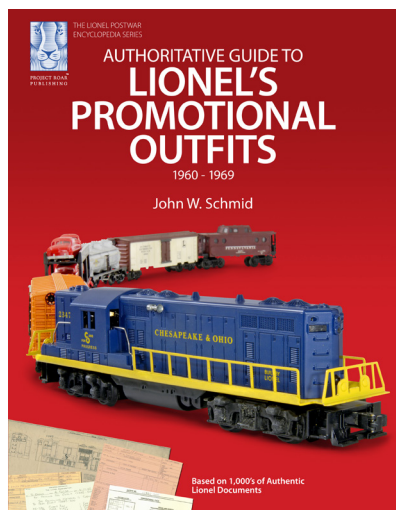


Authoritative Guide to Lionel's Promotional Outfits 1960-1969

by John W. Schmid

2007: Project Roar Publishing. \$69.95 (softcover); \$89.95 (hardcover).

Reviewed by Dr. Joseph Lechner



This is the second installment of a planned Lionel Postwar Encyclopedia series. Like its predecessor, *Authoritative Guide to Lionel's Postwar Operating Cars* by Joe Algozzini and Manny Piazza (2005), it is based on internal records of the postwar Lionel Corporation that Schmid acquired during the 2001 auction of Richard Kughn's personal collection.

Uncataloged sets have been largely neglected by train collectors. Perhaps one reason for neglect has been the lack of definitive printed information. With a few notable exceptions (Sears, Wards, JC Penney and

Spiegel, to name obvious examples), most vendors did not publish catalogs of the toys they offered for sale. That drought of information is now ended. This hefty volume will tell you almost everything you could want to know about the 707 uncataloged outfits produced by Lionel during the 1960s: the exact contents of each outfit; the quantity manufactured; which vendor(s) ordered it; and often the retail selling price.

Another reason for lack of collector interest is the perception that uncataloged sets consisted of common, low-end rolling stock. However, Schmid documents that several of the most coveted postwar engines came in uncataloged sets, including the #746 Norfolk & Western J, #773 scale Hudson, #2348 M&StL GP9, F3s, Berkshires and Trainmasters.

The phrase "uncataloged set" is collector-speak that did not originate with the manufacturer. At The Lionel Corporation, a package that included a locomotive, cars, track and transformer was called an "outfit". If the outfit was not listed in Lionel's consumer catalog, it was a "promotional outfit" (PO).

Postwar Lionel made very few POs before 1955, mainly because its cataloged trains were selling at full retail price as fast as the company could make them. The resurgence of POs in 1955 coincided with the demise of Fair Trade pricing and the rise of discount department stores. Vendors ordered promotional outfits for a variety of reasons. Retailers wanted distinctive trains that differed from their competitors' offerings, or that could be sold for a lower price. Military bases stocked them for families at the PX. Trading-stamp companies offered them as premiums. Cereal companies marketed them as box-top mail offers.

After 1960, promotional outfits greatly outnumbered cataloged sets, both in variety and total quantity. According to Schmid's count, Lionel produced 707 different POs in the years 1960-1969. During the same decade, according to my count, only 121 unique 1.25" gauge train sets appeared in Lionel's consumer catalogs. By summing the quantities specified in factory orders, Schmid calculates that Lionel manufactured a total of 1,597,000 POs, but only 879,000 cataloged outfits, during its final decade.

As you peruse this encyclopedic work, three generalizations will quickly become evident:

- The vast majority (99.3%) of POs were 027 gauge. Only thirteen outfits (1818 total pieces; 0.1% of total production) came with "O" gauge track;

and only 22 outfits (8880 total pieces; 0.6% of total production) were Super "O".

- The vast majority of POs were freight trains. Only twelve outfits contained passenger cars. In my opinion, only three of those (including the famed "Halloween General", more about which later) were actually intended to be sold and operated as passenger trains. The others appear to have been strategies by well-known dealers to stock up on high-end items at volume discounts. Consider, for example, outfit #19406, of which 42 pieces were ordered by Polk Hobbies in 1964. Each "set" contained a #213 M&StL ALCO diesel, three 2400-series 027 passenger cars, and three 2520-series aluminum "presidential" cars. One could not couple this implausible consist together, since the two observation cars lacked rear couplers. Even if the train could be assembled, a single-motored ALCO could not have pulled it; and even if it were operable, this train would have looked pretty silly.
- The vast majority of POs were hauled by Scout-type 2-4-2 steamers or plastic ALCO diesels. 207 different outfits (29%) were led by ALCO FAs; the most popular paint scheme was ATSF warbonnet (53), followed by Rock Island (29), Texas Special (29), D&RGW (28), Union Pacific (15), Canadian National (14), U S Navy (13), C&O (11), M&StL (9), Boston & Maine (4) and New Haven (2). Each of these road names appeared in a Lionel catalog at least once, except for the green-and-yellow Canadian National, which was manufactured as #227 (rear coupler only) and #228 (two couplers).

All three of these observations are price-related. Most vendors who ordered POs were discount department stores who wanted to beat a competitor's price. A few purchasers intended to give the sets away, as rewards to their clients / employees or even as premiums for trading stamps. The choice of freight trains vs. passenger outfits was related to play value. These were toys, designed to be enjoyed by youngsters. As Joshua Lionel Cowen observed, freight trains were more interesting to kids because you could "do more" with them. And, during the decade covered by this volume, freight trains outnumbered passenger trains on America's full-sized railroads.

Most POs consisted of common run-of-the-mill items, but each outfit has a unique story. Schmid tells their stories well, and some of them are bound to jog your memories.

In the early 1960s, our local grocery store issued Sperry & Hutchinson "Green Stamps" with every purchase. As a youngster, it was my job to lick these stamps and paste them into booklets. When we had accumulated enough books to make it worth a trip, we drove to the Redemption Center and exchanged stamps for merchandise. I remember well that S&H offered a Lionel train as one of its premiums. This was probably outfit X516NA, which consisted of a #246 steam loco and tender with three freight cars. S&H identified it as 6P4803. The "6" meant that it cost six filled books of stamps. I didn't get the train, because Mom had decided to spend our stamps on a set of folding tray tables. Thereafter, we ate Swanson TV Dinners in our living room while watching the Heathkit color television that Dad had recently assembled.

Another childhood memory reawakened by this volume was the electric train that I could have gotten by mailing in \$11.95 with two Quaker Oats box tops. Outfit X600 (1961) was Lionel's second largest PO order with 75,000 sets manufactured. According to Schmid, the \$11.95 paid by consumers was the same price that Quaker paid to Lionel. Quaker Oats got spanked by the Federal Trade Commission for claiming the train was worth \$25. During

the subsequent investigation, Lionel established that the true total list price of its components was \$35.40!

Although most Lionel POs were assembled from "off-the-shelf" cataloged components, a few contained unique items, and these are highly coveted by collectors today.

Like many baby boomers, I remember visiting the toy department of Sears, Roebuck & Co. at Christmas time and seeing a blue-and-yellow Chesapeake & Ohio GP9 diesel there. Lionel's only uncataloged 2300-series locomotive, #2347 was a full-featured engine equipped with horn and operating couplers, while the similar-looking cataloged #2365 lacked a horn and had fixed couplers. #2347 came only in promotional outfit #12885-500, of which 315 pieces were made exclusively for Sears, in white cartons marked "ALLSTATE by Lionel". This top-of-the-line set, whose consist appears on the cover of Schmid's book, included a #3662 operating milk car, a #346 culvert loader, a generous layout of "O" track with a pair of 022 remote switches, and an LW transformer. Sears cataloged it as #9836 in 1965 and asked \$99.99 for it. Schmid estimates this set is worth \$13,000 today in C8 condition. But less than 4% of all C&O geeps sold by Sears were the rare #2347. Sears offered two other POs powered by the cataloged #2365. Outfits #9655 (1962) and #19305 (1963) both featured space and military cars. A total of 8400 pieces were produced.

One of the most celebrated promotional outfits is the "Halloween General", so-called because its #1882LT locomotive and tender were painted orange-and-black instead of the standard red-and-gray loco and green tender found in cataloged General sets. In Lionel's records, the Halloween General was known as outfit X-507NA, of which 7300 pieces were ordered by Druggist's Service Council, Inc. in 1960. Schmid's research has solved a mystery. Previously, this train was spoken of by collectors as the "Sears" General. Possibly some sets ended up being resold at Sears, but X507NA was originally intended to be given away as a promotional item by participating drug stores. Schmid's book shows two examples of advertising signs that urged "boys" (!) to enter a drawing and "win this famous LIONEL train set".

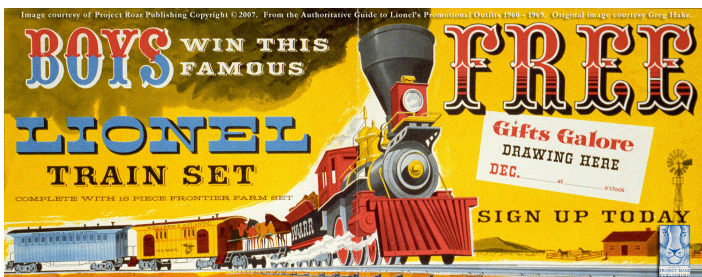


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Most promotional outfits consisted of mundane locos and cars, but in filling its orders, Lionel occasionally and unintentionally created collectible pieces. Outfit X-648 was ordered by Allied Stores, and retailed for under \$30 at Waite's, Gertz, Read's, and several other department store chains during the 1961 holiday season. Its cars included common space-and-military items (3665 Minuteman, 6470 exploding boxcar, 3509 satellite launching car and 6017 caboose), but its locomotive was the very scarce #235 steamer with Magne-Traction, which never appeared in any other outfit (cataloged or otherwise) and was never offered for separate sale. According to the Lionel factory order, 3,300 of these outfits were sold; but Schmid notes that #2018 was substituted

for #235 in 100 of the sets.

Sometimes, the most coveted collector's items are the most vulnerable. An obvious example is Lionel's 910-1 Navy Yard display, which consisted of several sheets of die-cut cardboard that could be punched, folded and tabbed together to create a military base. It first appeared in outfit X515NA (1960) with a four-car train led by the #45 U. S. Marines mobile rocket launcher. #910 usually came with an inverted figure-8 track layout made from 16 curves, four straights and a 45° crossing. Its ten cutout pieces formed elevated roadbed, a headquarters building, a bridge, an expanse of water, and three submarines. The "atomic sub base", as it is also called, never appeared in a Lionel catalog. It was sold with nine different promotional outfits, of which a total of 6338 pieces were made. So few sub bases have survived that #910 could now be the rarest postwar Lionel accessory. According to Schmid, a C8 copy of this set, with intact sub base and all packaging, is worth \$16,000.



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The *Authoritative Guide to Lionel's Promotional Outfits 1960 - 1969* by John W. Schmid. Available from Project Roar Publishing, P.O. Box 599, Winfield, IL 60190. To order, visit www.projectroar.com or call 630-653-ROAR (7627). It is also available at your local hobby retailer. 848 pages, 1,500+ color photos and images, Softcover \$69.95, Hardcover \$89.95, Limited Edition Hardcover \$150.



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