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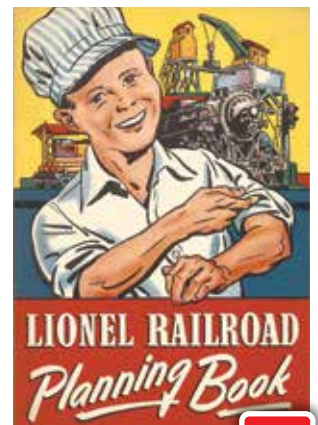
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1940

COLORFUL & FANCIFUL CARS STILL RODE THE LIONEL RAILS

◆ Toys readily coexisted with realistic models in 1940

Examining the trains from 1940 often leads to the conclusion that a quest for realism governed everything Lionel did for that pivotal year. But an investigation of the outfits available and the assortment of rolling stock listed in the catalog reveals a more balanced view. Much of the line consisted of beautifully painted models whose bold and brilliant hues, compact bodies, and shiny details announced unashamedly they were toys.

It's time to shift attention from the classics – the Hudson and the four new O scale

replicas of freight cars – to the wonderfully colorful and toy-like boxcars, gondolas, tankers, and more carrying on long-standing traditions at Lionel. Let's concentrate on the No. 2650 series of models. They were used to fill many of the O gauge freight sets cataloged in 1940, as well as being offered for separate sale at prices that could fit most families' budgets.

Six lines in 1940

Archer St. John and his associates in Lionel's advertising department devoted about two-

thirds of the consumer catalog to sets, starting with the O-27 outfits and moving forward with O, O-72, and OO gauges. The illustrations surely left hobbyists agog, so large and thrilling did the various trains appear. Even the shortest and simplest sets presented an aura of excitement.

Then, after introducing the Lionel Trainmaster and the other transformers available in 1940, the catalog contained six pages focused on different levels of rolling stock. First on pages 42 and 43 came the O scale models (the Nos. 700 and 2900 series). Flipping to pages 44 and 45 unveiled the neat operating and service items. They received special treatment with full-color and sepia-tone photographs.

The third two-page spread told the rest of the story. Six different series of O-27 and O gauge freight and passenger cars were described on pages 46 and 47. There was as well a box noting Standard gauge rolling stock in the Nos. 200, 300, 400, 500, and 1760 series, in what ended up being their very last year in the line.

Bottom to top

Our emphasis will be placed on the freight cars rather than the passenger cars (coaches and observations). At the bottom of the totem pole, in terms of cost, were the No. 1670-80 series. The boxcar, gondola, tank car, and caboose each measured 9¼ inches long, and all were priced at \$1. Those cars, in addition to being available as separate-sale items, were also used in the least expensive O-27 outfits.

Companions to the 1670-80 series of freight cars were the boxcar, gondola, tank



THE FREIGHT CARS Lionel cataloged in the No. 2650 series have been enticing model railroaders and collectors ever since they made their debut. The colors of the various pieces of O gauge rolling stock and their diverse loads explain their great appeal.

the year
1943

MAINTAINING INTEREST IN A CRITICAL YEAR

◆ Paper products kept Lionel in the game in 1943

The shopping season of 1942 ended all too soon for Lionel's advertising and sales executives. They had done everything possible to assemble a lineup of trains and chemistry outfits. Shortages of essential materials and a lack of manufacturing personnel had challenged them. A greater obstacle had been the federal prohibition on using "strategic materials" for toys.

Once the new year arrived and sales figures could be tallied, President Joshua Cowen and his associates confronted the issue of how to maintain interest in the company's trains without having any to sell. Worse yet, there was no way to know if the government's ban would be lifted in a year or even two. Leaders at Lionel understood that the war had to be won before the corporation could resume its regular business.

Consequently, Cowen and others put their trust in magazines, brochures, postcards, and later a train to stoke the fire of Lionel enthusiasts. At the same time, they were converting their plant to wartime production of precision instruments for the nation's armed forces in order to boost the firm's bottom line and retain its employees.

Expanded advertising

The energy and resources that Advertising Manager Archer St. John and his small staff normally would have devoted to preparing the annual catalogs had to be diverted to other areas in 1943. One area of concentration for them was *Model Builder* magazine. Published six times a year, that publication needed to include articles and photographs sure to nurture in current and potential Lionel customers interest in the company's



THE CLOSEST LIONEL came in 1943 to offering the type of toy people had associated with the firm for four decades was the No. 50 Wartime Freight Train. Fashioned out of cardboard with wood dowels, it proved to be less than ideal to build or play with.

trains and the entire hobby. The task would not be an easy one, especially because *Model Builder* came out only in the autumn and winter months; no issues were released between April and September.

In spite of the ongoing hardships and there being no new electric trains to inspire *Model Builder* readers to launch work on

layouts or improve their existing wiring or scenery, circulation held steady in 1943 and beyond. Indeed, the average number of subscribers throughout the war years exceeded 50,000. Clearly St. John and his crew were filling the pages of the magazine with informative and engaging stories, columns, black-and-white images, and more.

1946

REVIVING THE PROMOTIONAL SET

◆ Lionel creates a special item for a favored retailer

Marketing for Lionel during the first years of the post-World War II era brought challenges to the country's preeminent manufacturer of miniature electric trains. Most of all, advertising and sales executives aimed to present to a public eager for toy trains a wide assortment of outfits. They wanted to offer sets for every level of hobby experience and budget. Individuals and families with lots of dollars to spend should find something. So also should those whose income was smaller.

To accomplish those merchandising goals during the final decade or so of the pre-World War II period and to satisfy the

one promotional set different from anything in the cataloged line. They created a terrific outfit available exclusively from a retail outlet favored above all the others.

Madison Hardware reaches out

The various catalogs put out by Lionel in 1946 illustrated a total of 33 outfits – quite a large number, and one almost certain to satisfy every person or family in search of an electric train. Retail prices for those sets (not all of which were put on the market) rose from \$24.95 all the way up to \$85.

You would think that with 33 outfits, Lionel met every demand and reached every niche in the market. This was evidently not

The advertisement informed readers about outfit No. 3103W. They could obtain the four-car freight train only from Madison Hardware Co., a business located in New York City that proclaimed itself the first and oldest authorized Lionel dealer.

The boastful claim might have drawn a fair amount of debate from one or two other long-time retail accounts in the Northeast that had been stocking Lionel trains and related items since the earliest days of the company's existence. Some other store probably had begun carrying the firm's locomotives and cars prior to 1909, the date Lou Shur, the owner of Madison Hardware, used in his advertising.

What nobody was likely to deny was the close relationship maintained by executives based at Lionel's corporate headquarters, located at 15 East 26th Street in midtown Manhattan, and Shur's deceptively small site not far away at 105 East 23rd Street. Joshua Cowen had known Lou's father quite well and so treated the younger man as though he were a surrogate son.

Beginning in the 1930s and continuing after World War II, Cowen had arranged for obsolete inventory to be sold to Madison, which peddled the trains and parts. The store also carried supplies of current outfits.

IN 1946, KEY SALES LEADERS AT LIONEL REVIVED THE PRACTICE OF ASSEMBLING AT LEAST ONE PROMOTIONAL SET DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING THAT WAS BEING INCLUDED IN THE CATALOGED LINE.

demands of retail accounts, Lionel created outfits unlike the sets in its annual cataloged line. It assembled for special customers what were known as promotional outfits.

The differences generally amounted to the assortment of passenger or freight cars pulled by particular locomotives. Sometimes a set diverged because Lionel had packed an accessory or a switch with a train. Either way, the company was making it possible for a department store or a national retail chain to claim it had a unique item.

In 1946, key sales leaders at Lionel revived the practice of assembling at least

the case, because marketing executives thought it made good sense to offer a notable customer a special set.

The key piece of evidence for that decision was an advertisement in the October 1946 issue of *Model Builder* magazine. Lionel edited and distributed *Model Builder* to promote model railroading as well as its own array of products.

IN 1946, when Lionel assembled its first full lineup of train sets for the postwar period, it worked with Madison Hardware Co. in New York to offer the No. 3103W. The components of the four-car freight outfit headed by Nos. 224 steam engine and 2466W whistle tender differentiated the set from what Lionel put in the cataloged line that year.



1948

STYLISH SANTA FE F3s OPEN NEW ERA

◆ Story behind the classic 2333 warbonnets

The No. 2333 replica of the F3 diesel cab units made by the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors is one of the landmark models in the history of Lionel. In appearance and operation, the O gauge steed, especially when painted in the red-silver-yellow “warbonnet” scheme of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Ry., distinguished itself, as the Nos. 390, 408E, and 700E had in the prewar era.

Leading the way

The 2333 demands attention for historical, technological, and esthetic reasons. To start, it broke ground by being the first postwar model of a diesel locomotive added to the line of a major American toy manufacturer. Not until the 1950s did American Flyer and Marx introduce their own diesels. American Model Toys, soon to challenge Lionel in the O gauge market, also hung back.

One firm did beat Lionel to the diesel punch. According to the November 1948 issue of *Model Railroader*, Wm. K. Walthers sold an O gauge model of an E7 made by Baldwin Model Locomotive Works. An advertisement in the January 1949 MR introduced an O gauge diesel from General Models Corp. that resembled an F3.

But those models (both of which were described as undecorated and the GMC diesel as lacking a motor) scarcely registered

on the contemporary market. The O gauge diesels eliciting praise from magazine editors and readers were the Lionel F3s.

Also worth noting is the ample power the 2333 boasted. The first F3s had two horizontally mounted motors (in contrast, the No. 2332 Pennsylvania RR GG1 electric locomotive, like Lionel’s O gauge steamers, came with only one motor). Subsequent Lionel F3s – given two vertically mounted motors – performed better. For its time, however, the 2333 F3 stood at the top of the O gauge pulling pyramid.

Revolutionary construction

Another reason the 2333 remains a landmark is that it was the first Lionel locomotive to come with an injection-molded plastic body. Plastics transformed life after World War II and soon replaced die-cast and stamped metal as basic materials in the toy industry. With the F3, Lionel was taking the first steps in changing its manufacturing processes and learning to shape its future.

Fourth, the 2333 F3 earns praise because of its high degree of detail. The number of add-on exterior parts exceeds that on Lionel’s GG1 or its top steamers. How about two ornamental horns, a cab door ladder, clear plastic number boards and headlight lenses, plastic grab irons on the nose, and steps on the side frames?



Most importantly, the bold look of the near-scale, detailed, and glamorous Santa Fe diesel captured attention because it showed how far a toy could go in the direction of realism without becoming just another scale model. This 2333 F3 attested to the imagination of Lionel’s engineers and sales executives who aimed to upgrade the line without losing touch with the kids and hobbyists who were their customers.

For all these reasons, the Lionel 2333 – the Santa Fe version, in particular – inaugurated a new era of toy train production and marketing. It left behind anything offered before the war and even the top-of-the-line models brought out right after.

The postwar era began when Lionel introduced its new O gauge F3. That process began with the color illustrations of the 2333 in the 1948 consumer catalog.

Mysteries surround the first F3s

It was quite a jolt to see images of the Santa Fe F3s in the catalog. They didn’t resemble any known models ever made by Lionel. No