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Lionel News and Views

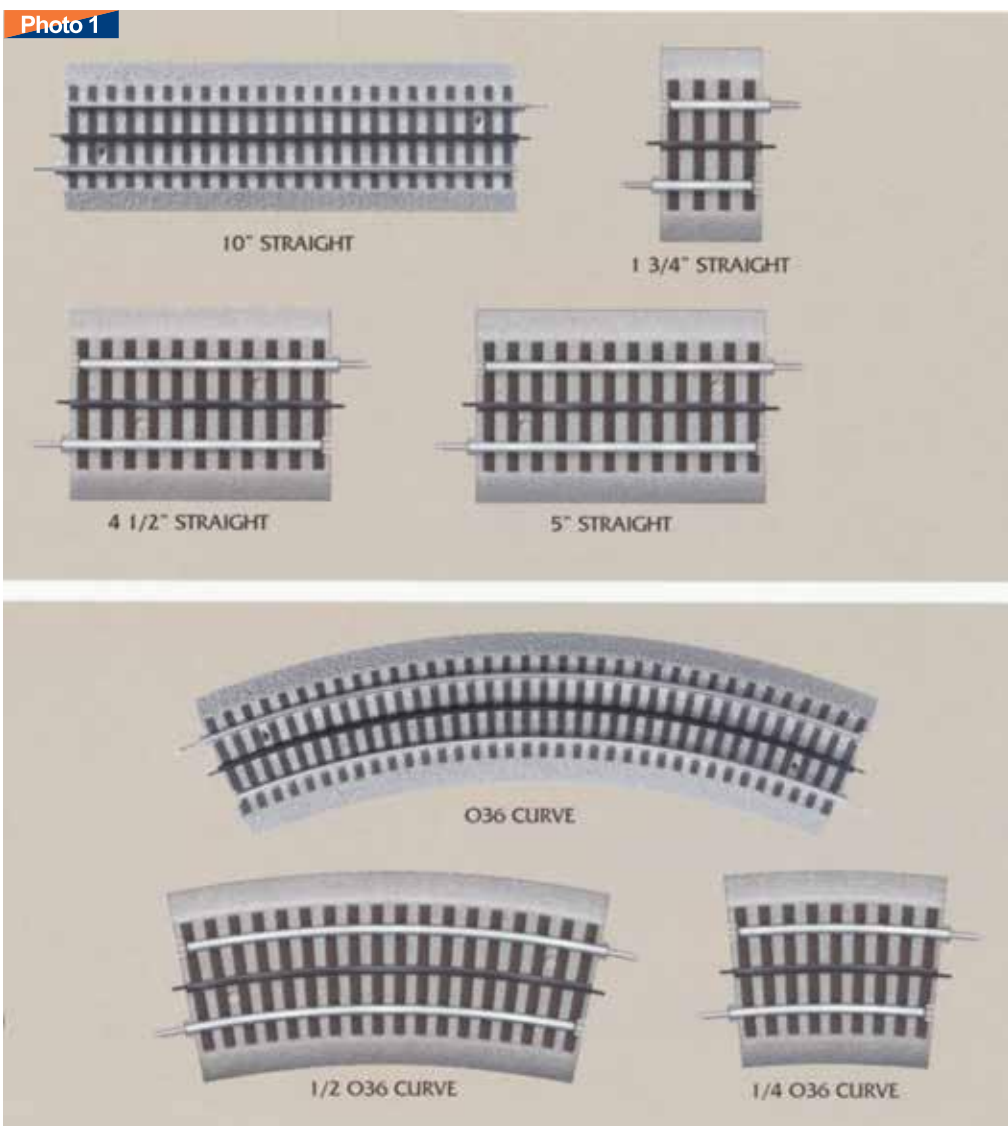
New Possibilities

Lionel's 2023 catalog features a new item that I'm sure many have overlooked. With a retail price under \$5, it's easy to miss. This new item appears on page 219 of the digital version of Lionel's 2023 Volume 1 catalog – a three-inch section of FasTrack®.

Lionel modernized its three-rail track system and introduced FasTrack in its 2003 catalog. Though initially designed for its starter train sets, FasTrack quickly became extremely popular and over the past 20 years Lionel has introduced many new FasTrack items to expand the appeal of FasTrack well beyond the starter set.

When initially introduced in the 2003 Volume 1 catalog, FasTrack featured a blackened center rail. **Photo 1.** Some of the early sets that year did come with the blackened center rail. Apparently, the black oxide treatment of the center rail affected the electrical conductivity, and it was decided to eliminate that feature. By the time the 2003 Volume 2 catalog arrived, the black center rail was still shown in the set photos, but eliminated in the track section. Frankly, the silver center rail on the gray roadbed is less conspicuous than was the black rail, and it was certainly better to have the optimum electrical conductivity. Lionel introduced FasTrack by offering four different lengths of straight sections – 10, 5, 4 1/2 and 1 3/4 inches – and three lengths of O36 curves. Several features of the track were borrowed from Lionel's postwar Super O track. The radius of 18 inches, or 36 inch diameter, and the method of locking the sections together are reminiscent of Super O. Adding to Super O's higher cost per section was the fact that it took 12 sections to make a 36 inch circle. Super O straight track at only nine inches, was an inch shorter than a section of O gauge tubular track. FasTrack curves are longer, and a 36 inch circle can be made with only eight sections of track. This is similar to O gauge tubular track. Curves were initially offered in half and quarter length sections. In addition to regular track sections, an uncoupling track, 90 degree crossing, and manual left and right switch tracks were offered. Both O27 and O gauge tubular track remained available and in the catalog.

As early as 2004, there were significant additions to the line. By now it was apparent that there was a great deal of interest in FasTrack well beyond the starter set level. Lionel added to the line with O48, O60, O72 and O72 half curves. A 30-inch-long straight section was also offered. Remote control switches were now available in O36 and O72. There was even an O72 remote control wye switch. Two new crossing sections, a 45 degree and a 22 1/2 degree were added. Also new was an earthen bumper section, a lighted bumper section



and a ten-inch straight section with a built-in grade crossing. An important addition was a five-inch transition track that allowed a direct connection from FasTrack to O gauge tubular track. A plastic railer was also introduced allowing a quick and easy way to place a car on the tracks.

2005 brought more additions to the line. An operating track section with five rails that allowed the operation of cars using the unload feature was introduced. An O84 section of curved track was new. A new five-inch block section that allowed connections between all three rails to be made or broken was added to the line. New FasTrack accessories included an operating grade crossing with flashers and graduated and elevated trestles made to accommodate FasTrack and a die-cast girder bridge. The line of switch tracks was expanded to include remote control O60 switches. Interestingly, the 22 1/2 degree crossing was not shown in the 2005 catalogs.

The 22 1/2 degree crossing returned in the 2006 catalogs and a new grade crossing with gates and flashers was offered. For 2007, Lionel added two short 1 3/8-inch straight sections – one with roadbed and one without. The sections without roadbed are needed with certain connections between two switch tracks. New O48

Lionel FasTrack Table of Lengths

Using the least number of sections for each length

Length	1 3/8	1 3/4	3	4 1/2	5	10	Pieces
1 3/8	1						1
1 3/4		1					1
2 3/4	2						2
3			1				1
3 1/8	1	1					2
3 1/2		2					2
4 1/8	3						3
4 3/8	1		1				2
4 1/2				1			1
4 3/4		1	1				2
4 7/8	1	2					3
5					1		1
5 1/4		3					3
5 1/2	4						4
5 3/4	2		1				3
5 7/8	1			1			2
6			2				2
6 1/8	1	1	1				3
6 1/4		1		1			2
6 3/8	1				1		2
6 1/2		2	1				3
6 5/8	1	3					4
6 3/4		1			1		2
6 7/8	5						5
7		4					4
7 1/8	3		1				4
7 1/4	2			1			3
7 3/8	1		2				3
7 1/2			1	1			2
7 5/8	1	1		1			3
7 3/4	2				1		3
7 7/8	1	2	1				4
8		2		1			3
8 1/8	1	1			1		3
8 1/4		3	1				4
8 3/8	1	4					5
8 1/2		2			1		3

8 5/8	3			1			4
8 3/4	2		2				4
8 7/8	1	2	1				4
9				2			2
9 1/8	3				1		4
9 1/4		1	1	1			3
9 3/8	1	2		1			4
9 1/2				1	1		2
9 5/8	1	3	1				5
9 3/4		1	1		1		3
9 7/8	1	2			1		4
10						1	1
10 1/8	3		2				5
10 1/4		3				1	4
10 3/8	1			2			3
10 1/2			2		1		3
10 5/8	1	1	1	1			4
10 3/4		1		2			3
10 7/8	1			1	1		3
11			2		1		3
11 1/8	1	3		1			5
11 1/4		1		1	1		3
11 3/8	1					1	2
11 1/2		4		1			5
11 5/8	1	3			1		5
11 3/4		1				1	2
11 7/8	1		2	1			4
12			1	2			3
12 1/8	1	1		2			4
12 1/4	2			1	1		4
12 3/8	1		2		1		4
12 1/2		2		2			4
12 5/8	1	1		1	1		4
12 3/4	2					1	3
12 7/8	1	4		1			6
13		2		1	1		4
13 1/8	1	1				1	3
13 1/4	2		2	1			5
13 3/8	1		1	2			4
13 1/2		2				1	3
13 5/8	3			1	1		5

remote control switches were also added to the FasTrack line.

For 2009, O48 half curved and quarter curved sections were added. The biggest news was the availability of Command Control Switches in all of the radii. These new switches were sold in addition to the regular remote control switches.

Lionel introduced the FasTrack system to the American Flyer line in 2011 with straights and curves and the promise of more track and switches to come. In 2012, Lionel added 20-inch radius remote control switches, a half straight and a transition track to the Flyer line of FasTrack.

A new O31 curved track added in 2013 allowed compatibility with layouts designed for O gauge tubular track. The Flyer FasTrack line expanded with the addition of a 30-inch straight section, a half curve section and a wide 27-inch radius, or 54-inch diameter curve. The 2014 Flyer catalog added a half section of the wide radius curve.

Lionel's 2014 Track and Power catalog adds a new LionChief Terminal track that allows the LionChief wall pack power supplies to connect directly to the track. Two new curved sections are also added. A quarter O31 curve and an O96 curve. While making a full O96 curve would require at least an eight-foot-wide table, these sections are also handy for getting specific distances between two

lines to match accessories such as the 164 log loader and the 97 coal loader where access is needed on both sides of the accessory. New Remote/Command Control switches were available in O31 through O72 switches. The Remote/Command switches combined the functions of the remote and the command switches and would eventually replace them. Lionel's Sensor Track was introduced this year. The Sensor Track was equipped with an infra-red receiver that could communicate with LEGACY[®] locomotives equipped with an infra-red transmitter, allowing unique programmable control of your loco. This catalog also introduced the Plug-N-Play Track and Power system. The name was later changed to Plug-Expand-Play. This new system of attaching accessories and power continued to add special sections of FasTrack exclusively for its use. A clear turning point for Lionel was a banner above the O27 and O gauge tubular track listings – Limited Items! Get Yours Today! Lionel was beginning to phase out its production of both O and O27 tubular track. O gauge tubular switches were no longer listed in the catalog.

The 2016-17 Track and Power catalog introduced a special Sensor Track section that would connect to O gauge tubular track. The 2018 catalog introduced FasTrack sections in Orange to expand its Hot Wheels set and in white for Christmas layouts. The 2019

13 3/4		1	1	2			4
13 7/8	1	2		2			5
14				2	1		3
14 1/8	3					1	4
14 1/4		3		2			5
14 3/8	1	2		1	1		5
14 1/2				1		1	2
14 5/8	1	5		1			7
14 3/4		1	1			1	3
14 7/8	1			3			4
14 7/8	1	2				1	4
15					1	1	2
15 1/8	1	1	1	2			5
15 1/4		1		3			4
15 1/4		3				1	4
15 3/8	1			2	1		4
15 1/2			2	1	1		4
15 5/8	1	3		2			6
15 3/4		1		2	1		4
15 7/8	1			1		1	3
16		2	1	1	1		5
16 1/8	1	1	1			1	4
16 1/4		1		1		1	3
16 3/8	1				1	1	3
16 1/2		2	1			1	4
16 5/8	1	1		3			5
16 5/8	1	3				1	5
16 3/4		1			1	1	3
16 7/8	1		2	1	1		5
17		4				1	5
17 1/8	1	1		2	1		5
17 1/4	2			1		1	4
17 3/8	1		2			1	4
17 1/2			1	1		1	3
17 5/8	1	1	1	1		1	4
17 3/4	2				1	1	4
17 7/8	1	2	1			1	5
18			1		1	1	3
18 1/8	1	1			1	1	4
18 1/4		1	1	3			5
18 3/8	1		1	2	1		5

18 3/8	1	4				1	6
18 1/2				3	1		4
18 1/2		2			1	1	4
18 5/8	3			1		1	5
18 3/4		1	1	2	1		5
18 3/4		5				1	6
18 7/8	1		1	1		1	4
19				2		1	3
19 1/8	3				1	1	5
19 1/4		1	1	1		1	4
19 3/8	1			4			5
19 3/8	1	2		1		1	5
19 1/2				1	1	1	3
19 5/8	1	3	1			1	6
19 3/4		1		4			5
19 3/4		3		1		1	5
19 7/8	1			3	1		5
19 7/8	1	2			1	1	5
20						2	2



Using these different sections there are numerous combinations to precisely fit almost any circumstance. In this article, we have compiled a list of lengths and the combination of track sections required to make them. These lengths are provided in 1/8-inch increments, from 1 3/8 inches to 20 inches. The table lists the most efficient combination, that is one using the least number of sections to achieve each length. In some cases, there is more than one configuration using the same number of pieces and both have been listed.

With the new three-inch section, all lengths above 5 5/8 inches are possible in 1/8-inch increments. In almost all cases, a gap of less than 1/8 inch can be closed. But suppose you have a gap of 3 3/4 inches. You cannot assemble a section of that length, but by simply removing a section of straight track and adding that dimension to the 3 3/4 inch gap, you'll have a length that can be found in the table. In the example above, if you removed a 10-inch straight section, you would have a gap of 13 3/4 inches, and any gap over 5 5/8 inches in 1/8-inch increments can be found in the table. In the same example, you could have removed a 5-inch section. That would leave a gap of 8 3/4 which can be found in the table. If you're planning a layout with FasTrack, this chart will certainly be very handy.

Special thanks to member Glenn Patsch whose proficiency in Excel assured accuracy and completeness in compiling this table. 🚂

Photograph by Bill Schmeelk

catalog featured a new Trolley Announcement Track. This 15-inch section of track allowed you to automatically stop your trolley and play back up to three different messages you could record. This would be the last catalog to offer the traditional tubular track. In 2020 Lionel introduced lighted FasTrack.

That brings us to 2023 – FasTrack's 20th Anniversary. The FasTrack line has been expanded to allow even the most sophisticated layout. One feature of FasTrack is that it must be assembled in a rather precise manner. FasTrack does not have the flexibility that tubular track had to fill gaps and must be assembled within precise dimensions. To accommodate this, Lionel has produced straight and curved sections in a variety of lengths. In the October 2007 issue of *The Lion Roars*, we published a table of lengths possible with FasTrack and the sections required to achieve specific lengths. Lionel, in its latest catalog has introduced a new three-inch section of FasTrack – allowing more possibilities without cutting track. With its recent introduction of this new three-inch section, there are now seven different lengths of straight track available.

- 1 3/8 inch
- 1 3/4 inch
- 3 inch
- 4 1/2 inch
- 5 inch
- 10 inch
- 30 inch