferred seeing what was really new for 1953.

Wouldn't it have been sensible to promote the new near-scale freight cars on the front of the catalog? Not to Lionel's marketing and advertising men! The sole clue that longer, better cars were available was the no. 6415 triple-dome tank car. Barely a third of this model was shown, so children could have overlooked it.

Introducing the line

Enough about the front of the consumer catalog. Let's pretend we're youngsters in 1953, eager to check out the contents and find out what Lionel had to offer.

Inside, readers learned on page 2 that "Lionel trains look and act like real ones!" Eleven pictures showed how they captured the look of full-size trains. That was a clever way of promoting the growing emphasis at Lionel on realism.

So was the illustration of a layout on page 3. The purpose of that picture was to remind consumers of the advantages of

It becomes apparent that Lionel's leadership was facing challenges of two kinds.



Magne-Traction, added to most of Lionel's fleet of locomotives to increase their pulling power and climbing ability.

The shortages of Alnico magnetic material – so vital for Magne-Traction – had been resolved as the Korean War wound down. As a result, steamers like the 681 Turbine, 736 Berkshire, and 2046, missing from the line for a year, made a comeback in 1953. New entries could say they came with Magne-Traction.

Elsewhere on page 3 the copywriter spelled out the ways that Lionel trains surpassed those put out by rivals. Implicit in the list of basic features – puffing smoke, built-in whistles and horns, and remote-control knuckle couplers – was the message that American Flyer, Marx, AMT, and HO scale trains didn't compare.

The illustration on page 3 did one more thing. The neat layout would encourage boys and their fathers to build model railroads.

That was significant because, as Lionel's leaders knew, the first group of youngsters born right after World War II was now at the perfect age for enjoying electric trains. They could be counted on to choose which of the new models they wanted and then ask, beg, and cajole their folks into making the right purchases.

Lionel pushed the idea that, no matter where a kid lived, there was room for a layout. Could be the attic of a house in the city or a spare bedroom in an apartment. Maybe the basement of a new home built in the booming suburbs. All that a family needed was a 4 x 8-foot sheet of plywood and a layout could be theirs.

Magnificent illustrations

For that memorable model railroad, a boy or girl needed a train, of course. So youngsters were advised to dig into the consumer catalog and carefully study what Lionel was planning for the year. Just past the introductory pages a phenomenal array of 10 O-27 and eight O gauge outfits was depicted, all in highly attractive yet realistic settings.

A look at any of the two-page spreads in the consumer catalog was all a kid needed to fall in love with the sets he or she found. The style and content of the illustrations, always strong at Lionel, jumped up a few notches in 1953.

What caused children then and middle-aged hobbyists now to linger over this catalog? Above all, the trains were drawn in such a way as to exude authority. Those toys seemed real – as powerful, heavy, and regal as could be imagined.

One glance created lasting impressions. You could smell smoke billowing out of the locomotives' stacks and hear their

The roster of freight cars expanded impressively in 1953. New models included (clockwise from upper left): nos. 6468 Baltimore & Ohio double-door automobile boxcar, 3484 Pennsylvania RR operating boxcar, 6561 depressed-center flatcar with cable reels, 6511 flatcar with pipes, and 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tank car.



UNIQUE AND RARE ITEMS OF 1953

In addition to all the common, mass-produced models from any given year at Lionel, there usually are some difficult-to-find variations. These items differ from the common versions in color or detail. There are also some truly rare pieces, typically paint samples or engineering prototypes of which only a handful of examples are known.

The list of unusual variations from 1953 begins with no. 1130 steamers produced with the die-cast metal shell intended for the 2034 engine.

Then there's the 685 small Hudson. This steam locomotive generally came with its number heat-stamped below the cab window. However, examples with rubber-stamped numbering were also produced.

Skipping ahead to the accessories associated with 1953, the only collectible variation was the black-painted metal tower on the 193 industrial water tower. Be aware, the 138 water tower initially had an unpainted gray plastic roof in 1953, but soon an unpainted orange one became the norm.

The story gets interesting when we turn back the rolling stock, in particular, the no. 6464 boxcars. Perhaps the rarest items are the examples illustrated in the advance catalog. Not one of these uniquely decorated models has ever surfaced!

Collectors had thought the green-painted no. 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis shown in the consumer catalog was equally rare, perhaps just a

figment of some artist's imagination. Then one genuine sample appeared – one of 1953's greatest rarities.

But not the only rare color variations of the 6464-50. One-of-a-kind examples, one painted cream and the other robin's-egg blue, exist. So do models painted a true brown (used on the no. 3484 operating boxcar) and not the Tuscan Red typically used for this common boxcar.

The first car in the 6464 series, the silver-painted Western Pacific, generally has blue heat-stamped lettering. However, rare early examples come in red. Slightly less desirable are the scarce versions of the blue-lettered car with ribs along the interior of their roofs. Both variations represent the earliest production.



Rare color variations of Lionel's early no. 6464 boxcars entrance collectors. Check out the nos. 6464-1 Western Pacific with red lettering (below) and the 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis cars painted in robin's-egg blue and a deep brown (above).



whistles. You could feel consists made up of rugged freight cars and sleek passenger cars rumbling over the rails.

Adding to the glory of these illustrations were the settings in which the unidentified artists placed them. Like miniature travel posters, these depictions had freights rolling by factories and farms. Passenger expresses accelerated along mountains and stations. Often the trains worked in tandem with accessories.

O-27 sets for those on a budget

Even outfits at the bottom of the line, like the two Scout sets, looked majestic, a tribute to the skills of the illustrator. They didn't cost much, \$19.95 and \$24.95, respectively, but the three-car no. 1500 and three-car no. 1501S didn't seem cheap or puny when shown racing in a mountain scene straight out of *National Geographic* magazine.

These outfits deserve our attention because they revealed how Lionel was trying to meet the needs of every segment of the marketplace. Set 1500 contained a brand-new no. 1130 steamer. Company designers had refashioned the low-end 2-4-2 locomotive by coming up with a new plastic boiler derived from the die that in the past Lionel had utilized for the nos. 1655 and 2034 steam locomotives.

As an aside, collectors should be aware of a scarce variation of the 1130 with a die-cast metal boiler. Research indicates this model was created when Lionel used previously unstamped 2034 castings that represented leftover stock.

Next came outfit no. 1511S, a four-car freight train led by the new 2037, an unheralded steam locomotive equipped with both smoke and a headlight. Three of the cars (nos. 6032 gondola, 6035 single-dome tank car, and 6037 caboose) were basic items Lionel had introduced in 1952 and included in the low-end sets.

The fourth model in the 1511S, a 3474 Western Pacific operating

Lionel's engineers demonstrated their ingenuity with more operating accessories in 1953 (left to right): nos. 193 industrial water tower, 497 coaling station, 445 animated switch tower (advertised but not sold in 1952), and 138 water tower.

boxcar, promised action for owners. Additionally, collectors have learned that finding a genuine boxed version from 1953 is more difficult than is generally thought.

The new 2055 small Hudson, which boasted a smoke mechanism and Magne-Traction, led a pair of O-27 sets. Matched with a new no. 6026W whistle tender in the no. 1503WS, it pulled four run-of-the-mill freight cars (nos. 6456 hopper, 6462 gondola, 6465 double-dome tank car, and 6257 SP-type caboose).

The other outfit with a 2055 was the no. 1502WS. That passenger outfit included a trio of 2400 streamlined cars. Assigned a retail price of \$57.50, that underrated outfit has been valued at more than \$1,500 in like-new condition.

The finest O-27 sets in 1953

Three other O-27 sets featured a 2046, which came with Magne-Traction and a smoke mechanism, along with a whistle tender. For 1953, the number under the cab window was heat-stamped instead of being rubber-stamped as in 1950-51.

Start with the no. 1509WS work train. Besides the action supplied by the 2046 and its no. 2046W tender, this outfit included nos. 3469 operating dump car, 3520 searchlight car, and 6460 crane car. Nothing new but a ton of play value.

The other 2046 outfits brought the new near-scale freight cars to the public's attention. Both the nos. 1505WS and 1507WS included a no. 6415 triple-dome tank car. The latter set also had a no. 6468 Baltimore & Ohio automobile car.

The otherwise insignificant 1505WS four-car freight outfit



The landmark series of no. 6464 near-scale boxcars changed the toy train hobby. Lionel released the first four entries in 1953: nos. 6464-1 Western Pacific, 6464-25 Great Northern, 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis, and 6464-75 Rock Island.

stands out because it introduced the first entry in Lionel's famed no. 6464 series of near-scale boxcars. The plain silver Western Pacific model (commonly known as the 6464-1) didn't stand out for its decoration. Yet rare red-lettered versions have surfaced, as have early models with plastic ribs along the interior of their roof.

Completing the O-27 line were two diesel sets that repeated what had been offered in 1952. The no. 1464W passenger train was just an alternative to the steam-powered no. 1502WS. Instead of a 2055 steam engine and 2046W tender, it came with no. 2033 Union Pacific Alco A-A units painted entirely in silver.

The no. 1467W again came with four common freight cars (nos. 6456 hopper, 6465 double-dome tank car, 6656 stockcar, and 6357 illuminated SP-type caboose), along with no. 2032 Erie Alco units. The retail prices for these two outfits (\$66.50 and \$57.50, respectively) had not budged from the previous year.

Quite a variety of outfits, steam and diesel, freight and passenger, and a price range climbing from less than \$20 to \$70. Incredibly, Lionel's marketers overlooked the corporation's two Electro-Motive NW2 diesel switchers (the nos. 623 Santa Fe and 624 Chesapeake & Ohio) and its no. 2031 Rock Island Alco combination. Trains with those good-looking thoroughbreds would have been solid additions to the lineup of sets.

Lionel's engineers developed better and more exciting freight loaders and railroad items.

Steam steps forward in O gauge

Lionel complemented its 10 O-27 outfits with eight O gauge sets (the same number it had released in 1952). Five of them had a steam locomotive and tender (the brand-new 685 small Hudson or the returning 681 or 736), and three used F3 diesels. Six outfits included at least one of the new near-scale freight cars.

Set no. 2201WS depended on the 685 for pulling its quartet of cars, three of which were common holdovers. The 685 steamer was a one-year wonder that used the same die-cast metal boiler casting as the 2055 yet had its own boiler front. This new 4-6-4 came with Magne-Traction and a smoke mechanism.

The fourth model in this low-end O gauge set (its retail price was a mere \$39.95) was the no. 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis boxcar. This newcomer came painted Tuscan Red, but the catalog

showed a green paint sample probably based on an AMT car. One legitimate green Lionel 6464-50 car has been verified.

Two neat outfits relied on the reissued 681 Turbine (again equipped with Magne-Traction) as their motive power. This established steam engine had heat-stamped numbering instead of the rubber-stamped markings used in 1950-51.

The first of these O gauge sets, the no. 2203WS, included three of the near-scale cars: nos. 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tank car, 6417 Pennsylvania RR porthole caboose, and 6464-25 Great Northern boxcar. A no. 3520 Lionel Lines searchlight car rounded out the 2203WS, which had a retail price of \$49.95.

Promising more action for an additional \$12.55 was outfit no. 2211WS. Its 681 was matched with two operating cars (the nos. 3461 lumber car and 3656 cattle car and platform). With them came the fourth of the new boxcars, the no. 6464-75 Rock Island, looking elegant in green. Last was a 6417 Pennsy porthole caboose.

The heat-stamped 736 weighed in as the key component of two five-car sets. First was the no. 2205WS, which offered four of the new models, including both the 6468 Baltimore & Ohio automobile car and the 3484 operating Pennsylvania RR boxcar. Finishing the list of cars were a 6415 tanker, a 6417 porthole caboose, and a 6456 Lehigh Valley hopper.

Turn to pages 18 and 19 of the consumer catalog to admire the top O gauge steam outfit, the no. 2213WS. Led by a 736 Berkshire, it contained four of the same cars as the O-27 set 1509WS. In place of a 6456 hopper, the 2213WS had a no. 3461 operating lumber car. Interestingly, Lionel retailed both sets at \$70.

Choices and snubs for the diesels

Lionel also specified \$70 as the retail price for its pair of diesel freight outfits. The same four pieces of rolling stock were packed with the nos. 2207W and 2209W. Three were new: the 3484 Pennsylvania RR operating boxcar, 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tanker, and 6417 Pennsy porthole caboose. The two sets differed only in their motive power, with the first led by Santa Fe A-B-A units and the other by New York Central engines.

Finally twin 2353 Santa Fe F3 A diesels were in charge of the no. 2190W, a four-car streamlined passenger outfit Lionel had introduced in 1952 with 2343 F3s. This train came with one each of the nos. 2531 *Silver Dawn* observation, 2532 *Silver Range* "Astra-Dome," 2533 *Silver Cloud* Pullman, and 2534 *Silver Bluff* Pullman for a gleaming streamliner.



The front cover of the consumer catalog depicted the powerful diesel and steam locomotives and eye-catching rolling stock distinguishing Lionel's line for 1953.

One snazzy set! And it raises a good question: Why didn't Lionel catalog the same or a similar passenger train led by its revamped no. 2355 Western Pacific F3s? That the company never used its WP A-A units to lead any kind of outfit leaves us wondering how executives could have been so blind to its appeal.

Same with the two diesel switchers. An O gauge work train using the C&O or Santa Fe NW2 would have been a hit. But those tried-and-true engines – now with three and not ten wire hand-rail stanchions – were offered for separate sale at \$25 and nothing else in 1953. What was the rationale at Lionel?

Even two of the brand-new freight cars, including one of the near-scale models, were not packaged with a single outfit. Both the nos. 6511 pipe car and 6561 cable car became stalwart parts of the cataloged line in the 1950s, yet for inexplicable reasons this duo was ignored by Lionel sales executives in 1953.

Can't miss the back of the catalog

For the youngsters who skipped their homework and instead studied the O-27 and O gauge outfits and then the separate-sale items in the catalog, the accessories shown on the back pages were icing on the cake. Buying more track and switches for their layouts was natural and provided Lionel with steady income. But the accessories were the real prizes.

Every year, or so it seemed, Lionel's engineers developed better and more exciting freight loaders and railroad-related items. 1953 fit in, starting with the nos. 193 industrial water tower (with blinking light) and 497 coaling station.

The fun began with a 497 when any of Lionel's new or vintage

operating dump cars dropped its load of coal into the waiting bin. A lift hoisted the bin overhead and poured the coal into a storage hopper under the roof. The bin returned to the ground level, and coal, at the press of another button, fell through a chute into a dump car or hopper below.

Besides these brand-new items, the list of accessories in 1953 included the no. 138 water tower (a reworking of the no. 30, last cataloged in 1950) and the no. 445 operating switch tower. That animated item, although mentioned and pictured in the catalog for 1952, was not available to the public until early the next year.

Longtime favorites also returned for another year. Counted among those popular accessories were the nos. 125 whistling station, 145 automatic gateman, 154 flashing highway signal, 252 automatic crossing gate, 364 conveyor-type operating lumber loader, 395 floodlight tower, and 456 coal ramp and hopper.

More basic items listed in the final pages included bridges, bags of grass and coal, street lamps, smoke pellets, sets of barrels and cattle, a maintenance kit, and replacement lamps. Can't forget the transformers. Four were illustrated, ranging from the 110-watt RW (at \$13.95) to the 275-watt ZW (at \$29.95).

Lionel enjoyed a good year

Judging from the number and variety of cataloged outfits, the new near-scale rolling stock, and the performance of locomotives, there is no doubt 1953 was a good year for Lionel. Add in that net sales had never been higher, and you can understand why the Cowens and their aides were breaking out the cigars.

In retrospect, the marketing could have been better and more could have been done to create attractive sets and promote the newcomers to the line. That's why we rate 1953 as a good year. Maybe we're being too tough on the world's greatest toy train maker – or are looking ahead to the triumphs of 1954 and later.



The many ribs molded into the underside of the roof of this undecorated Lionel no. 6464-series boxcar suggest it was created in the earliest stages of the model's development. Designers at the company soon added six gussets inside the body shell and had eliminated all the ribs by the time mass-production of the no. 6464-1 Western Pacific was going at full speed.

Discovering the earliest 6464 boxcar known

AN UNDECORATED MODEL WHOSE INTERIOR REVEALS FASCINATING CLUES

The development of the no. 6464 series of near-scale boxcars has fascinated collectors of Lionel postwar trains almost as long as those good-looking models have been around. In 1953, Lionel released four boxcars that launched a series that eventually included 30 great cars, all but one of them a cataloged item. Within a decade, toy train enthusiasts were examining the exterior details of those models and identifying collectible variations.

How designers employed at Lionel created the first 6464 models and then made modifications to assorted details has received great attention since the 1980s. Most of the emphasis has gone to

the rivets on the sides, with collectors analyzing the numbers and patterns of rivets. Other Lionel enthusiasts have concentrated on colors of plastic used to form body shells and variations in the heat- or rubber-stamped lettering and graphics.

Noticing the roof ribs

It was only a matter of time before sharp-eyed collectors turned their spotlight on the interior. There, they noticed that scarce examples of the no. 6464-1 Western Pacific body shell had been molded with ribs on the underside of their roof. Other boxcars had ribs as well as six gussets (two at right angles to each



other at each corner of one side and two more next to the door on that side). But most cars had no ribs – just the six gussets.

Of the four boxcars released in 1953, only examples of the 6464-1 were found to have those ribs. The other three models had only the smooth interior with the six gussets.

The few collectors studying those different Western Pacific boxcars drew the obvious conclusions to create a chronology, namely, that designers had modified the mold to eliminate ribs and rely on gussets for stability. Therefore, cars with ribs and no gussets came first, followed by cars with both features and then with only gussets. Little wonder the vast majority of 6464-1 models have only gussets, like the three cars that joined them in 1953.

Consequently, when a collector discovered the undecorated 6464 model shown on the previous page and noticed that it had more ribs inside its roof than even the scarce Western Pacific cars while lacking gussets, he was quick to proclaim it the earliest mock-up known.

In addition, the pattern of rivets observed inside that unique boxcar corresponded to that on the initial one. Four complete lines to the right of the door went along with three interrupted rows at the far left side. Breaks in the lines were put into the mold to accommodate different graphics.

Comments on the graphics

Just as there was a sequence of developments behind the appearance of body shells with and without ribs and gussets, so was there a sequence involving the graphics on the 6464-1 Western Pacific. The mock-up photographed here – lacking decoration – provides no clues as to the graphics Lionel's designers intended to use for the 6464-1. Various Lionel catalogs shed some light on the matter, but don't give definitive answers.

The boxcar Lionel produced had blue (the shade varied) heat-stamped graphics. The name of the railroad and its slogan ("Rides Like a Feather") stood out, with Lionel's circle-L emblem, product number ("6464"), built date ("5-53"), and car data.

Now let's work backwards, starting with the consumer catalog for 1953, which was released in the fall and produced during the late spring and early summer. Only one image of the 6464-1 appeared (with O-27 outfit no. 1505WS), and customers expected it to faithfully represent what Lionel was mass-producing for them to buy. But it did not. The built date and Lionel circle-L emblem were conspicuously absent in the illustration.

Moving back to the advance catalog released to the toy trade before the end of the winter and prepared early in 1953, we find two black-and-white illustrations of the 6464-1. The Western Pacific boxcars shown diverged even more from the actual model.

The existence of authentic 6464-1 boxcars with red heat-stamped lettering confuses the issue of how designers at Lionel finalized their plans for decorating the Western Pacific car. The body shells of the red-lettered cars lack ribs underneath the roof, which proves Lionel created them after developing the last of the molds used in the production process.

The image of outfit 1505WS depicted a car with a six-digit number ("480029") that did not correspond with anything the Western Pacific used. One of the WP's old heralds filled the upper right-hand corner on the car's side. Lionel's product number ("6464-1") appeared in the listing of car data located under the herald. No built date was discernible.

The image in the separate-sale section had the railroad's name and initials on the left, with "6464" underneath, followed by car data. On the right side were the WP's herald, more car data, and a small circle-L emblem. Oh yes, the door was upside down!

Red-lettered cars

We're left to ponder whether the advance catalog showed the earliest possible graphics with the outfit illustration, followed by changes depicted with the separate-sale model. Then came the consumer catalog, although Lionel had not finalized the design.

Another source that tantalized more than clarified was an order sheet dated April 1, 1953 (printed later than the advance catalog). It correctly referred to the 6464-1 as a "Silver & Blue" car. That description suggested Lionel had decided on the colors of the WP model even if, as shown by the consumer catalog, it had not settled on the graphics.

How then to explain the existence of 6464-1 Western Pacific cars with the exact graphics found on the mass-produced models but whose heat stamping was bright red?

One hypothesis holds that designers continued to experiment with the color of the boxcar's decoration even after releasing the order sheet to dealers in April.

A second hypothesis counters that the graphics had been determined before the price sheet was printed, with red lettering already rejected. Therefore, a 6464-1 with the correct decoration should have been available to the artist handling the illustration of set 1505WS for the consumer catalog. Either he was using an outdated mock-up, or he had a correctly lettered model and didn't bother adding the circle-L emblem and the built date.

Definitive answers about how Lionel settled on the graphics for its 6464-1 WP boxcar continue to elude collectors. They await documents that may – or may not – exist.

Lionel released four boxcars that launched a series that eventually included 30 great cars.

A magazine ad conveyed the joys of Lionel trains

ALEX ROSS USED HIS SON TO PROMOTE LIONEL IN 1953

From the time Joseph Hanson assumed the position of advertising manager at Lionel in June of 1945, he was determined to promote the line of trains and accessories as broadly as possible. Over the next 10 years before he left the company, he succeeded in placing trains in feature stories in newspapers and magazines, on spots on radio and television, and in movies and on Broadway.

Perhaps the most prominent method Hanson used while at Lionel was the full-page color advertisements the firm put in the leading mass-circulation magazines of the time. Millions of families across the United States viewed the evocative illustrations and inviting messages and so were motivated to learn more about Lionel electric trains. Youngsters sent off for consumer catalogs and visited local merchandisers.

Lionel enthusiasts have their favorite among these nostalgic ads, and many consider one dating from 1953 as the best. Fortunately for anyone wanting to learn more about this advertisement, the artist signed his name. This clue makes it possible to learn about him and his model.

A series of beautiful ads

Every year from 1949 through 1954, Hanson supervised the creation of two large advertisements that differed in their four-color illustrations and copy. Lionel's advertising department distributed those ads to run over full pages in *Life*, *National Geographic*, *Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Look*, and other popular magazines. Smaller versions appeared in many other periodicals.

Developing these bold and colorful advertisements was an expensive proposition, as was buying space in the best-read magazines of the early postwar era. Yet Hanson, not to mention Joshua and Lawrence Cowen, believed doing so was worthwhile. Besides capturing the attention of adults (who purchased trains), full-page ads enhanced Lionel's reputation as a maker of upscale toys.

Typically for these full-page advertisements, Hanson or an associate in the department jotted down some general ideas of what was desired and perhaps prepared a few preliminary sketches. Then he contacted an agency, almost certainly based in New York City, that either prepared advertisements or hired out work to illustrators in its stable.



Alexander Ross painted magazine covers and advertisements as well as scenes from nature and religious subjects in a career lasting from the 1940s through his death in 1990. He was working on a poster in the early 1950s when photographed.



Alan Ross, one of Alex's children, served as the model for the illustration used in a 1953 Lionel advertisement. Playing with electric trains was, Alan recalls, just one of his many hobbies as a boy. He also collected license plates from across the U.S.

"A One-Track Mind!"

The evolution of the ad titled "A One-Track Mind!" began sometime in 1953 with Jacques Zuccaire, an outsider who had started to work with Lionel and would take over its advertising department after Hanson's departure 2 years later. Zuccaire conceived of the idea and passed along drawings to his superior. Hanson shared what he had with Lionel's executives, who gave the project their blessing.

Hanson next contacted an agency to find an artist who would finish the advertisement. The fellow given the assignment was a 44-year-old artist who had established a reputation for creating delightful magazine covers and illustrations. Now this artist was being asked to create a picture that combined a child with realistic depictions of many of Lionel's newest and finest O gauge freight cars.

But in the estimation of family members, Alexander Sharpe Ross probably didn't flinch from the challenge of painting a miniature steam locomotive and its long train. He had, after all, largely taught himself to paint in the years after immigrating to Pennsylvania from Scotland, where he had been born in 1909.

By 1953, Ross had already done approximately 130 covers for *Good Housekeeping*. Some of the other popular American magazines that had featured his illustrations of romantic couples and children in the 1940s and '50s included *Cosmopolitan*, *McCall's*, *Collier's*, and *Saturday Evening Post*.

A model right at home

When called upon to depict kids, Ross didn't have to look far for models. He and his wife, Helen, had a family that included two boys and two girls. In the case of the ad for Lionel, the artist turned to his 9-year-old son, Alan, for inspiration. Ross planned to show Alan happily lost in thought while contemplating the wonders of the new train line – like millions of other youngsters.

The youngster wouldn't have any difficulty demonstrating his "one-track mind." As Alan reminisced, his father had constructed a 6 x 15-foot O gauge railroad for him as a Christmas present. Alan loved the trains that ran by the artificial mountains and roads on the layout.

Too bad there wouldn't be anything new for his roster from his dad's assignment. According to Alan, Lionel never sent any trains to his father. The most likely scenario had Alexander Ross painting the train in the ad after consulting various full-color illustrations in the consumer catalog for 1953.

There he saw the no. 736 Berkshire steam locomotive and tender, along with every sort of freight car. The long train that thrilled the boy with a one-track mind surpassed anything Lionel cataloged at the time. A whopping eight pieces of rolling stock had been coupled to the whistle tender.

Take a look at the ad and you'll note six models that made their debut in 1953. Along with a pair of older cars, Ross had the steamer pulling the new nos. 6464-25 Great Northern boxcar, 6511 flatcar with pipes, 6468 Baltimore & Ohio automobile boxcar, 6561 cable reel car, 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tank car, and 6417 Pennsylvania RR class N5c porthole caboose.



Few toy train advertisements better express the joy youngsters felt when playing with – or just dreaming of – a Lionel electric train set than does this one from the November 16, 1953, issue of *Life* magazine. The artist depended on his young son for inspiration.

Part of Lionel's legacy

Lionel dispatched the advertisement to *Life* magazine, which then was the premier weekly news publication in the United States. Kids like young Alan Ross saw the spectacular ad in the issue of *Life* dated Nov. 16, 1953. Millions of youngsters then scrutinized it to discover what might be new to the line.

Alexander Ross, meanwhile, moved on to many more assignments. His national reputation as a commercial illustrator grew over the coming years.

Critics and peers praised Ross for combining elements of realism with abstraction in depicting flowers and people, religious and natural themes. He successfully worked in watercolors, collages, pastels, and other media until his death in 1990.

To the regret of Lionel enthusiasts, the original watercolor illustration for the ad in *Life* most likely has been lost. But everyone who loves toy trains, even those manufactured by Gilbert, Marx, and other companies, can easily appreciate the "one-track mind" shown here.

Stars of the class of '53



NO. 6468 BALTIMORE & OHIO DOUBLE-DOOR BOXCAR

The trend toward designing and manufacturing larger, more realistic cars for the three-rail roster, which moved along in a hit-and-miss fashion through the early 1950s, accelerated dramatically in 1953. Along with single-door boxcars, a triple-dome tank car, and a flatcar carrying pipes, there stood out a double-door boxcar.

The no. 6468 Baltimore & Ohio double-door automobile boxcar has much to teach observers about Lionel's renewed commitment to realistic and accurate model railroading. Better yet, this O gauge model also sheds a good deal of light on the postwar relationship between America's principal railroads and the country's booming automotive industry then with its corporate headquarters in Detroit.

The need for special boxcars

The idea of designing a miniature boxcar for Lionel's cataloged line with two sliding doors on each side was not a fanciful notion bursting forth from the mind of a highly creative engineer. To the contrary, offering the deep blue 6468 model with Baltimore & Ohio lettering and graphics demonstrated the toy company's wish to present replicas of equipment seen throughout the country on major railroads.

In fact, the boxcar introduced in 1953 was not even the first double-door model cataloged after World War II. From 1946, when Lionel assembled its first comprehensive product line since the United States became deeply involved in the global conflict, through 1948, the firm offered the no. X2458. That brown-painted double-door boxcar with Pennsylvania RR markings was listed as an automobile car.

What were automobiles doing in boxcars? It turns out that almost from the time automobiles were first mass-produced in the eastern and midwestern regions of the United States in the early 20th century, they were being transported in railcars.

Railroads like the Pennsylvania, New York Central, and Grand

Trunk Western used 40-foot boxcars to bring partially completed automobiles from plants in Michigan to dealers for final assembly. Double doors on the sides and/or a door at one end enabled unfinished autos to be loaded and then carefully stacked inside.

By the 1930s, steel boxcars, often with rounded roofs, were becoming the rule. These accommodated finished automobiles; as many as four could be carried inside a boxcar, thanks to stronger rack systems. One set of automobiles was secured to a rack, which was raised so more autos could be loaded underneath.

Lionel creates a three-rail model

Lionel based its postwar models on those double-door boxcars. The A.C. Gilbert Co., which also sought to capture in miniature the latest rolling stock, never added an automobile boxcar to its American Flyer line. Too bad, because an S gauge car would have looked great riding behind a 4-8-4 Challenger or a silver GP7.

Lionel, as we know, burst ahead. When it started modifying the line in 1952, going from drab, compact models to larger, vividly colored items, a new double-door boxcar became a priority. The 6468 played a role in this transition.

The 11-inch-long model was touted in the consumer catalog as "longer" with a "modern design roof." In that subtle way, the copywriter justified Lionel's returning to the type of double-door car it had dropped. The automobile boxcar came painted a flat or glossy blue, with white heat-stamped decorative marks.

Besides being available for separate sale at a cost of \$5.50, the 6468 showed up in two cataloged outfits. For O-27 enthusiasts, there was the no. 1507WS, a five-car train led by a no. 2046 small Hudson. O gaugers could opt for the no. 2205WS, a five-car train pulled by the outstanding no. 736 Berkshire.

The blue 6468 returned in 1954 and '55. In the latter year, Lionel also released a few B&O cars painted Tuscan and packed in boxes with an "X" stamped on each end. Those scarce variations came only in the no. 1535W Santa Fe F3 freight set.

After the burst of activity and inventiveness that expanded the list of operating accessories so dramatically in 1952, Lionel's engineering staff and sales team might well have thought they had filled every possible gap. Four classic items had made their debut in the consumer catalog for 1952, so that kids with three-rail layouts could now load and unload barrels with their logs and coal, transport baggage, guard their switches, and direct trains on two lines with a signal bridge.

No wonder the lineup of three operating accessories introduced in 1953 seemed paltry and a bit dull by comparison. To start, Lionel offered a revived version of its big railroad water tank (the no. 138) and a sleek new industrial type of water tower (the no. 193). But with them came another model – truly different in form and function – intended to give modelers a third way of moving coal.

The importance of coal

Since the debut of the nos. 96 and 97 coal elevators (manual and remote-controlled, respectively) in 1938, the handling of coal had assumed importance in Lionelville. Kids liked being able to drop off “coal” (really, chunks of Bakelite) from dump cars and then watching as tiny buckets carried it up to a storage area at the top of the elevator. When ready, they could then unload the coal down a chute.

The remote-controlled version of the coal elevator returned to the Lionel catalog after World War II, and the 97 remained there through 1950. By then, the engineering crew had devised not one but two other accessories to handle coal.

First in 1948 came the no. 397 diesel-type operating coal loader. Although significantly different in appearance from the 97, its method of carrying coal upward was somewhat similar. Chunks reaching the top then rolled off the conveyor into a waiting dump car, gondola, or hopper on an adjacent track.

Two years later, Lionel released the no. 456 coal ramp. On that long accessory, a locomotive pushed a special hopper (no. 3456) up a ramp until a coupler secured to the raised end could hold it in place. A remote controller made it possible for a modeler to unload the coal into a bin located below. The design of the reliable 456 enabled it to work in tandem with the 397, as catalogs showed.

With the 397 and the 456 having become popular members of the roster of operating accessories, what reason might Lionel's executives have found for adding a third coal-handling model? The American Flyer line had only a single coal loader, and Marx had none. So why did Lionel add yet a third one in 1953?

Looking to an outsider

Decisions to develop new accessories typically were advanced by Joseph Bonanno, the far-sighted and demanding chief engineer at Lionel. The ideas and rudimentary designs for them might come from other sources at the company or even beyond, but Bonanno had a hand in virtually every new product released.

According to John DiGirolamo, an electric engineer working at the Lionel plant, his boss recruited an outsider to provide an innovative accessory. Not long after the company decided to eliminate the 97, Bonanno approached Raymond Loewy, the path-breaking industrial engineer responsible for the GG1 electric-profile locomotive, the Oreo cookie, and the Coca-Cola bottle, for a replacement.

Loewy, in association with a team of assistants, devised what became the 497. At least eight drawings (and a bill for \$6,000)



**NO. 497
COALING STATION**

mailed to the Lionel factory helped Bonanno's department develop preproduction samples. Members of his staff fine-tuned those models until a coaling station that ran as smoothly and consistently as Lionel's top executives expected was ready for mass-production.

What Lionel cataloged

The finished coaling station didn't look exactly like the one Loewy's group of collaborators recommended, but the resemblance was obvious. Further changes occurred between the time Lionel assembled its advance catalog early in 1953 and the printing of its consumer catalog several months later. The rendering in the advance catalog revealed shields on the loading chutes and an access ladder on the inner side of one support column that company engineers eventually removed.

As completed by Bonanno's department, the 497 featured a gray-painted metal base to which four blackened posts were attached. They held a red-painted housing covered by a green plastic roof (the shade varied from a dark to a light green). The bin and the hopper used to hoist and store coal were maroon plastic.

Tests by factory personnel ensured that the 497 operated in a dependable fashion sure to capture the interest of kids at a time when coal was being phased out by railroads across the country. The remote-controlled four-stage sequence began with coal being spilled into the bin, which was lifted to the storage hopper. The third step saw the bin return to the base, followed by the hopper's doors being opened to let the coal fall into a freight car waiting on the track under the hopper.

Executives gave a green light to the new accessory, the first loader to have coal emptied from a dump car, gathered and lifted, and dropped into the same car. The sturdy and reliable 497 coaling station earned a patent for Bonanno in 1957. Loewy, for all his international fame, merely launched the project, one that hardly added to his glory or left a lasting imprint on Lionel. Only now can we salute his great efforts.

1954

A LINE BRIMMING OVER WITH
CLASSIC SETS, LOCOMOTIVES,
AND ROLLING STOCK

Marking what was Lionel's finest year



In a year characterized by many great outfits, the no. 2223W diesel freight set rose to the top. That magnificent O gauge train featured a brand-new no. 2321 Lackawanna Train Master (often the desirable version with a maroon-painted roof) and five cars worth owning. Highlights included the nos. 6464-100 Western Pacific boxcar (possibly the scarce no. 6464-250 orange boxcar with a blue feather) and 6417-50 Lehigh Valley porthole caboose. Two operating cars (the nos. 3461-25 log dump car and 3482 automatic milk car) added play value.

How fitting that this new special interest publication from *Classic Toy Trains* should conclude with a good look at Lionel in 1954. From the peak of the company's grand 50th anniversary celebration in 1950 to the low points in 1951 and '52 and the gradual comeback to prominence in 1953, Lionel reached unbelievable heights with its electric trains during the production year of 1954.

So many classic locomotives, freight and passenger cars, and accessories of all sorts and sizes appeared in the cataloged line for 1954. Many were making their debut in that memorable time and would remain stalwart parts of the line. Others were returning for a second or third year. Still others would be gone after this great year.

Any way informed collectors and operators look at Lionel's product line for 1954, they end up being impressed by what the firm's talented engineers, industrious sales teams, and bright executives had assembled. This line seemed to represent a perfect balance of realistic models and colorful, whimsical playthings. Never before had Lionel achieved such an ideal combination, and the high sales it recorded reflected that fact.

A watershed year in many respects

Every year assumes historical importance, but 1954 seems a bit more significant than others.

Not for fans of the New York Yankees, who failed to win the American League pennant and or the World Series for the first time since 1948. Fortunately for residents of the country's most populous city, the Giants managed to grab the National League title and defeat the Cleveland Indians in an exciting World Series that showed the universe the artistry of Willie Mays.

Music buffs can point to 1954 as a turning point in the history of rock 'n' roll. Elvis Presley cut his first record in July, and great tunes like *Shake, Rattle & Roll*, *Rock Around the Clock*, and *Sh-Boom* were put on disks and sold wildly to kids everywhere.

Of course, readers of CTT are more interested in the electric trains of 1954 than they are in the first successful kidney transplant or the introduction of the B-52 bomber, two other highlights of that year. Knowledgeable collectors of Lionel trains are aware that profits at the firm were down from 1953 and the years that followed were even worse. But they know, too, that the trains cataloged in 1954 were among the best offered.

If you had shopped for gifts in 1954, you could have brought home some great Lionel sets and played with exciting accessories

and new locomotives. Let's now go back in time almost 60 years, forgetting the bad news about the French defeat in Indochina and all the commotion raised by Senator Joseph McCarthy about Communists infiltrating the federal government, and see why 1954 was the finest of Lionel's golden postwar years.

Power and color for 1954

By the time the holiday shopping season began after Thanksgiving, veteran Lionel salesmen such as Jerry Lamb, Myles Walsh, Hank Siess, and Joe Malcolm had traveled thousands of miles, introducing the new line to department, toy, and appliance stores. As they drove from state to state, they heard radio announcers describe the first mass polio immunization shots and Roger Banister's breaking the 4-minute barrier in the mile.

But more immediate matters concerned Lionel's sales force.

Growing numbers of children were being born – more than 4 million in 1954 – and soldiers were returning from Korea, eager to buy trains for their sons and themselves. Continually challenged by Gilbert's American Flyer S gauge line and the inexpensive trains made by Louis Marx & Co., not to mention manufacturers of HO scale trains, Lionel responded magnificently.

"You want power," Lionel's salesmen must have told their authorized distributors and retailers, "we have more of it this year than ever before. Get a load of our four new steam engines." Numbers 646 and 665 featured a 4-6-4 wheel arrangement, but used different boiler castings and came with different

tenders (nos. 2046W and 6026W, respectively). Also new was no. 2065, another Santa Fe-type Hudson, for the O-27 line.

The 682, the finest Turbine developed by Lionel, was the star of the new steam fleet. It featured an elegant white stripe on the running board plus lubricator linkage. The Turbine came with a no. 2046W-50 eight-wheel tender lettered for the Pennsylvania RR.

Power wasn't all Lionel promised for 1954. "Forget the dull black freight cars from past years," salesmen insisted, "and look at our new red crane car, green log car, and gray and maroon hopper. Even our scale-like 6464 boxcars are better! Remember how plain they looked? We've added a grand total of seven new ones, including dazzling models decorated for the Western Pacific, New York Central, and Missouri Pacific."

Having caught buyers' attention, salesmen did exactly what Lionel's catalog artists did: They brought out the diesel locomotives

Lionel reached unbelievable heights with its electric trains during the production year of 1954.



that represented the cream of 1954. And who wouldn't want the nos. 2321 Lackawanna Train Master, 2356 Southern Ry. F3 A-B-A combination, or 6250 orange-and-blue Seaboard NW2 switcher? For sheer fun, the no. 50 gang car deserved to be on every child's wish list. With so much to offer, a salesman working for Lionel couldn't help but feel confident as he showed off the line for '54.

A last hurrah for Mr. Hanson

The advertising campaign Lionel depended on to promote its roster of trains represented a year's worth of effort from employees on its regular payroll as well as artists working at agencies, demonstrators hired by department stores, and members of public relations firms. Together, they took numerous steps to ensure that children and families throughout the country became familiar with the latest trains from Lionel.

Naturally, Advertising Manager Joseph Hanson and the copywriters and designers working under his supervision put most of their energy into creating a phenomenal full-color consumer catalog of which more than a million copies were printed and distributed. Additionally, they prepared beautiful advertisements for model railroading and toy industry publications, mass-circulation magazines, and the comics of Sunday papers.

The advance catalog assembled early in the year for authorized dealers took on an especially good look in 1954. Indeed, the full-color illustration on the front cover might easily have been reserved for the consumer catalog. Put next to the image commissioned for that document, and it wouldn't be surprising if some people thought it was superior.

But the consumer catalog must be acknowledged as one of Lionel's very finest. Esthetically, it offered page after page of marvelous depictions of electric trains in settings that were both realistic and fantastic. If only we knew the names of the artist or artists responsible for both the black-and-white renderings provided to outside firms and the illustrators employed at those agencies who then inserted the rainbow of vivid colors.

Someone we can honor for the magnificence of the consumer catalog was Joe Hanson, in his final full year directing Lionel's advertising campaigns. Nearly a decade of service had honed his diverse skills and broadened his contacts. This great catalog stood as a final testament to all that Hanson gave to Lionel before he left the firm in 1955 and handed over the reins in advertising to Jacques Zuccaire, already assisting him.

The transition from Hanson to the younger Zuccaire mirrored

Lionel brought out its finest version of the popular Turbine, the no. 682, in 1954 and used it to lead the no. 2217WS "Freight Master" outfit. Three of the cars in this four-car set made their debut in 1954: the nos. 3562-25 AT&SF barrel car, 6356 New York Central stockcar, and 6464-175 Rock Island boxcar. We can envy those people who bought this O gauge train and discovered they had acquired the scarce versions of either the barrel car with red and not blue lettering or the boxcar with black and not blue lettering – or even both!



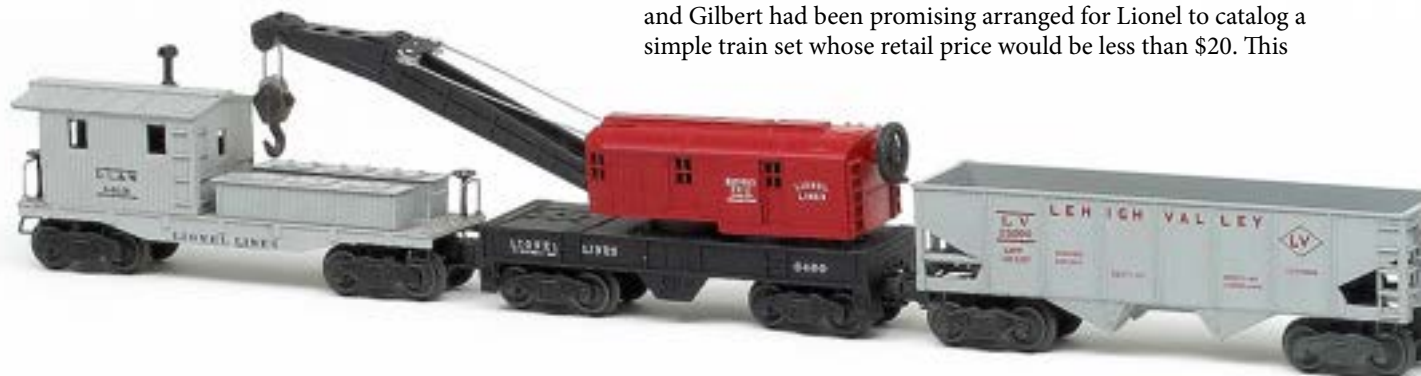
other changes at Lionel. Surely, Lawrence Cowen was assuming tasks and demonstrating leadership formerly done by his elderly father. Alan Ginsburg, serving as executive vice-president in place of the deceased Arthur Raphael, could now influence the entire product line.

Key personnel among the sales teams had also changed. Veteran salesman Sam Belser had moved up to become national sales manager and so was busy handling the multiple jobs Raphael had previously done in that capacity. Jack Caffrey remained in charge of the Chicago sales office, but out west Mack Mostman was now running the San Francisco office, having been hired the previous year to take over after Mike Sweyd died.

Outfits for those on a budget

The consumer catalog pictured a whopping 10 O-27 and 11 O gauge sets, with price points that could meet the budgets of most American households. Familiar locomotives as well as unbelievably strong and colorful new ones pulled the freight and passenger trains ably described. Never, it seemed, had Lionel offered so many sets with so much play value.

Once more, sales executives with an eye or two on what Marx and Gilbert had been promising arranged for Lionel to catalog a simple train set whose retail price would be less than \$20. This



The brand-new no. 6250 Seaboard EMD NW2 diesel switcher turned out to be the motive power for one of Lionel's finest work trains. Outfit no. 1523 came with three new cars: the nos. 6456-25 Lehigh Valley hopper, 6460-25 crane car, and 6419-25 work caboose. Although the no. 6511 pipe car did appear in 1953, this O-27 outfit was the first one to include it.



practice had built steady sales for the company and established its low-end Scout sets in the marketplace, so much so that Lionel brought back the same set cataloged in 1953, the no. 1500 three-car freight train with a no. 1130 on the point and the new no. 1130T tender, a scaled-down version of the no. 2671 lacking a whistle.

"Young engineers will love these two trains," the catalog claimed in promoting a pair of starter sets priced below \$30. Besides the 1500, the bottom of the line contained the no. 1513S, a four-car freight train going for \$29.95. The key piece in this nondescript O-27 outfit was the new no. 6015 Sunoco single-dome tank car, because early examples of this yellow car were painted (created from excess inventory of shells for the no. 6035).

Middle of the O-27 line

See how Lionel jacked up the price \$10? It did the same with the next two O-27 outfits. Spend \$39.95 to \$49.95 and you could put a four- or five-car freight train under the Christmas tree that included such new items as the nos. 6462-25 green gondola, 6460-25 red crane car, or 6419-25 work caboose without a rear coupler.

First in the catalog, with a designated listing of \$39.95, came the no. 1503WS. Familiar? Yes, because Lionel had shown that outfit in 1953. Headed by a no. 2055 small Hudson paired with a no. 6026W whistling tender, the train featured a no. 6462 gondola (shown as the -25 green-painted version in 1954), followed again by nos. 6456 hopper (now maroon), 6465 double-dome tank car, and 6257 non-illuminated SP-type caboose.

Beneath the color rendering of the 1503WS was an attractive illustration of the no. 1515WS, a new five-car freight outfit priced at \$49.95. That set featured a new small Hudson (no. 2065, all but identical to the no. 665 O gauge steam locomotive) with a no. 2046W streamlined whistling tender. The 6462 gondola, 6464-25 Great Northern boxcar, and 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tanker weren't new, but the no. 6456-25 Lehigh Valley gray hopper with maroon markings was. Last came the 6357 illuminated caboose.

A better deal for the same price was the no. 1523 four-car work train known as "The Gandy Dancer." Not since 1950 had Lionel used its NW2 diesel switcher as the motive power for an outfit; the 1523 depended on a new no. 6250 Seaboard model with Magne-Traction, headlights at each end, and a pair of remote-controlled couplers.

The 6250 pulled four models. The no. 6511 pipe car appeared in a set for the first time; the 6460-25 crane car with a red-painted cab was exclusive to this set; the 6456-25 gray hopper was new for 1954; and the 6419-25 work caboose had only one coupler.

Great sets at the O-27 head

Lionel assigned its five top-of-the-line O-27 outfits retail prices ascending from \$59.95 to \$69.50, the latter sum a hefty amount surpassed by only two of the firm's O gauge sets. So O-27 enthusiasts were looking forward to trains loaded with play value.

The big news for fans of passenger trains was the new four-some of silver-painted O-27 streamlined models with elegant red





lettering. Three of those cool newcomers – nos. 2432 *Clifton* Vista-Dome, 2434 *Newark* Pullman coach, and 2436 *Summit* observation – made up the rolling stock in no. 1516WS, led by a new 2065 small Hudson and 2046W tender.

Also retailing for \$59.95 was one of the two new outfits headed by the new no. 2245 F3 *Texas Special* diesel units. In addition to being the first F3 duo having a single motor, those red-and-white engines were the first offered in an A-B combination.

Outfit no. 1517W was a four-car freight train boasting three new cars. In addition to the green 6462-25 gondola, consumers admired the nos. 6464-225 Southern Pacific boxcar (never used in another cataloged set) and 6427 Lionel Lines porthole caboose. The final component was a no. 6561 die-cast metal flatcar with a cable reel.

Interestingly, the advance catalog had shown this set as having a no. 6464-1 Western Pacific boxcar and not the SP model. Also, the porthole caboose had been labeled for the Pennsylvania RR, thereby making it the 6417 from the year before.

One year after releasing the first four entries in the no. 6464 series of near-scale boxcars (the models to the rear on their boxes), Lionel expanded the group with seven newcomers in 1954. Offered in outfits or strictly as separate-sale items were the nos. 6464-100 Western Pacific with yellow feather (front); 6464-125 New York Central Pacemaker and 6464-150 Missouri Pacific (second row); and 6464-175 Rock Island, 6464-200 Pennsylvania RR, 6464-225 Southern Pacific, and 6464-250 Western Pacific with blue feather (third row). All four of the older models returned to the cataloged line in 1954.

For \$65, Lionel offered outfit no. 1519WS, a freight train with five cars and a 2065 small 4-6-4 steamer and 6026W whistling tender. Two of the models featured animation: the nos. 3461-25X green log dump car and 3482 operating milk car and platform. The rest was new to this year, notably the nos. 6462-75 red-painted New York Central gondola, 6356 NYC yellow stockcar, and 6427 Lionel Lines porthole caboose.

Next, listed at \$69.95, came outfit no. 1521WS, which matched a 2065 with a 2046W whistling tender. Packed with this five-car work train were the nos. 3620 searchlight car (new for 1954), 6561 cable reel car, 6460 black crane car, and 6419-25 work caboose. Key to this set was the new no. 3562 black-painted operating barrel car.

Lionel concluded its O-27 roster with the no. 1520W passenger set, also at \$69.50. This three-car train, which Lionel named the *Texas Special*, came with the 2245 F3 combination, along with three of the four new no. 2400-series silver streamlined cars with red lettering: the nos. 2432 *Clifton* Vista-Dome, 2435 *Elizabeth* Pullman coach, and 2436 *Summit* observation. The 2435 has the reputation of being rather difficult to locate.

Excellent low-end O gauge sets

As nice as the O-27 sets were, kids poring through a Lionel wishbook didn't stop with them. They spent lots of time checking out the O gauge outfits, believing that Lionel saved the best of its 1954 product line for further back in the book.



Absolutely stunning is the best way to describe Lionel's classic no. 1520W *Texas Special* passenger set from 1954. This high-end outfit started with the beautiful new no. 2245 F3 A-B combination that came with a single-motored lead unit. The three O-27 streamliners also made their debut in that year, and hobbyists prize the silver-painted cars with red heat-stamped lettering, especially the hard-to-locate no. 2534 *Elizabeth* Pullman coach.



As with the O-27 offerings, things started small, with two worthwhile outfits priced at less than \$50.

Outfit no. 2201WS came with a no. 665 small Hudson equipped with Magne-Traction, an operating whistle, and a smoke mechanism. The steamer was new, but everything else in this \$39.95 set represented carryover inventory from the set with the same number cataloged in 1953: nos. 6462 gondola, 6464-50 boxcar, 6465 tank car, and 6357 caboose.

The same number of freight cars went into set no. 2217WS, yet it retailed for \$10 more. Why? Start with the no. 682 Turbine cataloged with it. That new locomotive had Magne-Traction, smoke, and a whistle plus a no. 2046WX Pennsylvania RR tender. New as well were the nos. 6356 NYC stockcar, 6464-175 Rock Island silver boxcar, and 6417 Pennsy port-hole caboose. Don't forget the no. 3562-25 gray-painted operating barrel car.

The luckiest owners of this otherwise basic outfit found their operating barrel car had been given red (not blue) lettering, while their boxcar had black (not blue) lettering. Incidentally, the advance catalog specified the 6464-1 WP car and not the Rock Island.

Jump to \$59.95 to discover the next pair of outfits. Children had to select between the new no. 2219W five-car freight led by a no. 2321 Lackawanna Train Master. Only the nos. 6456-25 and 6462-25 (distinguished by their paints) set this set apart from its peers.

The second O gauge set retailing at slightly less than \$60 was the no. 2221WS, a five-car freight nicknamed "The Diamond Express." The no. 646 steam engine (another small Hudson) fit into the line quite well and easily pulled the five cars in this set, including the new nos. 3620 searchlight car, 6456-25 hopper and 6417-25 porthole caboose (with a coupler at each end). Returning to the line were the set's nos. 3469 operating dump car and 6468 Baltimore & Ohio double-door automobile boxcar.

The Big Haul had it all!

Lionel did something interesting and yet a bit odd for its next O gauge outfit. The no. 2222WS three-car passenger set, which was priced at \$65, combined a 646 small Hudson and 2046W whistling tender (symbols of railroading's past) with a trio of the extruded aluminum streamlined passenger cars (symbols of the future). The no. 2530 baggage car made its debut in 1954; some examples of this set had the scarce model with large doors.

More sensible was creating a dynamic and bold outfit with new items and a cool diesel on the point. That was Lionel's recipe for the no. 2223W, called "The Big Haul" and cataloged for \$67.50. Little did anyone at the firm realize this five-car freight could become the most valuable of all the sets offered in 1954 because it had scarce models.

Pulling the Big Haul was the 2321 Lackawanna Fairbanks-Morse Train Master. If it's the scarce version with a maroon roof, so much the better. As important for collectors is which Western Pacific boxcar came with the set. The most valuable variations have the orange car with a blue feather (no. 6464-250). The rarest of the 29 boxcars in the 6464 series cataloged between 1953 and 1969, it was included in this outfit only. Typically, however, Lionel substituted a no. 6464-100, the common silver car with yellow feather.

Rounding out the 2223W were four new freight cars. Two of them were operating models that added substantial play value: nos. 3461-25X green log dump car and 3482 operating milk car. By the way, some examples of this set came with the moderately scarce milk car lettered with "3472" and "3482," a mistake Lionel quickly corrected.

The New York Central gondola was a red-painted 6462-100, an overlooked and desirable variation of this common car. Last came a no. 6417-50 Lehigh Valley caboose, a neat model found in this set only. Its gray paint scheme matched the locomotive's.

Finishing the upper level

A gem lay hidden amid the diesel sets. The no. 2225WS, known as "The Trouble Shooter," was the top steam outfit. It featured a no. 736 Berkshire and five pieces of rolling stock, including two with remote control. Kids enjoyed the 3461-25X log dump car and 3562-25 gray barrel car (occasionally, a 3562-1 in black showed up instead).

This outstanding work train, listed at \$69.50, finished with a 3620 searchlight car and a 6460 crane car. At the tail there came the simple yet solid 6419 work caboose.

The identical amount of money was enough to bring home

Every year assumes historical importance, but 1954 seems a bit more significant.



one of the two identical diesel freight sets Lionel developed with either a no. 2353 Santa Fe F3 A-A combination or a no. 2354 New York Central duo included. Outfit nos. 2227W and 2229W boasted five quality cars: nos. 3562-25 gray barrel car, 6356 stock car, 6456 hopper, 6468 double-door boxcar, with a 6417-25 port-hole caboose bringing up the rear.

Owners of these sets discovered their Lehigh Valley hopper was the -75 variation, which came painted glossy red and had yellow lettering. More fortunate were those who found they had the -50 version, a scarce red model heat-stamped with white markings.

Spending \$10 more got you the no. 2231W "Great Southern Freight." That five-car outfit featured the brand-new A-B-A combination of no. 2356 F3 units decorated for the Southern Ry. The cars paled in comparison, with only the 3482 milk car operating. None of the three other freight models (6415 tank car, 6511 pipe car, and 6561 cable reel car was new). A 6417-25 Lionel Lines porthole caboose completed this long train.

Finally, Lionel proudly highlighted its no. 2234W "Emperor Chief," an impressive passenger set selling for \$89.50. It consisted of 2353 Santa Fe F3 A-A units and four streamlined cars: a baggage car, a Pullman coach (2533 *Silver Cloud*), a Vista-Dome, and an observation car.

Outstanding separate-sale items

If Lionel had just stopped with outfits, hobbyists would have proclaimed 1954 a fantastic year. But a number of excellent locomotives, cars, and more were available strictly for separate sale. Think of how any of these models could have enriched a set.

Not one of the three good-looking Alco diesels in the catalog led an outfit. The 2245 *Texas Special* F3s had taken their place. Yet the nos. 2031 Rock Island, 2032 Erie, and 2033 Union Pacific twin A units (all priced at \$39.95, the same as the *Texas Special*

pair) were outstanding locomotives. So were the often-forgotten NW2 switchers that returned (nos. 623 Santa Fe and 624 Chesapeake & Ohio, priced at \$25 for another year).

New rolling stock not used in outfits was plentiful. Among the excellent freight cars were the first near-scale hopper (no. 6446 Norfolk & Western cement hopper) and refrigerator car (no. 6672 Santa Fe). Those were great-looking ways to lengthen a train!

Several 6464 boxcars entered the line yet were not placed in any cataloged outfits. The beauties under consideration were the nos. -125 New York Central Pacemaker, -150 Missouri Pacific, and -200 Pennsylvania RR, not to mention the 3484-25 operating Santa Fe boxcar. Back yet not in a set were the 6464-1 Western Pacific and -75 Rock Island boxcars.

New ground with accessories

Lionel's engineering and sales staffs didn't neglect accessories. Page 36 of the consumer catalog described and illustrated some of the members of the class of '54.

The most imaginative new item among traditional accessories was the no. 282 gantry crane, an updated version of the 182 magnet crane (dropped from the line after 1949). The new loader of scrap metal rotated and moved along two parallel rails.

Two other new accessories, the nos. 140 banjo signal and 494 rotary beacon (an updated version of the no. 394 cataloged between 1949 and 1953), relied on the Vibrotor designed by Frank Pettit, Lionel's ingenious development engineer, to provide smooth and realistic operation.

Pettit also deserved credit for another novel item classified as an accessory. The no. 50 section gang car broke ground for Lionel and would, as collectors know, launch an innovative group of what they call "motorized units." These self-propelled models, based on actual railroad equipment, sped along electrified lines.



Youngsters who were looking for an O gauge freight train certain to provide hours of enjoyment probably quit paging through the consumer catalog when they caught a glimpse of outfit no. 2221WS. This five-car freight set depended on the new no. 646 Hudson steam locomotive. The rolling stock in that set included two operating models (the nos. 3469 ore dump car and 3620 searchlight car), along with the new nos. 6456-25 hopper and 6417-25 porthole caboose.



A number of exciting models upgraded the roster of freight cars, including the nos. 3562 barrel car (the scarce variation with a yellow-painted trough is shown), 6446 cement hopper (both the black and gray versions), 6456-25 gray hopper with maroon lettering, 6462-25 green gondola with white lettering, and 6672 Santa Fe refrigerator car.

UNIQUE AND RARE ITEMS OF 1954

Collectors connect with 1954 a few models they laud as scarce (or even rare) and unique. They don't include items of which fewer than five examples exist. Instead, hobbyists have in mind variations caused by chance, limited-production items or test runs, or regular production runs of small quantities done early or late in the year.

Variations caused by chance are 6464-series boxcars with an atypical body shell. A few -1 Western Pacific and -50 Minneapolis & St. Louis cars have been reported with type II body

shells, generally used on later cars from 1954. Conversely, a few of the latter (-100 Western Pacific cars with blue or yellow feathers; -200 Pennsylvania RR, and -225 Southern Pacific) have been observed with type I shells.

Next are limited-production items or test runs with probably fewer than 100 examples. These include the scarce version of the 50 gang car, 6456-50 hopper with glossy red paint and white lettering, 3562-25 gray barrel car with red lettering, and 6464-175 Rock Island boxcar with black lettering.

Also on this short list of items are the 3484-25 Santa Fe operating boxcar with black lettering and 6417-50 Lehigh Valley Tuscan Red caboose.

There also are variations that suggest limited production or test runs of probably fewer than 250 examples. The 2530 baggage car with large doors and 3562-1 black barrel car with a yellow trough fit this profile. Similar items are the 2065 locomotive and 6356 stockcar with rubber-stamped lettering as well as the 3482 operating milk car numbered "3472."



Take a look at five of the unusual models associated with Lionel's production for 1954: the nos. 50 section gang car with gray bumpers, a rotating blue figure, and fixed olive green figures; 6456-50 glossy red hopper with white lettering; 3484-25 Santa Fe operating boxcar with black lettering; 2530 Lionel Lines Railway Express Agency baggage car with large doors, and 6417-50 Lehigh Valley porthole caboose painted Tuscan Red.



Diesel lovers delighted in seeing the no. 2356 Southern Ry. A-B-A combination. It led one O gauge outfit, the no. 2231W five-car "Great Southern Freight" set. In addition, Lionel sold the A-A duo for \$47.50; another \$9.95 got the matching no. 2356C B unit.



Father and son seemed equally as dazzled by the line of trains Lionel cataloged in 1954.

The 50 gang car usually came equipped with two blue bumpers, two blue fixed figures, one green swiveling man, and a support casting on the metal frame. When that motorized unit struck a bumper or a train, its extended bumper was pushed inward and so caused the gang car to reverse direction. The operation was brilliant and entertaining.

Kids never grew tired watching the 50 in action, and at \$7.95 it made a smart and enjoyable addition to any roster. Incidentally, a scarce variation of the gang car boasted gray bumpers and had fixed men who were green and a swiveling figure that was blue.

(To learn about the development of the gang car, read Roger Carp's latest book, *101 Classic Toy Trains: Best of the Postwar Years*, item no. 64100, still available from Kalmbach Publishing Co.)

Looking ahead to a bright future

New F3s and accessories, powerful steam engines, an innovative motorized unit, and loads of colorful freight cars – all of these

additions to the Lionel line confirm that 1954 was a great year. Kids knew it back then, and collectors and operators agree today.

Even holders of stock in the corporation couldn't have complained too much. Admittedly, net income at Lionel was down from the previous fiscal year, but investors received the same annual dividend of \$1.25 per share as they had been awarded in 1952 and 1953. As important to remember, net working capital grew by almost \$500,000.

With more children being born in the United States and per capita income increasing, Lionel had good reason to feel confident about the future. Engineers were putting together a solid and diverse line of trains for 1955, one the advertising and sales departments thought would have wide appeal. Joshua Cowen, founder of the company, and his son and their associates looked ahead with optimism. They had no reason at all to doubt that Lionel trains would continue to be a part of American life for years to come.

Final tribute to an unsung hero

JOSEPH HANSON DEVELOPED THE CLASSIC NO. 310 BILLBOARD SETS

The five-year span that began with Lionel celebrating its golden anniversary in 1950 concluded with a profitable and productive year. Many toy train enthusiasts consider 1954 the high point of the firm's postwar history, basing their view on the range and quality of sets cataloged, locomotives and cars produced, and operating accessories available.

Yet there is another reason for noting what Lionel did in 1954. That year turned out to be the swan song for Joseph Hanson, the innovative advertising manager. He left the company just a few months into 1955, never to return. Before his departure, Hanson completed work on what might be judged his most enduring and least credited achievement, the annual no. 310 billboard set.

Promoting Lionel in diverse ways

Hanson had been employed by Lionel during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and he had done much to publicize its Standard and O gauge trains. Credit for launching *The Lionel Magazine* in 1930 belonged to Hanson. The value of a publication intended to promote model railroading in general and Lionel trains in particular seemed obvious to him. He pushed Joshua Lionel Cowen to allot the resources necessary to make the magazine a success.

Leaving Lionel during the Great Depression, Hanson returned in 1945, eager to rebuild the company's fortunes. He collaborated with Lionel's art director, L. Meinrad Mayer, in developing catalogs printed in the millions to win sales. Striking magazine advertisements and promotional materials also represented Hanson's best efforts, as did the appearances Lionel trains made in motion pictures and television programs and the use charitable organizations made of those electric trains in fund-raising campaigns.

Hanson, who had been instrumental in creating the miniature billboards Lionel used as a promotional offer in 1932-33, again pressed their value in 1949. He negotiated with Standard Outdoor Advertising Inc., a trade organization representing firms erecting billboards, to produce versions for Lionel. The deal paid dividends in 1949, when Lionel made available as only a mail-in offer a sheet of eight billboards, each with the trade association's name.

In 1950, Lionel started cataloging sheets of eight billboards with five green plastic frames inside an orange-and-blue box labeled as the no. 310 set. The idea was simple: separate the billboards along their perforations and insert one into a frame. Having more signs enabled kids to substitute them on their layouts or even buy a second 310 set in order to acquire additional frames.

A range of consumer goods

Advertising consumer goods on trains or signs was hardly novel for Lionel. Cowen had been benefiting financially since the 1930s from business involving Curtiss Candy (maker of Baby Ruth candy bars) and Sun Oil Co.



Joe Hanson (to the left of his assistant, Banning Repplier, in the late 1940s) supervised the publication of Lionel's advance and consumer catalogs, in addition to myriad other duties. He saw the financial advantages of offering miniature billboards and created the no. 310 sets.



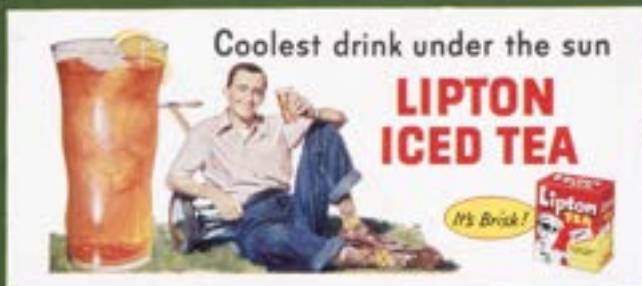
Lionel mentioned the 310 billboard sets with other accessories at the back of its catalogs. The neat illustration accompanying the description in 1954 didn't match any of the eight signs advertising consumer goods in the set Joe Hanson developed for that year.

Besides putting the names of products made by those firms on boxcars and tank cars, Lionel had used them on metal signs attached to the fencing in its no. 156 station platform (cataloged from 1939 to '42 and 1946 to '49). Other items advertised there included Remington typewriters, Fleer bubble gum, and Rival dog food.

Many more mainstream consumer goods appeared on the billboards in 310 sets. Rather than toys or other products appealing to kids, the miniature signs featured Heinz foods and Plymouth automobiles, Wrigley's chewing gum and DuPont anti-freeze. In 1954, Lipton tea, Fram oil filters, Breck shampoos, and New Departure bicycle brakes were among the manufactured items shown.

Neither the products nor the signs were juvenile. Realism was critical, and modelers of all ages appreciated being able to spend just a dollar to upgrade their layouts with realistic billboards.

Hanson devoted part of each year to hammering out an agreement with Standard Outdoor Advertising. As a result, kids checking out the accessories at the back of each consumer catalog in the first half of the 1950s found a description of the 310 set, even if the billboard shown wasn't part of the actual set. Hanson completed that assignment early in 1955 before leaving the firm, never knowing his successor would adopt a different approach.



Standard



Standard



Standard



Standard



Standard



Standard



Standard



Standard

A colorful if overlooked part of Lionel's roster of accessories during the postwar golden years was the no. 310 billboard set. A sheet of eight signs came with five green plastic frames. Products advertised on the sheet released in 1954 ranged from tea to gasoline, shampoo to oil filters. Credit for developing the concept and working with Standard Outdoor Advertising Inc. on the sets belonged to Joseph E. Hanson, the advertising manager at Lionel between 1945 and '55.



The no. 2321 Lackawanna Fairbanks-Morse Train Master, the first road diesel in Lionel's postwar line, dominated the front cover of the advance catalog for 1954. That big locomotive led two O gauge freight outfits, in addition to being offered for separate sale.

Enter the Train Master

THIS ELEGANT BEHEMOTH DEBUTED IN TWO VARIED SETS IN 1954

Among the reasons many Lionel enthusiasts speak of 1954 as the peak of postwar excellence was that the O gauge product line diversified with the arrival of what might be described as the company's first "big bad road diesel." A solid roster of locomotives packed with big steamers and colorful diesels would at last gain an attractive and powerful replica of one of the long, boxy steeds hitting the rails.

Lionel's engineering and sales leaders knew they had a winner with the no. 2321 Lackawanna Train Master, something sure to delight hobbyists. Their challenge was how to present what the consumer catalog lauded as "The New Fairbanks-Morse Power Giant." Besides offering that 16½-inch-long diesel for separate sale at \$43.50, Lionel packaged it in a pair of O gauge outfits in 1954. Those sets, like the 2321, merit attention in any assessment of Lionel's postwar heyday.

Gilbert strikes first!

Lionel modelers hearing about the firm's first road diesel, might have said, "It's about time!" During Lionel's golden anniversary in 1950, they had watched as the A.C. Gilbert Co. broke the barrier with the S gauge no. 370, an Electro-Motive Division GP7 in silver with yellow and blue details, and marked for American Flyer Lines.

Why Gilbert's locomotive roster gained a hard-working yet attractive model of the latest road diesel four years before one entered Lionelville still can't be determined. Both toy train manufacturers were pushing aggressively for bigger shares of the market in 1950 and so searched for an edge over their competitors.

Therefore, decision makers at Lionel must have been pleased in 1950 to add an Alco diesel to the two EMD units already cataloged. Trying to broaden the O-27 roster with its first diesel (the no. 2023 Union Pacific Alco FA unit) might logically have been their priority rather than pursuing any sort of road diesel.



The Delaware, Lackawanna & Western RR turned out to have been one of three railroad names Lionel considered for its new Train Master in 1954. Even after releasing the 16½-inch-long no. 2321, production supervisors made changes. To be specific, they saved time and money by painting the roof gray (front) rather than continuing to mask the plastic shell by hand and spraying it maroon (back).

Background of the Train Master

Whatever the scenario, key people at Lionel were left grumbling that Gilbert, like American Model Toys with its streamlined passenger cars and Colber with certain accessories, had left the premier toy train producer in the shadows. The only solution to that unpleasant situation was for Lionel to innovate and win!

But which full-size road diesel should Lionel's leaders decide to model in O gauge? Something else from General Motors would have made sense, and in 1953 a magazine advertisement picturing Development Engineer Frank Pettit inside his office did show a preliminary model of what looked like an EMD SD9.

Yet that diesel never entered discussions for mass-production at Lionel. Instead, the toy maker took its cue from a massive 2,400-horsepower, six-axle hood unit Fairbanks-Morse began shopping in 1953. That powerhouse, designed for freight and passenger service, carried the impressive title of "Train Master."

Not much else about the new H-24-66 ended up being impressive for the chiefs at Fairbanks-Morse. They learned to their dismay that the boxy appearance of the H-24-66 Train Master and its mammoth engine, though capable of pulling long strings of cars, left most American and Canadian railroads indifferent.

Sales of the Train Master proved disappointing for F-M. Still, before that became evident Lionel's executives made it their choice.

Announcing of a powerful diesel

The 2321 Lackawanna Train Master deserves to be praised as one of the landmark O gauge locomotives of the postwar era. Let's call this 12-wheel model a masterpiece of engineering – an Olympian god with the elegance of a debutante.

Peeking under the plastic body shell of that behemoth revealed two worm-drive motors equipped with Magne-Traction and a three-position reversing unit. Consequently, the Train Master could, or so its instruction sheet claimed, pull as many as "24 average-sized freight cars." Quite a distinction if it were accurate!

Other features included an operating light at each end and an electronic horn. The six-wheel passenger trucks had "delicately molded springs and hand brake connections." Unfortunately, the almost 17 inches of the Train Master's length, not to mention its low undercarriage, prevented it from operating on O-27 track.

F-M looks fantastic, too

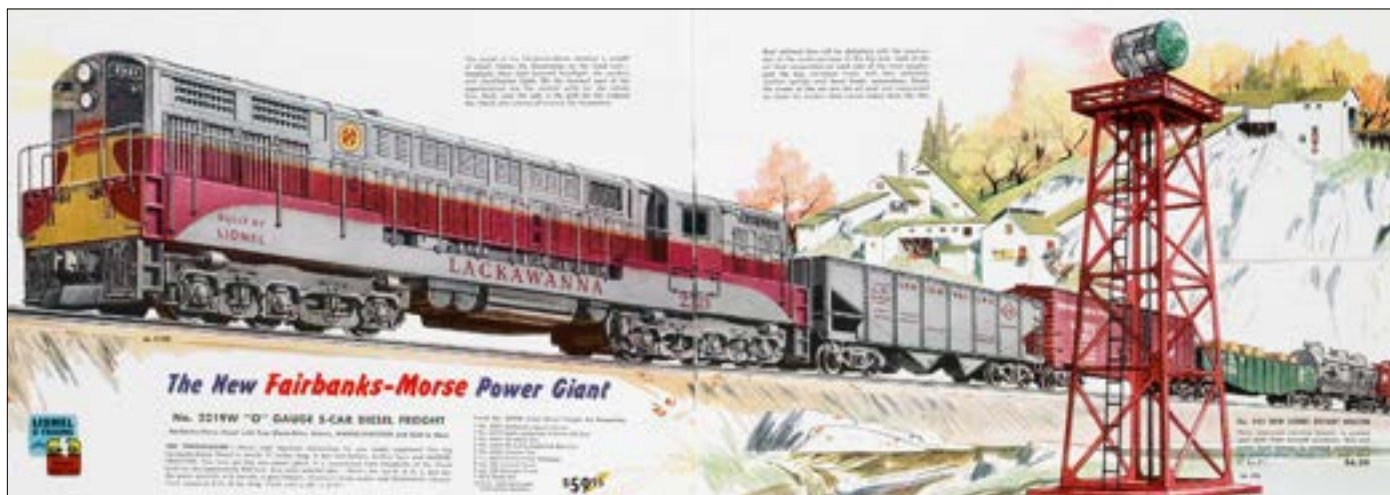
Where Lionel's 2321 earned its stripes related to its appearance. That Charles Atlas of three rails displayed the graceful and handsome façade of a Fred Astaire. The O scale dimensions helped. So did the shiny wire handrails that wrapped around the shell and the ornamental horn on each side. Those details countered the heft of the body, so the Train Master didn't seem muscle-bound.

Best of all were the colors of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western RR unit – gray, maroon, and yellow. Paint samples suggested Lionel debated whether to go with a more elaborate Lackawanna scheme; decorate the Train Master for the Southern Pacific in black, orange, and silver; or paint it dark green with yellow high-lights for the Reading Lines (all of which used Train Masters).

Disappointing responses to the Southern Pacific and the Reading Train Masters at national and regional toy fairs ended the discussion. Lionel opted for a scheme that came close to the one used by the Lackawanna. Other elements – rubber-stamped yellow stripes and maroon lettering plus decaled F-M medallions on the sides and railroad heralds on each end – enhanced the 2321.

Employees at the factory having to mask by hand the early maroon-painted body shells slowed the process and made keeping gray spray off the roof difficult. Production supervisors there concluded the decoration process would be easier and less costly in terms of time and money if they painted the roof gray. Not for the last time did esthetics take a backseat to efficiency and expense.

Even so, the first of Lionel's road diesels exuded power and heft. It looked confident, bold, and strong – just the way the corporation was feeling at the time.



The two-page color rendering of the no. 2219W Thunderbird five-car freight set stood out for its realism and drama. The Train Master fairly bursts off the left-hand page, and the cars captured interest with their muted colors and fine detailing.

Two varied sets

The Train Master exemplified the commitment to merging toy-like elements with scale realism. No other O gauge locomotive, not even the F3s, raised the Lionel line to such greatness in the middle of the postwar era.

Given the 2321's blend of realism and fancy, the mix of solid performance with eye-pleasing beauty, executives participating in the creation of outfits needed to use it to financial advantage in 1954. They should, in short, pack the road diesel with freight cars known to run as smoothly and provide as much visual appeal.

One of the O gauge outfits led by a Train Master in 1954 met every criterion a kid in the 1950s and a collector half a century later might have for his Lackawanna Train Master. The other freight set proved to be far more elementary, with only pockets of beauty and traces of usefulness amid its cars.

Ready for the Thunderbird

Children grabbing a copy of the consumer catalog didn't have to wait to discover the Train Master. The nose of a preproduction model greeted them from the front cover. Readers saw more of the new road diesel once they opened the catalog and studied the illustration of four big-time engines waiting on page 2.

Naturally, the massive 2321 was absent among the images of O-27 outfits. Not until folks hit the O gauge section were they reunited with the Train Master. But what a view they got on pages 18 and 19. They gazed at a realistic image of a freight train rolling by a hillside mine of some type. This full-color rendering ably introduced outfit no. 2219W, a five-car freight train with a retail price of \$59.95.

In 1954, Lionel resumed the practice of giving a name to each of its outfits. Marketers had seldom done this since the 1930s, when such unforgettable monikers as Pennsylvania Limited, Red Comet, Transcontinental Limited, and Blue Streak had made its passenger trains seem even grander.

The consumer catalog issued in 1954 wowed readers with O-27 and O gauge sets given such fanciful names as Great Southern Freight, Green Ball Express, Skylark, Gandy Dancer, and Golden West Special. The Train Master freight outfit depicted on pages 18 and 19 went by the title of Thunderbird.

Impressive name for this new set. But where did this Train Master outfit stack up amid the nine other O gauge freight outfits

in 1954? Unfortunately, not too high. Based on its retail price and the location of its description in the catalog, the 2219W had not earned "top-of-the-line" status. Only two O gauge sets sold for less than its \$59.95 in 1954; five O-27 outfits were priced the same or higher.

Five run-of-the-mill cars

The contents of the Thunderbird corroborated other evidence that it was a low-end outfit. Every other O gauge freight set in 1954 came with as many cars. The only exceptions were the low-priced nos. 2201WS and 2217WS, four-car steam trains at \$10 and \$20, respectively, below the 2219W. Also, the 2201WS Fireball Express was the only other O gauge freight set to lack an operating car.

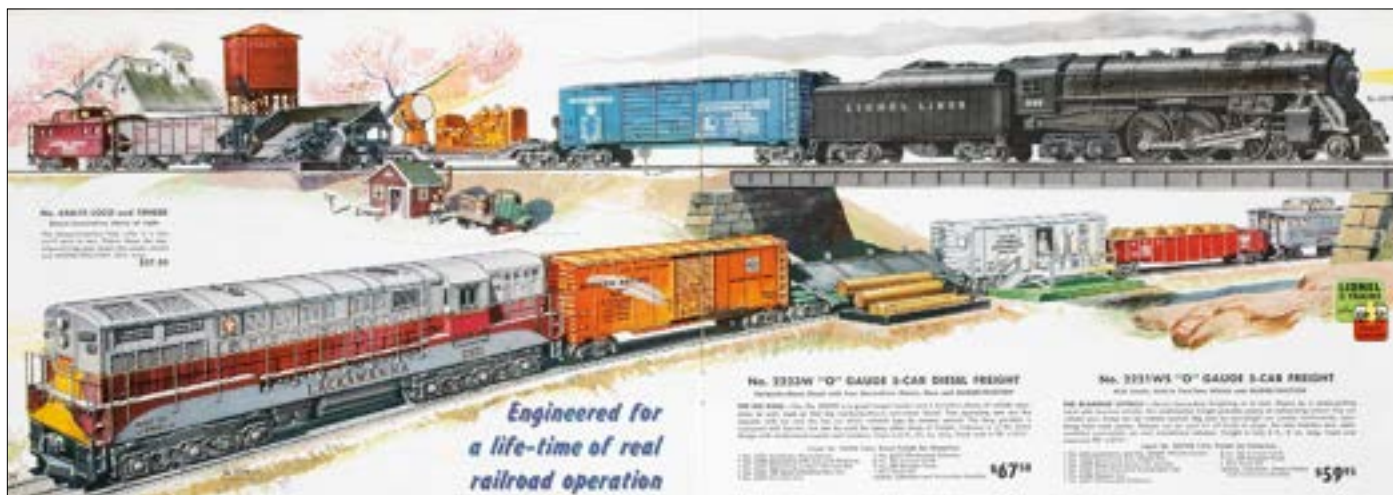
The 2219W featured four elementary cars – boxcar, gondola carrying wood barrels, open hopper, and triple-dome tank car – plus a porthole caboose. Not one of them could be considered scarce, and desirable variations weren't linked with this outfit. All the freight cars, except for the hopper, were near-scale models from the upper echelon of Lionel's roster. Three of the models were carryovers from 1953.

- 6456-25 Lehigh Valley hopper (new for 1954). Its gray paint scheme with maroon heat-stamped graphics complemented the colors adorning the Train Master. Lionel cataloged it for another year; no variations have been reported.

- 6464-50 Minneapolis & St. Louis boxcar (new for 1953). That Tuscan-painted car with white heat-stamped lettering was cataloged through 1956. A rare version of the Minneapolis & St. Louis car has been documented that used a Type IIa body shell and not the usual Type I. Otherwise, the 6464-50 was a common car.

- 6462-25 New York Central gondola with six wood barrels (new for 1954). Its green paint scheme stands out, but in other respects this car hardly differs in characteristics or value from the red gondola in the no. 2223W Big Haul, the other Train Master set for 1954. Lionel cataloged the 6462-25 all the way through 1957.

- 6415 Sunoco triple-dome tank car (new for 1953). A silver-painted car with rubber-stamped lettering and heralds, handrails, ladders, brake stand, bar-end trucks, and operating couplers, it was cataloged through 1955 and from 1964 to 1966 and once more in 1969. The lettering, which could vary from black to blue, underwent slight changes over the production history of the car.



The no. 2223W Big Haul pulled five cars, including two operating models: nos. 3461-25X lumber car and 3482 automatic milk car. The no. 6464-100 Western Pacific boxcar could be the silver variation with a yellow feather or the scarce orange one with a blue feather.

All the same, those differences did not affect the tank car's value, which was never substantial.

- 6417 Pennsylvania RR N5c illuminated porthole caboose (new in 1953). The Tuscan-painted model with white heat-stamped graphics ran through 1957. Original examples of the Thunderbird always included the common version of this model, which had "New York Zone" centered on the side under the number.

The eye-catching Big Haul

Turning just one page of the consumer catalog brought a Lionel enthusiast face to face with the 2223W, the second set from 1954 given a Train Master as its motive power. That five-car freight outfit was referred to as the Big Haul and should be esteemed as one of the prizes of that year, if not the postwar era. The executives who created the classic 2223W demonstrated true sales acumen.

The Big Haul promised plenty of play value, thanks to the inclusion of two of Lionel's best operating cars of the time. Also placed in each set box were a near-scale boxcar as well as a version of the familiar gondola. A different porthole caboose brought up the rear of this memorable outfit, which retailed for \$67.50.

- 6464-100 Western Pacific boxcar (new in 1954). Two versions of the near-scale boxcar have been found with original examples of the 2223W. One featured a silver-painted body with yellow rubber-stamped feather and black rubber-stamped lettering. Lionel cataloged it for another year. The second and scarcer variation featured an orange-painted body with blue rubber-stamped feather and white rubber-stamped lettering. Lionel did not offer it after 1954.

- 3461-25X operating lumber car (new in 1954). That green-painted model with white heat-stamped lettering on a blackened tilting platform came with stained brown logs and a plastic bin. Lionel cataloged it for one more year.

- 3482 automatic milk car (new for 1954). The third and final version of the 9¼-inch-long operating model had an unpainted white plastic body, along with black heat-stamped graphics. The frame had steps at the four corners. The 3482 came with six magnetic milk cans and a white-and-green painted unloading platform. Lionel cataloged the car through 1955. Some examples of

the 2223W had the scarce variation with "3482" on the left and "RT3472" on the right.

- 6462-125 New York Central gondola with six barrels (new in 1954). That unpainted version with a red plastic body was in the line through 1957.

- 6417-50 Lehigh Valley N5c porthole caboose (new for 1954). Lionel painted the N5c model gray with maroon heat-stamped markings to match the look of the 2321. Lionel cataloged this illuminated model for one year only.

Flying close to the ground

The decision makers in charge of assembling the freight cars for Lionel's outfits hit a home run with the Big Haul. Except for the no. 2225WS Trouble Shooter, a work train pulled by a no. 736 Berkshire steam engine and tender and packed with three remote-controlled cars and a crane car, no other O gauge set could claim to provide as much action and fun.

Too bad those executives barely got to second base with the Thunderbird. They didn't go with a single operating car, striving to lower costs by using established models that could only carry "stuff" in their open compartments.

What could Lionel's planners have done? How about substituting a brand-new no. 6356 New York Central near-scale stockcar for the returning M&StL boxcar? The yellow newcomer would have been an improvement in color.

In the same vein, sales executives could easily have swapped a no. 3562 barrel car or at least a no. 6561 flatcar with cable reels for the tank car to provide kids with more to do. Or they might have replaced the 6456-25 hopper with another near-scale model (possibly a no. 6511 flatcar with pipes) so every component had similar proportions.

No, it wouldn't have taken much to raise the quality of the Thunderbird set. All the same, the 2219W, like the 2223W Big Haul, introduced a landmark diesel locomotive to the O gauge world. The Train Master showed again how well Lionel's engineers could develop an outstanding performer for the line and then guarantee that it looked as great as it ran. Maybe that was more important than the cars running behind it.

Lionel's
engineering
and sales
leaders knew
they had a
winner with
the no. 2321.

Stars of the class of '54

NO. 50 SECTION GANG CAR

Lionel changed the direction of the postwar toy train hobby in 1954, when it developed the no. 50 section gang car, the first of its innovative and entertaining series of what hobbyists refer to as “motorized units.” From here on, consumers had another kind of toy train accessory to consider when making their purchases and designers at Lionel had another area in which to apply their imagination and technical skills when creating new items. One more reason 1954 stands out so prominently.

Self-propelled models at Lionel

The notion of a model (not a locomotive) that came equipped with a motor and so could propel itself along a miniature rail system was not unique to the postwar period. After all, the first items made by Joshua Lionel Cowen at the turn of the 20th century had been gondolas that zipped around a loop of track carrying goods to entice consumers to shop at the establishment sponsoring the eye-catching window display.

Later came Standard gauge trolleys in the 1900s, followed in the 1930s by mechanical handcars that featured Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Santa Claus, and the Easter Bunny, among other figures from American popular culture.

Lionel capitalized on the popularity of those inexpensive, pleasing motorized units to expand sales, especially among customers who were not deeply devoted to the toy train hobby, all the while bolstering the company’s finances at a critical juncture.

Of course, Lionel had not been the only toy maker to develop models of trolleys or handcars in the prewar period. Neither was it first with them after the war. In the early 1950s, General Models and Emco made little units that sped around track and on the floor. And Gilbert had its delightful American Flyer no. 740 handcar in 1952 as well as the no. 5300T Miners Work Train it pulled in 1953.

Still, nothing put out by any other firm, large or small, came even close to matching Lionel’s roster of motorized units in terms of variety and function. This niche, crammed with three-rail models, belonged to it from 1954 through 1969.

Ground-breaking no. 50

The archetype of these whimsical motorized units was the section gang car, which Lionel cataloged for a dozen years, starting in 1954. This innovative, ground-breaking model represented one more triumph of the imagination of Frank Pettit, the firm’s development engineer, who had collaborated with Cowen on different handcars during the 1930s and had kept their design and popularity in mind when returning to his research lab after World War II. Chief Engineer Joseph Bonanno also contributed, as he received a patent for the 50 in 1960.

The 4¾-inch-long gang car came equipped with a tough little



motor that helped the model gain momentum as soon as its four wheels hit the energized track. Off it went until it smacked into a bumper, a train, or another obstruction.

A rubber bumper absorbed the force of the impact, which pushed the gang car’s reversing slide assembly toward the middle of the unit. That caused the 50 to reverse direction and flipped around one of the figures. Off the gang car dashed until it dashed into another object, which reversed its direction once again.

Simple activity yet enormously entertaining to young and old observers alike.

Sales potential

The development of this motorized unit and the many that followed broadened the Lionel line in a significant way. Sales executives there, like their counterparts elsewhere, faced a great challenge: What could they offer that would motivate consumers to continue to buy Lionel items after getting a basic train set?

Additional sections of track and switches were obvious answers. So too were extra pieces of rolling stock and more powerful transformers. But the key to success, everyone knew, had always been accessories – the tunnels, signals, stations, freight loaders, street lamps, bridges, and more that enabled a youngster to create a miniature railroad system similar to those seen in everyday life.

The motorized unit took on a new life as yet another secondary purchase. It promised increasing sales for Lionel as hobbyists looked to the gang car and its kin as “must-haves” in order for them to keep developing their three-rail empires.

The 50 was the first of those pioneering models that showed the ingenuity of Lionel’s engineers and gave the sales team a new way to keep the firm thriving. For many hobbyists the gang car epitomized the fun and excitement of toy trains, and they never tired of watching it tear down the track looking for a collision.

A glance at the new locomotives, colorful near-scale rolling stock, and innovative accessories (including the first motorized unit) filling the cataloged line for the year causes many observers to argue that 1954 represents the peak of Lionel's postwar history.

Another area at the company should only bolster that opinion.

There must have been a general sense of optimism and confidence surrounding the firm's corporate headquarters in New York City and its industrial facility in Hillside, N.J. Members of every department at the factory probably felt energized to improve the quality of their work and do what they could to promote the trains.

That mood would have infused the supervisors of the Display Department and the hard-working laborers assigned to them. Joe Donato Jr. and Bill Bonanno could take credit for creating outstanding static and operating displays for 1954, one of which, the no. D-131 layout, beautifully conveyed the excitement of the line.

So much to show off

The challenge when designing a display was fitting in many accessories without giving the trains short shrift or overwhelming onlookers. That problem grew greater in the mid-1950s, when the number of operating cars and accessories increased rapidly.

At the same time Donato and Bonanno sought to come up with new and exciting displays, they realized that the size of the standardized layouts would remain relatively stable. Meaning, that each year Lionel offered to its authorized dealers operating layouts covering anywhere from 24 to 64 square feet. To be specific, layouts built to be 4 x 6, 4 x 8, 5 x 9, 6 x 8, and 8 x 8 feet have been documented, not to mention special assignments that might be bigger.

Yet those two supervisors set down on paper some magnificent displays and then assisted the troops of young men building them under watchful eyes. Think of the no. D-27 (the so-called Disappearing Layout) from 1950 or the no. D-63 with skyscrapers and an elevated highway with moving traffic from 1952.

The situation got only better in 1953 and '54, and Lionel put a few gems in the compact display catalog it mailed to its dealers

during those critical years. An absolute jewel was the D-131. That 5 x 9-foot operating layout packed with track and a siding for operating cars and accessories was available in 1954.

Take a good look

Never forget that the purpose of each display layout was to assist a dealer in boosting sales. The best method for doing so was to show as many operating items as possible going through their paces. The D-131 therefore consisted of two concentric loops of O gauge track on its main level and a third oval slightly elevated and partially concealed by a mountain featuring four tunnel portals.

The outer main line showcased the largest and longest of the new train sets. Keep in mind that outfits were not included with the display layouts. Retailers had to provide the trains they ran from current stock. Many store owners undoubtedly elected to run the no. 2223W Big Haul shown here, with its no. 2321 Lackawanna Train Master and five-car freight consist. The no. 2221WS Diamond Express, a five-car steam set, dominates the inner main.

Several accessories came wired to the D-131. Sharp-eyed readers noticed the most prominent items date from 1953, specifically, the nos. 193 industrial water tower and 497 coaling station.

Because designers had to create displays early in the production year, before Lionel made final decisions about what to catalog, it was unusual to include any new accessories. One exception on the D-131 was the updated rotating beacon (no. 494), new in 1954.

Nearby you can spot assorted signals, along with favorites like the nos. 145 automatic gateman, 445 operating switch tower, and 450 signal bridge. Demonstrating the operating cattle car and milk car would have been easy with their metal platforms installed on the siding with a no. 260 illuminated bumper.

Quite a railroad world in less than 50 square feet. The vivid colors used for the mountain and the bright shade of green daubed on the frame caught everyone's attention. Less prominent were the dyed sawdust sprinkled on, the clumps of lichen used as bushes, and the strip left bare for a street. Yet for \$175, the D-131 delighted customers of a store in Chicago where it once stood.

NO. D-131 DISPLAY LAYOUT



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Still in the papers in 1954

MAINTAINING A PRESENCE IN THE SUNDAY COMICS

When it came to conveying to children the thrills and fun of Lionel trains, Joshua Lionel Cowen had long believed that, in addition to annual color catalogs and animated store displays, the comics sections of metropolitan newspapers were ideal.

Since the early 1920s, Lionel had maintained a presence in Sunday papers, with holiday season advertisements such as the one on the previous page.

What was different about the ad printed in newspapers dated November 21, 1954, was that it more closely resembled a comic strip than had its predecessors. Earlier advertisements developed under the guidance of Joe Hanson and his department had consisted of a single large illustration, with accompanying text praising Lionel trains and accessories for bringing families together and helping a boy grow up.

For 1954, however, the creator of that ad adopted a novel approach. He indicated that boys coming of age at the time when families uprooted themselves frequently would face feelings of loneliness. How could kids treated as outsiders make new friends?

The answer – sure to please children and assuage the guilt felt by their parents – was to buy a Lionel electric train. That plaything would solve the problem. Tightening bonds between fathers and sons or instilling adult values in boys – the primary messages in older ads – no longer mattered. Life in America was changing and so must the purpose of Lionel's products if the company hoped to enjoy its postwar heyday.

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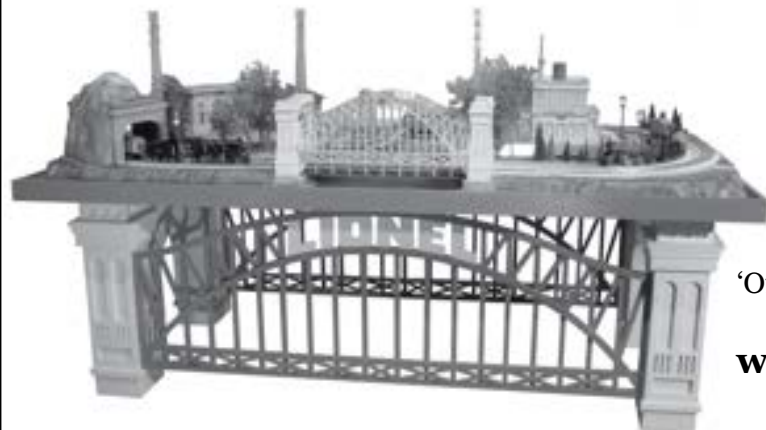
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