

LIONEL 255-260-263 Locomotives Part 1 of 2

by Rob English 96-43303
friscosteam@gmail.com

There is a natural progression in train collecting to the highest quality that one can afford. There is a similar progression in the desire to collect top quality of manufacturing. As we've heard so often from the collector starting with Marx, Winner Lines, or Joy Line trains, there is usually a desire to "move up" in the world to bigger, shinier, more complex trains.

My honorary uncle Dave mentioned several times early in my collecting that I should, "Keep the best, sell the rest." Well, that seed took root, and the 3rd prewar collection I purchased, not a big one mind you, just four trains, yielded a black 260E with 260T in C7 condition (Photo 1). Since it was the best, I sold the rest and paid for the 260E to find its way into my permanent collection. This addition ignited the desire to add all the variations to the fleet and in order to do that I found it necessary to study, learn the history, read catalogs, read books, and ask questions of other collectors to determine authenticity. Please note the color names are Lionel designations. Type designations of the details (trucks, couplers, and motors, etc.) are referring to Bruce C. Greenberg's current 0 gauge book. I am very thankful that Bruce allowed me to use the modern designation updates.

The Lionel 260 series of steam locomotives were catalogued and produced from 1930 through 1939 (though there are examples that have 1940 details). There is speculation among collectors that the Ives 1122 (Photo 2) may have prompted the development of Lionel's top of the line 260E. While not as prototypical as the Ives 1122, the Lionel 260E loco and 260T were larger and more brightly decorated initially, which certainly contributed to the model's long production run. The design aesthetic was attributed to dozens of blue prints and photographs from all over the country that were examined, and the best feature of each were utilized by Lionel's engineering departments in designing this locomotive. This catalog copy certainly inspired

numerous daydreams in 1930! The loco design picked up elements from the Standard gauge 390E and 400E.

Lionel produced the 260 series in three road numbers during its tenure. The 260 was produced from 1930 to 1935. The 255 was an interim production locomotive for 1935-1936 (more on this in "Part 2"). The final iteration was the 263 version produced from 1936 to 1939.

The 260 series of locomotives were produced in five definitive liveries. Initially they were produced in glossy black with a cream stripe on the locomotive frame and tender running boards, with brass and copper trim (Photo 3). This very attractive scheme was available in 1930-1931 only. It is difficult to find tenders with completely intact striping since it is on a rub spot on the tender. In 1931 they changed the scheme to gloss black bodies on the loco and tender, both with a dark "State Green" color on their respective chassis, with brass and copper trim (Photo 4). This scheme is the most common. Generally, one finds about eight to ten of these locos for each black/cream one. The black/green scheme ran until 1935. In about 1934, Lionel had a color change in the Standard gauge and 0 gauge product lines. They started to use gunmetal colors and nickel or chromium trim decoration on the locomotive offerings.

In 1934-1935 Lionel employed a bronze gunmetal ("dark" gunmetal by some) on the 260E and its cousins the 255E (Photo 5). They changed again in 1936 to a "light" gunmetal for the 263E (Photo 7). Note: there are dark gunmetal 255Es, and 260Es produced during the color transition. The color differential can be tough to make out unless viewed side by side in good lighting. Finally, in 1936-1939, Lionel concurrently produced the two-tone blue color scheme for the "Baby" Blue Comet (Photo 7). The livery only gets us part of the way to authenticating the locomotive. We have to look at the frame type for the next



Photo 1- 260 with cream stripe.



Photo 2- Ives 1122.



Photo 3- 260 with cream S.



Photo 4- 260 black and green.

clues. (Photo 3 a 260 with cream stripe, Photo 4 a 260 black and green, Photo 5 a dark gunmetal 255, Photo 6 a light gunmetal 263, and Photo 7 a Blue Comet 263).

During the ten or so year production run, Lionel produced four frame types for these locos. Type I was produced in 1930 for the initial black and cream 260. This frame is readily identifiable by the groove that was cast into the frame sides. This groove was picked out by cream paint. Very quickly, Lionel switched to Type II. In 1931, the groove was filled in and the cream stripe eliminated in favor of dark "State Green" overall coloration. The next change, to Type III, occurred in 1933 with the advent of the Ives derived, Lionel modified drum type "e-unit". The mounting method changes to eliminate the pendulum type reversing unit side plates. A third pair of motor mounting lugs was added to the frame sides' aft of the air cylinders, one lug on each side. These additional lugs made the lugs that were accessed through the hole in the ashpan vestigial. The lugs were left, but not drilled and tapped. They were probably left to help traction or just to save money on die modification. It should be noted that some motors were mounted in Type II frames with pendulum reverse side plates as a stop-gap measure while awaiting the Type III frames in production.

Type IV frames sported two additional changes that occurred simultaneously. The vestigial lug became inaccessible as the ash-pan access hole was filled in, yet the lug remains and the mounting location for the modified valve gear the 263 uses was extended to the rear to accommodate an afterward mounting that was needed to allow an eccentric rod to be added.

We see significant changes to the frame that help authenticate the locos. As is frequent-

ly referenced in collector publications like *The Train Collectors Quarterly*, the metallurgical failure of the die-cast components can create increased difficulty in authentication due to re-

placement casting differences. Such is the case with the 1935-1936 260E and 255E locos. The Type III frames are seldom found without some sort of warp or decay. Produced only for a short time, a solid, intact Type III frame is rare. For those locomotives that suffered these issues, replacement by Type II or a reproduction Type III frame is common and the reader is warned to view gunmetal 255s and 260s with a wary eye. We can use the tenders that these locos pulled for further dating help.

Lionel produced essentially four tender variations during the production run to accompany the 260 series of locomotives. The tenders were quite impressively detailed for the time. With detailed die-cast Zamak, or pressed steel construction, Lionel captured the essence of the Vanderbilt tenders of the day. Even with current manufacturing technology in the fields of die-casting and embossing, we do not seem to be able to capture the same presence or detail these models had back then. The 260 Type I tender, first made in 1930, had a die-cast body painted gloss black fastened to a pressed steel black frame. This tender came with four-wheel trucks, Type IVa with nickel journals. The tender was decorated with a cream stripe along the water reservoir tank sides (Photo 8).

Made to accompany the top of the line 710 and 712 series cars, the Type II tender produced from 1931-1934 included several simultaneous changes from the Type I. The decoration discontinued the cream stripe and changed the frame color to dark State Green. Lionel changed the trucks to copper journals first, then to the Type I six-wheel trucks with copper journals to match the big, beautiful 710 and 712 cars. There



Photo 5- Dark gunmetal 255.



Photo 6- Light gunmetal 263.

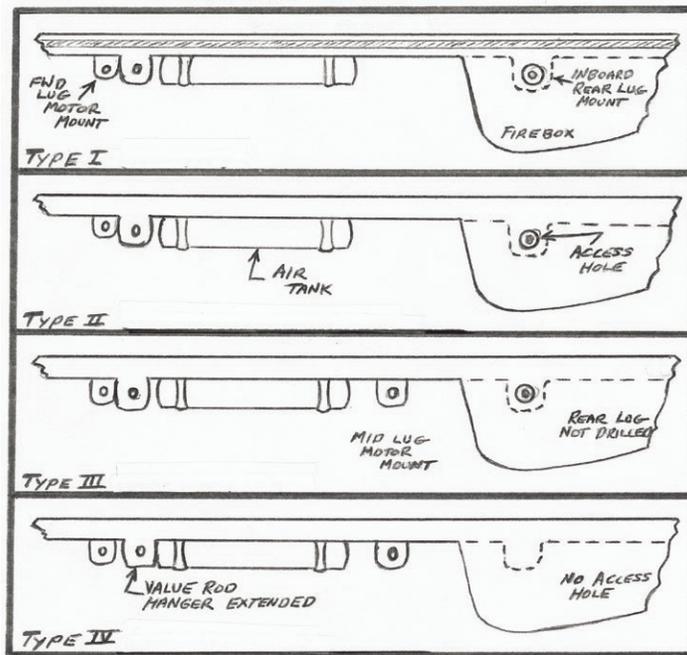


Photo 7- Blue Comet 263



Photo 8- 260T cream stripe

FRAME TYPES



was also a subtle change to the lower half body casting. The tank bolsters now had straight sides instead of angled ones. There were more changes forthcoming in 1934 (Photo 9).

Lionel heavily modified the tender in 1934 into the 263 Type I. Gone were the die-cast body halves, replaced by a pressed steel, larger diameter water reservoir tank, with a pressed steel rear end cap, oil reservoir and cap, and a die-cast, non-recessed front bulkhead. The 263T tender was painted in bronze gunmetal color. The reservoirs sat directly on the same color frame with Type I six-wheel trucks decorated with nickel journals. This 263 Type I tender came equipped as a 263W tender with the “snail drum” or “banjo” type whistle. It appears to us that the 263W tenders were all painted gunmetal and the 263T tenders were all painted bronze gunmetal in the pro-

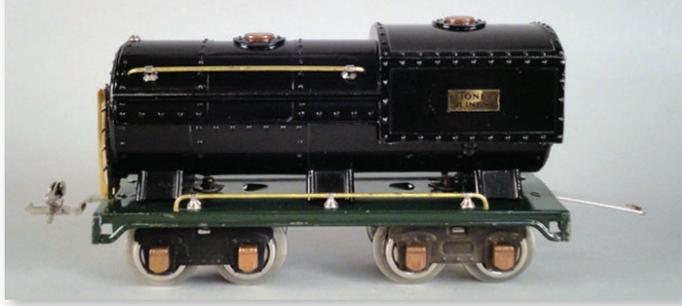


Photo 9- 260T black and green.



Photo 10- Gunmetal 263W.



Photo 11- Gunmetal 2263.

duction transition period (Photo 10). I would ask for reader input to confirm this. In 1934 Lionel was painting two tender types in three different colors during that year!

Finally, the last variation, 263 Type II was produced from 1935 to the end of the run in 1940. The Type II sported a deep recessed front bulkhead, the lighter gunmetal color body and frame and Type II six-wheel trucks with nickel or blackened journals. It was equipped with the late style rectangular body whistle. With the advent of the box electro-coupler, a 2263 sub variation was added in 1936 (Photo 11).

In “Part 2” of this mini-series we will cover boiler details, number plates and motor changes throughout the production run. As always, I would appreciate reader input on production variations at my email address friscosteam@gmail.com.



AMERICAN FLYER FAN



by Chip Kessler 15-71537 • chip@ecpnews.net

I’ve read with interest the letters asking for more American Flyer stories in *The Quarterly*, so here is my effort to respond to that call.

I was a TCA member back in the 1990s but let my membership lapse as I got out of trains. Not to shock my American Flyer brethren, but when I first got into train collecting some 30 years ago, I was a Lionel and MTH fan. After selling my collection in 2002, and then deciding to return to the hobby only a few years ago, I didn’t want to repeat the same old experience, so I decided to try American Flyer trains and I am glad I did! My main interest these days is Flyer postwar boxed sets. I also had a 6x12-foot layout built for me. Brian Inch of Model Rail Scenes in Hallowell, ME, did the work. If it had been left up to me, “Ten Thumbs” Kessler to do the job, I’d be in trouble! Not only did Brian build it, but he got it down to me in Northeast Tennessee.

I would like to hear from American Flyer fans about subjects they would like to read about in *The Quarterly*, as I am willing to write more articles. I would also like to write about some of the interesting American Flyer people I’ve encountered. I’ve spent almost 40 years in the communications field

(radio, newspapers, television), so I’m always on the lookout for a good story!

Here’s something I find really fascinating regarding American Flyer postwar sets. They were each given a name, at least the cataloged sets were, as well as, many of the uncatalogued sets too. While some may consider this a small thing, I find this “added detail” to be quite fascinating. Quite frankly, I’m not sure who decided to do this or why, but if anyone knows, please relay that information along and I may write about it, giving credit as appropriate. I just like referencing outfit #20315 as “The Keystone Rocket” set, or outfit #K5440T as “The Yard King Switcher” set. I wonder how many American Flyer fans know the sets by their name, or just by their number, or maybe by both.

One thing I want to avoid is the debate about American Flyer versus Lionel. I remember a quote in one of the 1990s TM train videos. It came from a fellow TCA member Bruce Lorence 79-14212. I had the pleasure of speaking to Bruce earlier this year to ask his permission to use his comment. Bruce who has a fine collection of American Flyer trains and a layout, when asked about the good-natured ribbing that



goes on between Flyer and Lionel folks put it so well when he said, "We all have our own fun." He's so right! Let each to their own. After all, this isn't a discussion about world peace or if you're a fan of this or that sports team (you know important stuff)... this is about toy trains! By the way, Bruce let me know that he's in the process of expanding his present layout into other parts of his house (again), and what he said in the video back then, still holds true today. He has a "very understanding wife!"

I am open to all fans of American Flyer. Accordingly, let me pose some questions to ponder. Please feel free to answer any or all as you wish. Please include your name and TCA member number. Please note that your response(s) gives me permission

to use your name and thoughts. So, without any further ado:

- What feature or thing do you like best about American Flyer?
- Do you have a favorite set and/or piece?
- Do you have a particular "find" that you'd like to share?
- How did you get started with American Flyer?
- Did or do you have a favorite hobby shop where you purchased trains in the past and/or present (sadly many of them have disappeared over the years)

I hope to hear from American Flyer fans! I especially enjoy reading about other peoples' backgrounds in the train collecting hobby. My email address is under the by-line at the top of this article.

