

Lionel News & Views

by **Bill Schmeelk**
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Many of us had our first experience with Lionel® trains in the 1950s. The early part of that decade was Lionel's golden age, while the latter part saw Lionel's profits sinking and the beginning of a decline that would take Lionel very near extinction.

Although I enjoy Lionel's new products and all of the new features we see technology bringing to the forefront of train operation, I still have a soft spot for the postwar golden age when Lionel was the largest toy company in the world. Because of my nostalgia towards the Lionel of my youth, I enjoy reading about how the company was run and how they developed products that kept them on top.

A new book published by a new publisher not only provides a unique look at Lionel product but also a detailed view of how the company operated. The new publisher is Project Roar Publishing and their first book is entitled *Authoritative Guide to Lionel's Postwar Operating Cars* by Joseph Algozzini and Emanuel F. Piazza.

Father and son George and John Schmid made Lionel news in 2001 when they purchased a stack of notebooks for \$43,000 at the first Richard Kughn auction in November 2001. Those notebooks contained Lionel internal records listing the contents and quantities of uncataloged and promotional sets produced from 1960 to 1966. John related to me the joy of going through the information and discovering directly from

company documents many of the details of how Lionel operated. Thankfully for the rest of us, Project Roar was started in 2001 with a goal to disseminate this information and share it with the Lionel community.

From the start I have to say that this is a very unique book. This is not a rehash of material we've seen published before. This is all new information — documented through the availability of thousands of actual postwar Lionel documents and numerous interviews with former Lionel employees. The

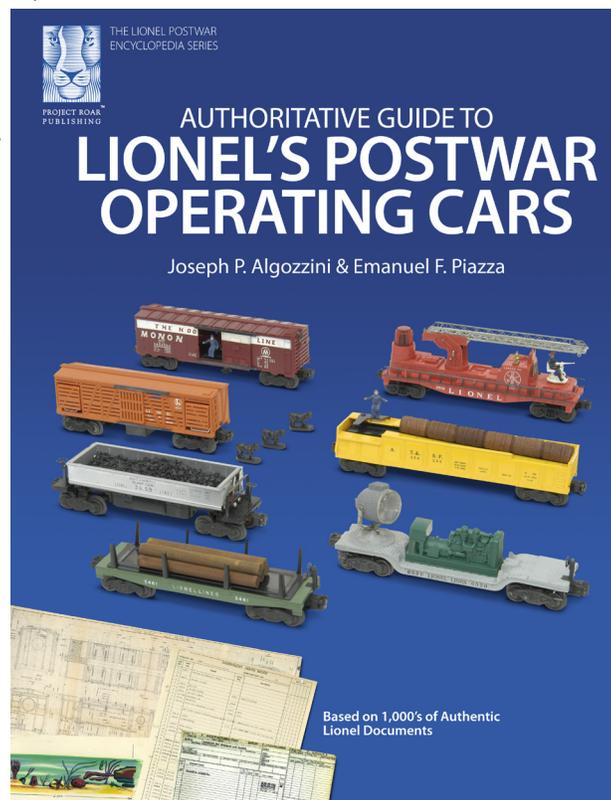
material is organized and presented well, with lots of color photos and charts. Every page is populated with crisp color photos.

The first 17 pages of the book explain to the reader how the research was done. Here, the authors detail the types of Lionel documents among the thousands that were available to them.

The next section of the book is an excellent 15-page introduction by Classic Toy Trains senior editor Roger Carp. Entitled "Lionel Operating Cars: An

Overview and an Appreciation," this chapter takes you through Lionel's history of operating cars — not a listing of the cars but a look at how the company operated and how they strived for realism and eventually entertainment in their operating cars. Among the many acknowledgements listed, John Schmid gratefully thanked Roger Carp for the guidance and editorial assistance he received and for making the volume exciting and easy to read.

Charts show all of the documented variations including their rarity and value. Unique to these ratings are the fact that the rarity is based on actual production numbers. These are given in ranges from R1, which includes quantities over 150,000



to the least rare (R10) which includes items made in quantities of less than 250; for example, R1 includes the 6167 Caboose. The black lettered 3484-25 Santa Fe Operating Box Car is an example of an item with an R10 number. The figures are documented through actual Lionel records.

Throughout the text appear pop-ups highlighted in green which reference Lionel's documentation — blueprints, engineering specifications, production planning records, and component parts indexes. These documents often indicate changes that were made before production. For example, in the discussion of the 3435 Aquarium Car, one of these pop-ups explains that Lionel's Production Control Files state that the body of the car was originally to be painted green only, but was changed to be painted black first and then green. Some of these comments make clear exactly when certain variations and changes in production took place.

If you have a postwar collection, you will certainly find a great deal of new and interesting information in this book. I've said it before, but it bears repeating — we are very fortunate in this hobby to have dedicated scholars working to discover more information and share it with the rest of the Lionel community. The amount of information available to us over the years has grown by leaps and bounds. This book certainly marks a high point in that dissemination of knowledge. I haven't read a book as interesting and informative as this one since Ron Hollander's *All Aboard* was first published in 1981. The quality of this publication *The Lion Roars* December, 2005 29 reflects the devotion the authors and publisher have for the material and their desire to make it available in the best way possible.

The book concludes with a series of four appendices and an index by catalog number. The appendices cover postwar box car types, postwar Lionel boxes,

postwar trucks and couplers, and operating car peripherals. These appendices are also in full color and provide very useful and interesting information.

This book is the first in a series entitled *The Lionel Postwar Encyclopedia Series*. I sincerely hope that this book is supported and purchased by Lionel enthusiasts, making it possible for the authors and publisher to continue this series. The next volume, now in progress, will deal with Lionel's promotional sets made in the decade of the 60s.

I could go on and on about this book, but I'll end it here with the suggestion that you take a look at this book and decide for yourself. I found it hard to put down. There's something exciting about learning new information about how the company ran in the postwar period. This book provided me with plenty of excitement. I look forward with great anticipation to future releases in this series and commend the authors and the publisher for a magnificent job. A job well done by all involved!

You can purchase the book and read more about Project Roar Publications on their web site, www.projectroar.com. The book is 8-1/2 x11-inch format, with 160 glossy pages. It is available in soft cover for \$44.95 and hard cover for \$59.95. You can view actual pages from the book on their web site.



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