



Lionel News & Views

by **Bill Schmeelk**
RM 6643

Another Decade Revisited

As we know, the 1960s were not the greatest in Lionel's history. The offerings in the catalogs, especially after 1962, were lackluster and few new products were offered. Checking through Lionel's consumer catalogs of the 1960s, we find that Lionel offered a total of 121 sets in O gauge. Of these, 73 came with O27 track; the balance included O-gauge track. What's surprising is that while sales of cataloged sets were sagging, Lionel was also producing uncataloged sets. In fact, during the 1960s, in addition to the cataloged sets, Lionel produced over 700 different uncataloged, promotional sets. Actually, Lionel always referred to these sets as "outfits." The quantities of these outfits ranged from as few as six to as many as 85,000. Says who, you ask? These figures come directly from Lionel's postwar factory order sheets.

In 2001, when Richard Kughn sold his collection at auction, I was somewhat saddened to see that parts of the Lionel archives were among the items sold. One of those items was a three-foot tall stack of notebooks which included Lionel factory orders for all outfits manufactured in the 1960s. This included cataloged and promotional O27, O gauge, Super O, and HO as well as Raceway outfits. These were records that nobody knew existed and they went for a substantial sum; more than \$40,000 as I recall.

Documentation to the Right Team

The purchaser of this goldmine of information was the father-and-son team of George and John Schmid. I'm sure I was among many who were saddened to see these rare documents separated from the Lionel archives. As collectors, however, we can be gratified that they ended up in the hands of someone like John and his father.

With their acquisition of these documents, they began in earnest a journey of giving back to the hobby some of the joy it gave to them. The Schmidts decided to publish this information and share it with the toy train community. To that end, Project Roar Publishing was formed. Their first publication was the *Authoritative Guide to Lionel's Postwar Operating Cars* by Joseph P. Algozzini and Emanuel F. Piazza.

In July, their second book will be released, and this one promises to be another winner. This second in their authoritative guide series covers Lionel's Promotional Outfits 1960-69. I was able to read a pre-publication proof of the book and, quite frankly, I was enthralled with the depth of information contained in this new volume. If you enjoy learning about Lionel's history and their internal operations,

you'll have a difficult time putting this book down. For the first time, we learn information gleaned directly from Lionel's factory order sheets and other internal documents.

This huge 848-page book begins with a brief introduction and a preliminary section explaining how to use the volume and includes an explanation of terminology used throughout the book.

Promotional Outfits as Big Business

This is followed by a very informative history of Lionel's promotional and special outfits. Written by Roger Carp, this chapter contains a considerable amount of new information. John Schmid explained to me that he had asked Roger to write about the promotional sets of the 1960s, but Roger expanded his research and wrote a history documenting the importance of promotional or special outfits dating back to the company's first one in 1913. Roger

does an exceptional job of conveying the importance of promotional outfits throughout Lionel's history. From the beginning, promotional outfits contributed significantly to Lionel's sales. During the 1960s, Lionel produced a quantity of approximately 879,000 cataloged outfits. This was far surpassed by the approximately 1,597,000 promotional outfits produced during the same period. In Roger's article we learn of the different types of special outfits Lionel made, including promotional outfits, retailer promotional outfits, retailer general release promotionals, and premiums.

A particularly interesting section of this history deals with the demise of promotional outfits in the late 60s along with information pertaining to Lionel's contract with General Mills signed on April 24, 1969.

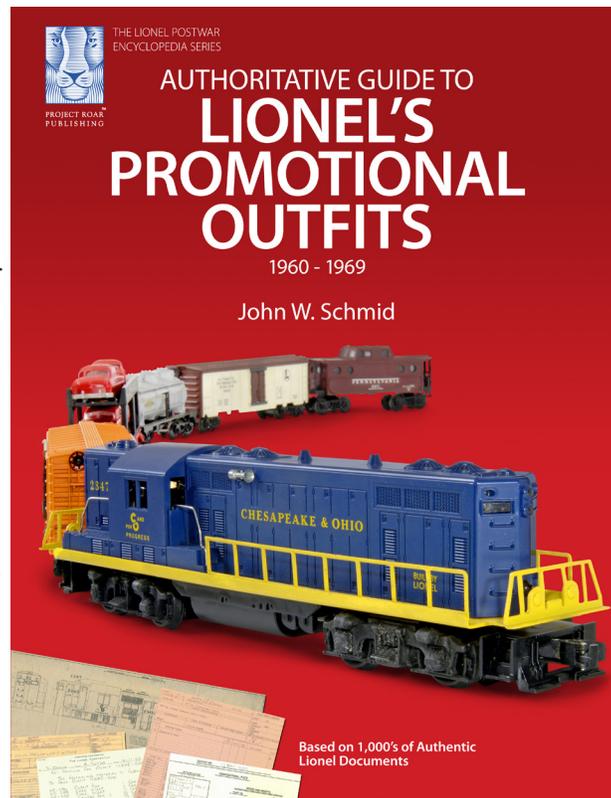
Although the foundation of this book is internal Lionel documentation, the research didn't end there. John also spent time acquiring and researching the retail catalogs of some of the more

than 170 firms that purchased these outfits. These advertisements provide additional information, such as the retail selling price of the outfits. In some cases, the Lionel documentation included the price at which the set was sold to the merchandiser. Where this information was available, it has been included.

Insights into Pricing

In Part II of the book beginning on page 42, the author discusses how current prices for the outfits were determined. A table for each outfit shows their current values for several grading scales. One of the most important components for these sets is the outfit box. You might have all the components of a set, but one of the most important is the original outfit box. The pricing information includes a separate price for the empty outfit box. For some of the outfits, the empty box is well over half of its total value.

This section of the book also includes a complete discussion of the outfit boxes in which Lionel products were packaged. There were several different types of packaging used, depending on the customer's needs. Even the cardboard inserts used in packaging are discussed in detail. The paper items packed with the outfits are



also discussed – everything from the Lionel envelopes to special instruction sheets. Another section deals with the individual boxes that Lionel often used within the outfit boxes. Finally, there is a discussion of the different types of trucks and the years in which changes were made.

All about the Outfits

The third and largest section of the book deals with the outfits themselves. This 681-page section lists information for each outfit. This information includes a description, specifications, the customer, the original number of units ordered by the customer, the factory order date, the date issued, and the packaging type. When available, the retail selling price and Lionel's price to the customer are included. The contents and individual catalog numbers of each piece in the set are included along with occasional substitutions made by Lionel. For many outfits, a color photograph is included. Each outfit includes a value chart indicating the current value of the outfit and its rarity.

Occasionally there are photos of the special instruction sheets which were unique to a particular outfit, retailer advertising for the set, and other interesting components of the outfit. The boxing for both the individual outfit and the shipper box are included. When appropriate, alternates to the outfit components are given, often with the exact number of sets made with the alternate components.

Included with each outfit description is a drawing illustrating exactly how the individual components were packed in the outfit box. There are even descriptions and Lionel numbers for the cardboard inserts used in packing the outfits. Each outfit includes a comments section in which the author conveys additional information unique to the outfit. These comments are particularly interesting and provide additional information about both the customer and Lionel.

These promotional outfits were marketed to a wide variety of vendors, including large mail order houses like Sears® and Montgomery Ward®. In one chapter, all of the 170 plus customers are listed with a brief history of each.

A Father and Son Outfit

To me, one of the more interesting outfits was a pair made for FAO Schwarz®. Although an actual photo of the set was unavailable, the ad from the FAO Schwarz 1961 Christmas Catalog is included. Lionel made two nearly identical outfits, one in O gauge and one in HO gauge. Included with each was a single instruction sheet that appears in the book. This sheet described how to make a father and son combination layout with the two outfits. Both the HO- and the O-gauge sets made use of graduated trestles. Only 50 of these outfits were made, so they truly were a rare set. This FAO Schwarz layout was quite different from the father and son layout that Lionel offered in its consumer catalog – the "pretzel" design included an elevated crossover track.

A number of these promotional outfits included additional items, some never offered in their catalogs. These include items such as the cardboard trestle set, Submarine Base, Cardboard Scenic Set, special boxcars, many special instruction sheets, and more. In each case these additional items are documented, and many of the unique instruction sheets are printed in the book.

Expectation Meets Reality

Most of these outfits included a Lionel accessory catalog, a consumer catalog, or brochure illustrating additional Lionel items. Apparently, Lionel believed that once having a starter set customers would purchase more items to expand their set. John surmises that for the most part, this expectation failed. Most of the sets that John has come across in his research had nothing added to them. At most, some additional track was found with the sets. In general, these promotional sets did not spur additional purchases.

The final section of the book includes several useful appendices. One sorts the outfits by motive power, another by individual items, another by least and most produced. A fourth appendix lists passenger car outfits. The final appendix lists the O-gauge and Super-O outfits including the year, the quantity, the motive power and the customer. Two indices, one sorted by Lionel's outfit number and the other by year, complete this massive volume.

Pardon my Enthusiasm, but ...

This work is one that is unequaled by anything previously available on the topic. The author's love for the subject is apparent. This is clearly an historic volume. After reading it, I can understand the large amount of research and information gathering that went into the four-and-one-half years required to produce it.

In all of the reviews I've written over the years, I always refrained from suggesting that you "go out and buy this product," or using terms such as "highly recommend." I find it particularly difficult in this situation to hold back those sentiments. But to stick with my original principles, I'll simply suggest that should you have any doubts about this book, be sure to look at a copy and decide for yourself.

I personally do not collect promotional sets, but found that the vast amount of inside knowledge and new information in this book made it an extremely enjoyable read. Anyone with an interest in postwar Lionel should consider this groundbreaking book. I have selfish reasons for wishing John Schmid success with this book. I want to see more books of this quality from Project Roar Publishing.

This 846-page, 8.5x11-inch book will be released in July with a softcover for \$69.95, in hardcover for \$89.95, and in a limited-edition hardcover version autographed by the author and editors – limited to 100 copies – for \$150. You can get more information and pre-order it at www.projectroar.com. You can get a first look at the book and meet the author in Chicago at the LCCA Annual Convention. That's it for now – hope to see you in Chicago!



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