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THE O-27 LINE

SNAZZY STREAMLINED PASSENGER TRAINS

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 vivid colors. What did stand out was a pair of diesels: the nos. 2343 Santa Fe Electro-Motive 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 consumer 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 Flyer

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

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

Featuring the fine UNION PACIFIC Diesel—with built-in HOORN

Each set equipped with the Lionel No. 1022 90 Watt Transformer, with both horn-blowing and directional control throttles.

Each set comes complete—ready to set up, plug in, and operate. Big track wheels measure 33/16" x 27/16".

\$4750

Lionel No. 1464W 4-Car Diesel Freight Set, Comprises:

- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel with built-in horn
- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel
- 1 No. 2481 Plainfield Pullman Coach
- 1 No. 2483 Livingston Observation Car
- 1 No. 2481 Plainfield Pullman Coach
- 1 No. 2483 Livingston Observation Car
- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel
- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel
- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel
- 1 No. 1022 90 Watt Diesel

500

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.

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 slick 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 attractive 2023 Alco A units broke new ground for Lionel. At last, youngsters who owned 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 railroad 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 2023 Alcos 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.

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 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 new 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 now 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 concerning to Lionel's top men when AMT introduced extruded aluminum streamlined cars lettered for the Santa Fe. Suddenly, a third train was possible. Once kids could couple Lionel's very popular no. 2333 Santa Fe F3s to the matching passenger cars, they could pretend to run *El Capitan* or the *Chief*.

LIONEL MOVES FAST!

The situation for engineering supervisors and sales executives at Lionel 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

LIONEL TRAINS ON BROADWAY

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

Even though the majority 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 Joseph 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 Saily, 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

Approximately 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.

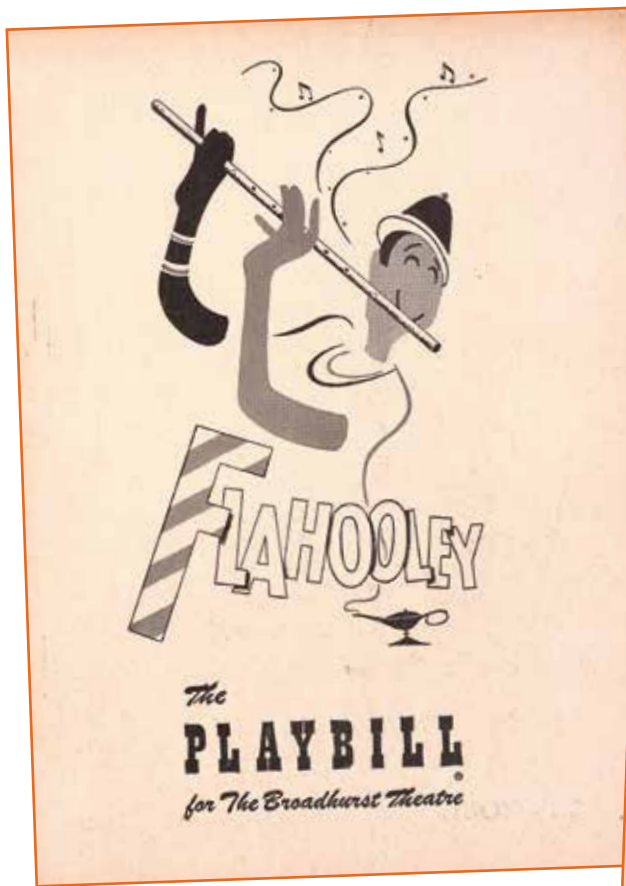
When Art came on stage, dragging the two boxes of Lionel trains, the stage manager rushed up to me and said, "Where the hell have you been? I called your office yesterday!" Since Art was unaware of the assignment until 3 hours before, all he could do was blink and try not to look guilty.

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!"

Then Bigelow locks the door to his office and pushes a button

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.



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.

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 locomotive worked perfectly at each of the handful of performances of *Flahooley*.

SET NO.
1585W
PROMISED
AN ENTIRE
ROSTER
FOR KIDS



LIONEL'S LONGEST TRAIN

When youngsters perused the consumer catalog for 1957, they had tough choices to make. Every set must have looked great, and they found so many exciting and colorful trains to please them. Maybe their parents or Santa Claus would bring one home.

What tantalized some youngsters in 1957 related to the kind of motive power in their outfit of choice or possibly the road name of a car packed in it. Other kids probably focused on one or two of the components, maybe an operating car or even a slick accessory in it.

Then there were the girls and boys best described as practical. They likely saw the benefits of one O-27 outfit that came packed with virtually one of every type of freight car Lionel cataloged. Time to look back at set no. 1585W, which was the longest train the firm ever offered in the postwar period.

■ BEATING THEIR FOES

Sales executives at Lionel had several goals in mind when they sat down to pick the components of the sets they wanted to fill out the annual product line. Offering outfits at various price points was essential, because leaders wished to have new trains available for households whose budgets differed extensively.

Related to that aim was the need to create sets whose retail prices and components would win customers at the expense of Lionel's competitors. Every outfit Lionel sold almost certainly robbed Louis Marx & Co. or the Kusan Corp. of a potential sale. It also meant another modeler was opting for O or O-27 gauge trains over the S gauge products from the A.C. Gilbert Co.

With the domestic market becoming increasingly competitive at a time when children had more options among toys, Lionel had to be creative and smart when it came to assembling sets. They had to provide kids with better trains that gave them to do.

In specific terms, sales executives realized that increasing the size of the trains they cataloged made sense. Children appreciated having more rolling stock to play with in their new sets. So in 1957, Lionel put together an enormous set. Never before during the postwar era had it packed so many cars inside one carton.

■ INCREASING THE SIZE OF SETS

During the pre-World War II era, Lionel packaged freight train outfits consisting of three to five cars. That approach must have paid dividends for the company; after all, key sales personnel there recommended creating sets having the same quantity of cars during the first 10 or so years after the end of the war.



The no. 1585W, an O-27 outfit cataloged by Lionel in 1957, featured nine freight cars with a new no. 602 Seaboard NW2 diesel switcher. The amazing number of pieces of rolling stock made it the longest set Lionel cataloged during postwar days.

In 1957, changes made at Lionel during the previous 3 years made increasing the number of freight cars in a set easier. Designers began cheapening the construction of diesel switchers in 1955. They also reduced the weight of F3 diesels by making them in an A-B combination instead of an A-A.

In 1956, Lionel brought out “watered-down” locomotives, such as the no. 520 General Electric 80-ton electric, and the no. 600 series of GE 44-ton diesels. Besides saving on manufacturing costs, the inexpensive items could pull the cheap rolling stock being introduced. And so Lionel decided the next year to increase the number of freight cars in O-27 outfits from five or six to as many as seven.

But sales executives didn’t quit there. If anything, their slogan for 1957 might have been: “More Is Better!” While adding rolling stock to low-end sets, they also kept retail prices in line with what Lionel had previously been asking.

As Lionel noted on pages 14 and 15 of the consumer catalog: “The brute strength of the new 600’s plus Magne-Traction ... now combine for the longest loads ever hauled” with “the most varied and versatile cars ... in O-27 work trains and freight outfits!”

■ INTRODUCING SET 1585W

The individuals polishing the catalog copy weren’t kidding about “longest loads ever hauled.” In 1957, Lionel offered a great outfit packed with a whopping nine freight cars. As many as 15,000 examples of that set were assembled.

Executives were confident their new marketing theme would bear fruit with the 1585W. Kids would have been impressed by the sight of a Lionel freight train that seemed to go on and on in the catalog. With a suggested retail price just less than \$50, it seemed like a set worth buying for any child or family.

Heading this winner was the flashy black and red scheme of the brand-new no. 602 Seaboard Air Line Electro-Motive NW2 diesel switcher with two-axle Magne-Traction, a three-position

reverse unit, an operating headlight, a real-sounding horn, and fixed plastic couplers.

The 602 diesel, like similarly “cheapened” NW2 switchers, wasn’t the most powerful locomotive. Yet Lionel enthusiasts agreed it was an attractive and consistent performer. Better yet, the 1585W came with cars promising quality and play value.

Four of the nine models in the set were making their debut in 1957, including a trio of boxcars (the nos. 6014 Frisco, 6024 Nabisco Shredded Wheat, and 6464-525 Minneapolis & St. Louis). Also new was the no. 6476 Lehigh Valley hopper.

The first car depicted in the catalog was the 6014 white-plastic Frisco boxcar equipped with new plastic AAR trucks. The Frisco was the heir apparent to the discontinued no. 6014 Baby Ruth boxcars with die-cast metal trucks. Equipping the Frisco with plastic trucks made it lighter to pull.

The reissued nos. 6111 Lionel flatcar with three logs and 6121 flatcar with three pipes were watered-down versions of earlier cars with die-cast metal trucks and heavier frames. Again, the newcomers were lighter and easier to pull.

As for the other cars making their debut, the most impressive might have been the 6464-525 M&StL boxcar with die-cast metal trucks that came individually boxed. There also were a 6476-50 Lehigh Valley gray hopper with plastic AAR trucks and a 6024 Shredded Wheat orange boxcar and AAR trucks.

Other lightweight cars in the 1585W included the reissued nos. 6025 Gulf single-dome tank car, 6112 Lionel gondola with four canisters, and 6017 Lionel Lines SP-type caboose. All three models had the new lighter, plastic AAR trucks.

■ AN UNHERALDED CLASSIC

By today’s standards, the O-27 gauge 1585W outfit would certainly be considered somewhat boring because the cars lacked animation. Yet more than 60 years ago, Lionel thought otherwise and trumpeted the arrival of the nine-car diesel freight set.

In 1957, changes made at Lionel during the previous 3 years made increasing the number of freight cars in a set easier.