



# TRAIN COLLECTORS ASSOCIATION WESTERN DIVISION NEWSLETTER



VOL 64, NO.1

MARCH 2018

2018

## MEET SCHEDULE

### MARK YOUR CALENDERS

- Mar-24 Green Trains
- Apr-28 Cabooses
- May-19 Military trains and toys
- Jul-28 Red, White & Blue
- Aug-25 Hand made & custom
- Sep-22 Union Pacific
- Oct-27 Orange and Black
- Dec-15 Holliday trains and toys



No. 5404W Southern Pacific Diesel Locomotive and Cabooses from the TCA 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Golden Express Freight Set

## NEXT MEET MARCH 24, 10AM SHOW AND TELL THEME IS "GREEN TRAINS"

We are still meeting at the United Methodist Church this month. Possibly the next several months before the construction at the Arcadia Senior Center is complete.

From Santa Anita Ave, turn West on W. Duarte Rd. Go about 1.5 miles. The Church is on the corner of Duarte Rd & Holly Ave. Go just past Holly and enter the parking lot behind the Church. Lots of parking.

Please visit the Western Division website, at <http://www.tcawestern.org> for more information.

FREE DONUTS AND COFFEE GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY BOB CAPLAN

## From the President's Desk, March 2018

Sitting in the family room typing this with a nice view of a light rain outside. We are pretty lucky here in the west, train season is pretty much all year round. My layout is in the garage, so I putter during the day and retreat to the house later in the day when it cools down. In a month or so I will be spending more evenings in the garage. Our friends in the east tend to concentrate on trains in the winter and use the nicer months to catch up on outdoor activities.

Jeff and Denyse Meyer and myself made the trip up to San Ramon for the Cal-Stewart meet. Quite a few other club members made the trip also. My purchases were pretty small this year, but I did knock a few items off my list for projects in my roundtuit pile.

Election of Western Division officers is coming up. We really need to have some new blood step up to support YOUR club.

Reminder we are meeting this month, 3/24/18 at the Church of the Good Shepherd United Methodist. 400 W Duarte Rd, Arcadia. This has been a good alternate location for us. Please come on out.

Steve Eastman, President TCA Western Division



Photos from the December Holiday Party



Almost dropped it!



**Raffle Prize Winners**

From the archives of TCASWestern.Org

## AMERICAN FLYER TRAINS

Continued from the December issue

During the early 1930's, American Flyer struggled under increased competition, especially at the low end of the market. In 1931, Flyer announced it would not produce an electric train set to sell for less than \$4 like its competition had. However, within three months, it relented and released a train without transformer that sold for \$3.95, and in 1932, it released a set with transformer that retailed for \$3.50. Sales increased, but the company was not profitable. Expansion into other toy arenas also failed.



American Flyer Aeolus #9915 Streamlined Hudson Made 1935

The Great Depression killed all the Wide gauge lines and 'O' became the mainstay of all makers that survived. Flyer Wide gauge production ended in 1932. Having weathered the depression, Flyer, like Lionel, concentrated on more scale accurate trains that the public was demanding. Like most of its competition, American Flyer did well in the 1920's, selling more than half a million trains in its best years, but suffered in the

Great Depression, during which the company's focus shifted back to the more economical 'O' gauge trains. Low-end 'O' gauge trains became the mainstay product. One exception was a very successful high-quality die-cast New York Central Hudson locomotive with cast aluminum tender, produced in 1936. Other notable trains from this era included the streamliners. The first offering was the #9915 produced in 1935. This was described in the catalogues as a New York Central type, but collectors referred to this cast aluminum engine-tender combination as the Aeolus due to its resemblance to the CB&Q's engine of that name. The second streamlined steam engine made its appearance in the back pages of the same 1935 catalog. It too was described as an NYC engine. It is also referred to as the "Minnehaha" because it was part of that particular set. The electrically powered version is usually lithoed in orange and silver and the clock work version sports a reddish/rose and silver livery. This train was made from 1935-1937 and came in either a two or a three car articulated passenger set or a freight set.



American Flyer 'O' gauge Tinplate Clockwork Minnehaha Articulated Streamliner set with #551 loco and three passenger cars circa 1935

In 1936 Flyer went after the prototype look with its top of the line Hiawatha passenger set. The engine also came in a freight set. At the same time they also offered an uncatalogued, lithoed tin 0-4-0 version of the Hiawatha which came with either passenger or freight cars. The 0-4-0



American Flyer Lines Cast Hiawatha Loco & Tender in 'O' gauge Circa 1936

version was made with or without a mechanical whistle that was powered through a gear train connected to the main gearing of the motor. The engine had either a rounded or a squared rear. The tender for the engine with the rounded end has a much longer drawbar than the one with the square end. The lithoed engine was made 1936-1937. 1936 also saw the release of the streamlined Comet set. The Comet has a strong resemblance to the lithographed Burlington Zephyr, and both trains are sheet metal throughout. However, most but not all Burlington coaches have six windows while Comet coaches always have four. The set was brightly lithographed in blue and silver, with gray and black details. In 1938 the #4603 PRR streamlined style engine with 2-4-4 wheel arrangement was introduced. The engine was sheet metal with a diecast front end and came with either freight or passenger cars. Other notable streamliners from this era included the cast-aluminum CB&Q Zephyr and the City of San Francisco.



American Flyer Comet Streamliner Includes Motorized Diesel Unit, Two Coaches And Trail Car Circa 1935



American Flyer Lines Prewar 'O' gauge Union Pacific City of San Francisco Streamliner Set Circa 1936

The American Flyer cast aluminum Zephyr was first cataloged in 1934. Two different approaches to the model were considered. Either die cast or sand cast and sheet metal. Die cast technology couldn't produce the kinds of models American Flyer wanted to create.

Sand cast aluminum was chosen. When they came out of the sand cast, the aluminum bodies had a mold seam



American Flyer 'O' gauge #9900 Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Zephyr Streamliner Set circa 1935

down the middle. This required a grinding and polishing process that resulted in a very bright smooth finish to the roof of the cars and the power unit. Decals were utilized for applying identification numbers as well as the car and power car lettering. The grinding and polishing work was expensive and dirty and no one wanted to walk through the final polishing room where the air was thick with polishing rouge. The 1934 set came with either 3 or 4 cars while the 1935 set had 5 cars. In 1936 a whistle was placed in the baggage car. This train required using a special 4 rail track to operate the whistle, however the car trucks with power pickups experienced problems traversing switches. The on board whistle was dropped in 1937 and the whistling billboard was created as a substitute.



American Flyer O gauge #4322 Streamline Passenger Set With #4322 Scale Atlantic 6-4-2 Loco and #1623 Cast Tender, 2 #1621G coaches and a #1622G Observation Car

In 1938, W.O. Coleman sold American (Chicago) Flyer to Alfred Carlton Gilbert, a former Olympic pole vaulter and Yale medical school graduate. Gilbert had made a name for himself in the toy industry in 1909 when he created and

manufactured Mysto Magic sets for youthful magicians. In 1913, his A. C. Gilbert Company also became the makers of Erector Set construction toys. The two toy magnates were just finishing shooting on Gilbert's game reserve in New Haven when Gilbert



American Flyer Lines Prewar O gauge #1680 Hudson Loco and #1623 Tender

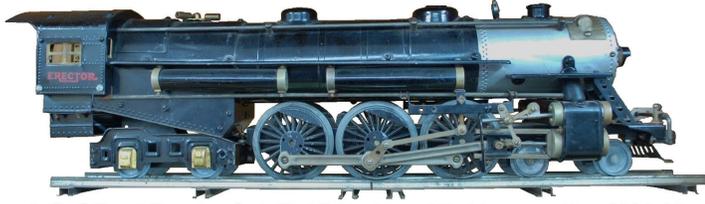
casually mentioned he was thinking about manufacturing toy trains. Gilbert had been making plans to enter the HO gauge train market. Instead, Coleman said he'd give his struggling American Flyer Co. to Gilbert in return for a share of the profits. Gilbert quickly agreed. Gilbert had just what the company needed – high standards and the business smarts to pull the company out of debt. Coleman worked out a potentially lucrative royalty deal with Gilbert, but he died in 1939 before he could reap any of the benefits.

Gilbert was a shrewd businessman. His accomplishments included not only winning an Olympic Gold medal in pole vaulting, but he was also the developer of the bamboo pole and new techniques in vaulting. He was also in charge of the U. S. Olympic team in the legendary 1936 games. He is credited with being one of the founders of Toy Manufacturers of USA, Inc. in 1916. He was also credited with being a performing magician, a medical doctor, a hunter, a dog breeder, home builder, and toy industry pioneer.



American Flyer 'O' gauge #3020 4-4-4 electric outline loco

A. C. Gilbert had previously included trains as part of the Erector Set line. In 1915, the 3rd year the famous Erector Sets were made, the manual included a design diagram for construction of a 4 car train that was comprised of a locomotive, tender, gondola and caboose. The design contained so many parts, that no single Erector Set was big enough to construct this train. Another pattern was published in 1926 that was for a locomotive and tender. This iteration was much more realistic looking, as Gilbert had developed parts for a boiler and boiler top. Later on during



A.C. Gilbert Erector Set #8 J-3 Hudson 4-6-4 Locomotive 1931-37

the Erector Classic period (1924-32), other rolling stock patterns were developed. Those included a more detailed gondola and caboose. In 1930 the Erector 20th Century #8 set was produced. This was a highly detailed, almost scale, non-powered #4 gauge model of a Hudson J-3 4-6-4 locomotive. At 28" long, 5¼" wide, 8" tall and weighing 9 lbs., this set was very large, and consisted of over 70 separate parts to assemble. Initially the detailed 19½" long

tender with New York Central markings to match was made available in a separate Erector Set. In 1931, a #8½ set was introduced that consisted of both the locomotive and tender. Gilbert also offered this set in a factory pre-assembled version. This static model could be outfitted with an electric motor capable of operating the driving wheels and valves. The classic Hudson Erector Sets were made through 1937, and are very rare and highly sought after by collectors of both Erector Sets and model trains today. They garner very high prices, regardless of their condition.

To A.C. Gilbert the American Flyer train was a real challenge. "Chicago Flyer" was a second rate company just hanging on. The trains were no better than the Lionel items being marketed at the same time. In 1938 AF sales were not quite at the million mark. As an attempt to improve the image, A. C. Gilbert decided in 1938 to release a line of HO gauge trains for the first time. The introductory American Flyer



American Flyer O ga. #3322 2-4-2 Steam Loco & #421 Sheet Metal Tender

HO line, was called "Tru-Model Trains." The emphasis was on producing scale models rather than toys. Great pains were taken to obtain blueprints of prototypes and achieve accuracy. The HO line did not even carry the American Flyer Lines logo. The HO line remained in place through 1963, but it was not promoted very highly. The A.C. Gilbert Co., in what little advertising they did for the HO line, emphasized the high amount of precision within their HO steam locomotives. A valiant effort was made to appeal to true scale modelers during the early HO years. Unfortunately, Gilbert did not have quite the impact they desired in the HO market during its first years of production. Gilbert had bought the name and nothing else when he got American Flyer. He planned to redesign the entire line from track to transformer.

Gilbert soon moved the company from Chicago to New Haven, Connecticut, closing American Flyer's Chicago plant. He then began to completely re-design the product line. The main thrust - technically and financially - went into redesigning the 'O' gauge trains. He pioneered the 3/16" to one foot (S-scale) variant of 'O' gauge in 1939, in which the locomotive and car bodies are scaled to 1:64 scale, making them approximately 25% smaller than the standard 1:48 for 'O' gauge while still running on the same type of three-rail 'O' gauge track. While this allowed the 'S'-scale trains to navigate tighter curves that would cause a conventional 'O' gauge train to derail or jump the track, Gilbert actually introduced a wider radius (20") track for added realism. This still resulted in curves that were much tighter than those that appear in the real world, but appeared much more realistic than the 13.5" radius (O27) gauge train cars that appeared "stubby" in length. The new 40" diameter circles allowed more track in the same space as a layout constructed with O72 (36" radius) curves. Focusing on realism, American Flyer put out this line of tiny, high-quality, and highly detailed die-cast train sets in 1939, led by the acclaimed Union Pacific 4-8-4 "Challenger" Model #806 and the #1680 Hudson. Ironically, these were both they designed to operate on 'O" gauge track, but were in reality 3/16 scale.



American Flyer 'O' gauge #431 Combo #429 Loco & #430 Tender



American Flyer Pre-war 'O' gauge #482 Log Car and #478 Box Car



American Flyer Pre-war 'O' gauge #478 Gondola and #484 Caboose

Lots of changes were introduced in 1939, including a new 3 digit numbering scheme. Gilbert also introduced its new remote directional control for locomotives in 1939. This reversing unit was operated via a remote control button, that when pushed, would interrupt the current by triggering a relay.

The engine would continue in the same direction even after the track current was interrupted, the only way to change the locomotive's direction was to push the remote control button. 'O' gauge locomotives that had the new reversing unit relay installed were identified by the number on the cab, or by noting that the loco does not have a reverse unit lever protruding through the boiler, but instead has a small pinhole in its place. Exceptions to this rule were the #569 Hudson and the #571 4-8-4, both catalogued in 1940. A nail or pin inserted into this hole when the current is on will change the direction of the loco without using the button. In 1939, Remote Directional Control came with the four offered Tru-Model sets and all the HO gauge sets.



American Flyer O ga. #436 Loco & Tender (#435 4-6-2 Loco & #433A Tender)



American Flyer Pre-war 'O' gauge 3/16" scale Passenger Set with #561 PRR 4-6-2 Pacific Loco, Tender, #494 Baggage, #496 Pullman and 2 #495 Coaches

The first accessory made of Lucite was introduced in 1939. This was the #587 block signal. The purpose of the Lucite was to make a smaller, better proportioned light. The bulb was located in the base of the unit and the light was reflected via the Lucite to simulate light emission. The electromagnetic crane was also new in 1939. Flyer beat Lionel by a year with this introduction. A station that would be around for several years, that is commonly called by collectors the Mystic Station or talking station, first appeared in 1939. The Mystic Station was sold as a plain illuminated passenger and freight station and also as a Koostikin talking passenger and freight station.

Model train hobbyists were even more taken with 1940's die-cast Pennsylvania K-5 locomotive and the Baltimore & Ohio #556 "Royal Blue" 4-6-2. American Flyer also produced inexpensive sheet-metal versions for consumers who didn't have such deep pockets. In anticipation of



American Flyer 3/16" Scale #556 The Royal Blue B&O Railroad 4-6-2 Streamlined Loco

America's involvement in the war, Gilbert opened the Gilbert Hall of Science in New York on September 17, 1941, to keep his company's name in the public consciousness. It was a brilliant marketing maneuver, showcasing American Flyer products in an elaborate miniature scene featuring 80-feet of train track surrounded by mountains, waterfalls, crossings, and towns. The hall also contained impressive displays of Erector sets and other Gilbert products like chemistry sets and microscopes, as well as sales offices. Soon, other cities had their own smaller versions of Gilbert Hall.

By 1941, Gilbert had discontinued the earlier designs and advertised his new American Flyer products as "Every train 3/16" scale from front end to rear end." Some boxes were labeled "3/16 scale" and others labeled "Tru-Model" As most prior trains from American Flyer and other manufacturers paid little attention to scale (proportional size mirroring the prototype), this new wrinkle made Gilbert American Flyer distinctive, as his cars at 1:64 were much closer in scale dimension to the prototypes on real railroads than the comparatively stubby 1:48 scale rolling stock that ran on 'O27' track. The new Choo-Choo Sounds were also introduced at this time. This was a motortized piston and cylinder installed in the locomotive tenders that made a chugging sound. These tenders were also available for separate sale. At the same time, Gilbert also released a line of die-cast HO scale trains. Total A.C. Gilbert sales for the year 1941 were above \$4 million.



American Flyer 'S' gauge #356 chrome Silver Bullet 4-6-2 streamlined loco and tender

During the war years, the A.C. Gilbert Company converted completely to war production. Hundreds of thousands of parachute flares were produced. Drawing on their experience with magic tricks, booby traps that caught the enemy

off guard and triggering mechanisms were also produced. The motors that controlled the trim tabs on the first American fighter planes came from the genius of the A.C. Gilbert Company. Designed in a record 72 hours from inception, these tiny motors were produced in thousands and became the prototype for the motor that powered more than a million and a half engines that pulled a string of freight or passenger cars around the family Christmas tree. For the war contribution and efforts, Gilbert won 4 Army-Navy "E" awards, an honor presented to companies during World War II for excellence in production of war equipment.

In 1946, after World War II, Gilbert discontinued manufacturing three-rail 'O' gauge trains entirely in favor of the slightly (25%) smaller and more realistic 'S' gauge and in the process eliminated the most unrealistic aspect of toy trains -- the center rail. His 3/16" American Flyer used two-rail track sized closer to 1:64 scale, or about seven-eighths inches between rails. The minimum radius for Gilbert's curves was 19 inches, which added to the look of "realism" missing with larger 'O' gauge trains running on curves with a smaller 13.5-inch radius. It was a new scale and a new gauge for toy trains. These new trains ran on realistic two rail track that was not rounded on top due to some antiquated extrusion process, but it was "T" shaped like real prototypical railroad track. The surface contact on this new track was greater and so was the pulling power. AF never needed "magna-traction" - it had real traction in its engines. American Flyer 'S' gauge was first unveiled at the March 1946 Toy Fair. The entire pre-war line of 3/16"-scaled locomotives and cars were converted to 'S' gauge, 2-rail operation. Plus a whole new line of passenger and freight cars went into production.



American Flyer #629 Missouri Pacific Cattle Car 1946-53



Gilbert American Flyer 'S' gauge #648 Service Car Circa 1952



American Flyer S gauge MKT Katy Box Car



American Flyer S #625 Shell Tanker Made 1946



American Flyer S gauge #633F G. Fox Box Car Made 1947

In 1946 the American Flyer #332 Union Pacific die-cast 'S' gauge locomotive was introduced. This Northern style locomotive had a 4-



American Flyer 'S' gauge #332 Union Pacific 4-8-4 Northern Type Steam Loco and 12 Wheel Oil Type Tender Made 1946 to 1949

8-4 wheel arrangement with 4 leading, 8 driving, and 4 trailing wheels. It was accompanied by a 12 wheel oil type tender. At 21½" long, it was the longest locomotive and tender combination ever made by American Flyer. It used a worm-drive Pull-mor motor, featured Red Glowing Smoke and choo-choo sound. Eventually, there would be 8 models of the Northern 4-8-4 produced by Gilbert. One modification made was the inclusion of a remote control steam Whistle. Although it carried the Union Pacific herald, it was patterned after engines employed by the Great Northern R.R. and New York City also had these but called them Niagaras. The American Flyer Northern (33x series) is modeled after a specific Union Pacific Locomotive. It would remain in the catalogue through 1957 with both AC and DC versions being made, and original selling prices in the range of \$35.

American Flyer Heavyweight Passenger Cars



American Flyer S gauge #654 Heavyweight Observation Car



American Flyer S gauge Heavyweight #524 Pullman



American Flyer S gauge Heavyweight #653 Combine Car



American Flyer Prewar O #494 Blue Sheet Metal Baggage Car



American Flyer S gauge #735 New Haven Heavyweight Pullman



American Flyer S gauge Worlds Greatest Circus Pullman

In 1947 a 2 train control system was introduced that facilitated operation of both AC and DC powered train motors on the same track. The A.C. Gilbert Co. maintained factories in New Haven and Branford Connecticut along with their famed Gilbert Hall of Science, in New York City. Other cities such as Chicago and Washington, D.C., also had Halls of Science. The New York Hall of Science had a massive train layout on the main floor along with displays of Erector and Science toys. On the second floor was another train layout not open to the public, it was reserved for salesmen, buyers and selected guests. Work shops and offices occupied the remaining floors. After World War II, A. C. Gilbert had lost some of his drive. A. C. Gilbert, Jr. came into the business and was given increasing responsibilities. However, Al Jr. did not have his father's drive and decisiveness. He could be influenced by others.



American Flyer 'S' gauge Atlantic freight set #490T, circa 1949 Including #300 steam 4-4-2 loco, Reading Lines tender, #640 hopper, #639 boxcar and #638 caboose.



American Flyer 'S' gauge Freight Set #5204W with #315 Pennsy Pacific 4-6-0 Smoking Steam Loco & Tender, #633 Baltimore & Ohio Boxcar, #625 Silver Gulf Tank Car, #632 Lehigh New England Hopper and #630 Reading Caboose Circa 1952



American Flyer 'S' gauge Santa Fe Streamliner Set from the 1950's

American Flyer #23772 Water Tower

The Flyer 'S' gauge line developed a devoted following of fans, who were drawn to the detail and realism of the trains. Lionel trains, however, had more bells and whistles—literally. Lionel's patented built-in whistle sounded just like a real steam engine's, while American Flyer fans had to content themselves with "whistling billboards" off to the side of the track. In 1949 the Flyer #314AW air whistle was released, but this technology was found to be in violation of a Lionel half-wave registered patent. Royalty costs were deemed to be too costly, and the product was withdrawn. In 1951 Flyer released its "Nathan air-chime" whistle, but operators complained of its wheezy, fake sound. 1950 saw the release of new diesel locomotives with plastic shells and a reverse loop relay, to deal with the track current issues presented when 2 rail loops were implemented. Also in 1950, Gilbert released a Circus Train. In order to further differentiate his product line from that of Lionel, Gilbert employed a bullet-shaped (link) coupler, but within a few years (1952), a newer, more realistic knuckle coupler design appeared. Flyer played up its improved realism and attention to details, with two-rail track and prototypical couplers, with Gilbert himself saying the design

was inspired by his son's dissatisfaction with other toy trains available on the market. "Kids want realism", he said. His trains, which were closely proportioned to their prototypes, also had more detail elements than most 'O' gauge competitors. 1952 also saw the introduction of red glow smoke, Pull-mor motors, and a dead man control on transformers. The company's rendition of the New Haven R.R.'s distinctive passenger coaches became so recognizable that the full size prototypes became known as "American Flyer cars." All steam outline engines were



American Flyer 'S' gauge #499 New Haven EP5 Rectifier

die cast to make them look real and to have the heft of the real thing. There were, in the company's prime, seven basic steam type engines. There was one basic diesel and one basic diesel switcher. 1955 saw the introduction of the Diesel-Roar sound unit. In 1957 there was a model of the New Haven R.R.'s EP-5 electric loco created and marketed. It cost \$100,000 for the engine design.

The Gilbert HO line went back into production after the war also. The primary difference being that trains that were previously produced in die-cast, were now plastic. In 1951, the HO line was idled due to the Korean War. No magnets were available for motors. It was not offered again until 1955 when a new revitalized line called Gilbert HO (instead of American Flyer Lines), consisting of ready-to-run trains made by [Gordon Varney's](#) Florida based company was released. Varney provided the A-B F-3 diesels which Gilbert started offering for the first time in 1955. And Varney created the first HO boxcar offerings that the Gilbert line ever carried. They also made freight cars, passenger cars and steam locomotives for Gilbert. Once again however, sales were not what Gilbert had expected them to be.

In 1957 the 3 digit numbering system that had been in use was replaced with a 5 digit system. This change was made because so many different products had been manufactured, that available catalog numbers for new products were running out. That year, 1957, saw the largest catalog of products ever offered by the A.C. Gilbert Company. On their 50th anniversary in 1959, Gilbert produced the famous Frontiersman Old Time passenger train in both 'S' gauge and HO. The 'S' gauge is fairly easy to find these days, but the HO version is not so easy to come across. Gilbert manufactured the 'S' version, but looked outside to [Tyco/Mantua](#) to manufacture the HO version. This set, which included a 4-4-0 wood burner type loco and two passenger cars is referred to as the 'Fifty Years of Progress' set and is highly sought after by collectors. Interestingly, the original model used to develop this set was one created by [E.P. Alexander](#) for the

U.S. Information Service. A copy of the model was on display in Alexander's museum in Yardley, PA and was seen by the sales manager for American Flyer trains. The sales manager thought it would be ideal to reproduce the train for their line and subsequently purchased the model. This was a significant event in that it was the first time one of the top toy train producers went outside of their own development organization to obtain a pilot model for a new product.



American Flyer S gauge MOW #944 Industrial Brownhoist Crane Car and #24546 Work & Boom Caboose



American Flyer S ga. Rio Grande Operating Cookie Box American Flyer S ga. Rocket Sled USAF Flat Car



American Flyer S #632 Cast Hopper American Flyer S #971 SP Lumber Loading Car



American Flyer S ga. #946 Erie Searchlight Car

Although the line was extensively redesigned, with interruptions during World War II and the Korean conflict, by the time the redesign was complete in the mid 1950's, electric train sales had already begun their long-term decline.

While popular, American Flyer was always the No.2 brand to Lionel in terms of market share at the high end of the market. Based on comparative sales records taken from Moody's Industrials of the A.C. Gilbert Company and Lionel Corporation between 1950 and 1960, the total train sales were about \$340 million. Of this, American Flyer is estimated to amount to \$120 million, or as much as 1/3 of the market. With [Marx](#) and a handful of other brands relegated to the low end of the market, Lionel and American Flyer shared premium status. A rivalry emerged between both companies' fans that continues today. Gilbert in its prime was one of the largest, best known and respected toy makers. It was also the largest manufacturer of fractional horsepower motors, holding the patent for enameled wire.



American Flyer S gauge #343 Nickel Plate Road 0-8-0 Steam Switcher



American Flyer 'S' gauge #20550 Frontiersman Set Circa 1960

Like Lionel, Gilbert was caught off guard by the popularity of HO scale trains that offered better realism at a lower price than its American Flyer 'S' gauge products. But the true reason for the demise of the toy train industry was the changing interests of American youth. A new technology called television was taking the place of many traditional hobbies, and the toy market was subject to the success of unpredictable

overnight fads like the Hula-Hoop and yo-yo. Kids were also eschewing their Lionel and American Flyer trains in favor of remote-control slot car racing sets.

Finally, the national phenomena of the discount store craze was ravaging toy train companies' traditional distribution network -- mom-and-pop hobby shops -- and sending them into financial oblivion. The discount stores demanded train sets at a low wholesale price and refused to offer the personal attention and repair services of the hobby shop. In order to get product on the shelves of discounters, toy train manufacturers cheapened their lines to get the price point down on sets -- which exacerbated the downward economic spiral. Longtime train collectors and hobbyists were offended at this newer production, dismissing the new products as "cheap junk", an accurate description.



**American Flyer S 4-4-0 Casey Jones Burlington Route made 1963**



**American Flyer S Tank Cars - #625 Shell (1948-50), #910 Gilbert Chemicals (1954), #24324 Hooker Chemicals (1959), #958 Mobilgas (1957), #912 Koppers Chemicals & Plastics (1955-57)**

A.C. Gilbert retained some control of the business until 1958, when illness forced him to minimize his activities. The company's problems were compounded by A.C. Gilbert's eventual death in 1961, at the age of 76. With the popularity of toy trains and construction toys declining, and without another successful product line to buoy the company's finances, Gilbert found itself in serious financial trouble. Finally, a controlling majority of the company stock (144,000 shares) was sold by the family to a holding company, the Wrather Group, in 1962, right after A.C.'s death. The Wrather group owned the Disneyland Hotel and Lassie Conglomerate (Jack Wrather was the producer of "Lassie"). A.C. Gilbert, Jr., continued to act as CEO. A primary reason the controlling interest in Gilbert was sold was because in 1961 Al, Jr., A.C.'s son had become aware that he himself had serious health problems. Within a few months, A.C. Jr. also passed away. It was the end of an era.



**American Flyer S gauge #740 Hand Car**



**American Flyer S ga. F9 Diesels First Released in 1961 - #21215 Union Pacific, #21206 Santa Fe, #21205 Boston & Maine and #L-2004 Rio Grande**



**American Flyer 'S' gauge #21922 & #21922-1 Missouri Pacific Alco PA diesel locos**

Under the new ownership, the A.C. Gilbert Co. continued to struggle, although the new owners took a more aggressive approach to advertising and marketing than when the firm was headed by the more conservative A.C. Gilbert. The company continued to manufacture trains of limited appeal for the next several years, thanks to the questionable quality. It also manufactured a wide variety of poorly-designed and poorly-conceived toys (dolls, racing sets, games) that sold slowly, if at all, and was nearly overwhelmed by store returns of defective merchandise. The company delivered many of its toy line products to discounters with a "100% sale guarantee." When the merchandise didn't sell through, it ended up back in Gilbert's warehouses. Gilbert took an especially-hard hit when a majority of a poorly-designed and manufactured red James Bond 007 slot car racing set flooded back as returns after component failures. Because of the number of returns, these sets are rare and extremely collectable, now selling for an average of \$1000 on eBay. The company never made money after 1961. It lost and it lost and it lost. Rumors had begun to circulate about the company's financial stability. Gilbert experienced five straight years of losses, including a \$9 million deficit for 1966 (up to \$17 million overall during the 5 year period). The company discontinued the American Flyer train line in 1966 and finally declared bankruptcy in 1967. All the Gilbert Halls of Science had been closed by 1966.



American Flyer S gauge #922 GAEX DF Box Car



American Flyer S ga. Missouri Pacific Box Car



American Flyer S ga. #803 SF The Chief



American Flyer #24065 New York Central Box Car



American Flyer Seaboard Coastline Box Car



American Flyer S Baltimore & Ohio Box Car



American Flyer Central of Georgia Box Car



American Flyer S ga. #913 Great Northern Box Car



American Flyer S ga. Seaboard Silver Meteor



American Flyer S ga. Toronto Hamilton & Buffalo



American Flyer S ga. Simon's Promotional Box Car



American Flyer S ga. M. St. L. Box Car



American Flyer S ga. Santa Fe Box Car



American Flyer S gauge #985 Boston & Maine



American Flyer S #24054 Santa Fe Box



American Flyer S #9707 RailBox Box Car

It was announced on January 30, 1967 that the A.C. Gilbert Company was getting ready to call it quits. Initially negotiations were undertaken with Gabriel Industries to buy the patents and toy lines. Gabriel Industries bought the Erector Set line from Wrather Corporation for no money, just a promise of future royalties. It became the Gilbert Division of Gabriel Industries, and was moved to Lancaster, PA. Erector Set products continued to be manufactured in the US through 1988. The Erector brand ownership eventually was acquired by the Japanese NikkoCorp., a maker of remote-control toy airplanes and cars. The toy is distributed in the U.S. by Brio, a public company based in Sweden that is known for wooden train sets.



American Flyer 'S' gauge 'The New Clipper' New Haven streamliner passenger set #20340 circa 1957

In May 1967, Lionel Corporation announced it had purchased the American Flyer name and tooling even though it was teetering on the brink of financial failure itself. A May 29, 1967 story in The Wall Street Journal made light of the deal, stating, "Two of the best-known railroads in the nation are merging and the Interstate Commerce Commission couldn't care less". Former Lionel treasurer Robert A. Stein said Lionel did not initiate the deal; both companies had farmed out their accounts receivable departments to Arthur Heller & Co., who initiated the transaction. While various accounts published over the years valued the deal at \$150,000, Stein's recollection was that Lionel simply liquidated \$300,000-\$400,000 worth of American Flyer inventory for Heller in exchange for the tooling, which, by some accounts, sat unused and neglected in a parking lot for some period of time. Lionel Corporation never manufactured American Flyer trains.



American Flyer Texas & Pacific Baldwin Switcher



American Flyer S ga. #24633 Bay Window Caboose



American Flyer S ga. New Haven Box Car American Flyer S Bangor and Aroostook American Flyer S Texas & Pacific Gondola

Within two years, Lionel Corp. was bankrupt itself and had sold its train lines to General Mills, including the unused American Flyer tooling. In 1979, General Mills' Lionel division started to reissue Flyer products under that name employing a mix of previously unused railroad heralds and traditional Gilbert American Flyer designs.



American Flyer #355 Northwestern RR Baldwin

In 1984, General Mills sold the Lionel Co. to Kenner, a toy manufacturer. One year later, the company was sold to Richard Kughn, a Detroit toy train collector

who made his fortune selling and developing real estate. For over a decade, Kughn moved both the Lionel and American Flyer brands forward, getting a shot of momentum from a resurgence in the toy train hobby in the early 1990's. In 1996, Kughn sold a majority interest to Wellspring Partners LLD, a Chicago-based national turnaround firm headed by Martin Davis. Kughn retained a small percentage, and rock star Neil Young, another toy train buff, also became a minor investor. Young's contributions include designing a sound system for trains (RailSounds) in 1992, as well as the Trainmaster Command Control (TMCC), a unique radio control system. The new company is known as Lionel, LLC.



American Flyer S ga. Northern Pacific Reefer American Flyer S #29425 BAR Reefer American Flyer S #29425 BAR Reefer



American Flyer S gauge #989 C&NW Reefer American Flyer S ga. Illinois Central Reefer



American Flyer S ga. by Lionel Baltimore & Ohio Chessie System GP20 Circa 1984

The American Flyer brand name survives today under the guidance of Lionel, LLC, although Lionel's advertising and marketing emphasis tends to remain skewed toward the 'O' and 'O27' gauge product lines. True American Flyer aficionados claim this narrow focus is a conflict of interest and prevents the growth of 'S' gauge among new train operators. Most of the initial American Flyer-branded product sold by Lionel, LLC consisted of reissues of 1950's designs utilizing refurbished old Gilbert tooling, decorated in traditional road names and paint schemes used by Gilbert, as well as an influx of some of today's modern railroad heralds. For a long time, American Flyer devotees were concerned that Lionel was not creating Flyer products that appealed to the toy train masses, but rather, focused on a small market of Flyer collectors. Lionel has publicly stated that they are committed to the American Flyer product line.



American Flyer S Mounds Ventilated Box Car



American Flyer S Borden's Milk Flat



American Flyer S Bakers Chocolate Tanker



American Flyer S #24058 Post Cereal Box Car

Each year since 2002 Lionel has in-fact increased the number of American Flyer offerings, a sign the demand for 3/16" 'S' gauge is growing. In late 2004, Lionel debuted a new highly-detailed, 2-8-2 Mikado steam locomotive in multiple road names. Utilizing all new tooling and issued under the American Flyer name, the Mike was the first original American Flyer steam locomotive design since the late 1950's. It was touted by Lionel as "an engineering marvel which even brass collectors can admire". It came complete with TMCC (Lionel's proprietary wireless remote control technology) and a sound chip/system (TrainSounds). The Mikados proved to be a hot seller and their success has led to similar product issues. In late 2006, Lionel began delivering an updated remake of AF's largest steam locomotive, the famous 4-8-4 Northern, as well as a gray Union Pacific Northern with smoke deflectors (elephant ears). Both of these new versions were equipped with digital sounds. The 2006 Lionel Catalogue One included over thirty different products in 'S' gauge American Flyer. In 2006 and 2007 came a new high-detail Pacific (4-6-2) with both TMCC capability and RailSounds. Additionally, Lionel released in 2006 the first newly tooled passenger fleet. These heavyweight style cars were neither a refashioning of older Flyer designs nor a repurposing of Lionel 'O27' rolling stock (as some earlier Lionel/Flyer freight cars had been.) Lionel's investment in new tooling began to be taken among 'S'-scalers as a sign of real commitment by the manufacturer to their market segment, and as an optimistic future view for the brand, the gauge and the hobby itself. Over the past few years, Lionel LLC has released scale SD70ACe and U33C diesels and in 2011 a 4-6-6-4 Challenger steam outline loco was issued. In 2012, an American Flyer 2-8-8-2 Y-3 class detailed locomotive was manufactured based on the 1919 prototype that ran on the Norfolk & Western R.R.



American Flyer S gauge New York Central 2-8-2 Mikado by Lionel

As far as the classic American Flyer wide gauge and 'O' gauge trains of the 1920's and 30's, reproductions have been made and sold over the years by the likes of [McCoy Manufacturing](#), [Richart](#), [Sirus-Varney](#), and [MTH](#).



American Flyer S ga. #372 Union Pacific GP7 diesel Built by Gilbert



American Flyer 'S' gauge #377 Texas & Pacific GP-7 power diesel unit



American Flyer Boston & Maine GP-7 By Lionel Circa 1984



American Flyer 'S' gauge #371 GM GP-7 Diesel Loco



American Flyer #6-48013 Conrail GP7 Diesel Made 1995



American Flyer #48033 Rock Island GP-7 Diesel Made 2002

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