

The History of LCCA Convention Cars - Part I

By BILL BUTTON, #3835

Editor's Note: Each issue will cover several of the club's convention cars in order of issuance by the LCCA.



It all had to start somewhere, as does everything else and continue to grow as time passes on. LCCA Convention Cars are no exception. How did they come about? Why were they developed? This series of articles will try to answer these and many other questions that members have wondered about over the years. Also covered is the concept of the commemorative issues of LCCA Convention Cars with some background on the production of some cars and their prototype.

When the LCCA was founded by

James D. Gates, CM#1, of Des Moines, Iowa, it was his idea that collectors and operators of Lionel Trains had long needed an organization dedicated solely to their hobby and exclusively for the Lionel enthusiast. Since a convention was going to be held each year, why not have a souvenir that would be a remembrance of each of these yearly occasions? This was discussed at the first convention in 1971. Of course, it was too late for that year, so the officers planned the first commemorative issue for the

following year's convention. As the next year rolled around, there still was no policy laid out as to what the convention car souvenir would be. As it turned out, the 9701 black Baltimore & Ohio Double Door Boxcar became the first LCCA Convention Car. The 9701 was an uncataloged item to begin with and therefore not everyone could get one. Thus, it became a true unique souvenir.

Somehow, after that second convention, the wheels started turning. Why not make LCCA

Convention Cars based on prototypes of the area hosting the convention, unlike anything the other train organizations were doing? The cars were offered with a limit of two cars per member. This way, members could purchase 2 cars, not only to help raise funds for the club, but also to give the member a chance to possibly sell the second as its value increased. This idea just seemed to catch on as the club grew. Production of each year's cars kept growing, as did our membership.

Not all members order convention cars. Some members collect only certain areas of Lionel production. Others only purchase convention cars if they attend that year's convention. It got to the point that as the club was growing, more convention cars were being ordered than what the membership was ordering. With other clubs convention cars offered and various limited specials, sales were starting to decline. Production had to be reduced each year to find that magic number of cars that would sell out by convention time. Current club policy is to order only enough cars to cover those pre-ordered by the membership prior to the convention.

In the first decade train set of the LCCA Convention Cars, only one body style was repeated. True, boxcars are the most popular body style and the main workhorse of the railroads, but indeed it is a tribute to have a wide variety of body styles for convention cars. Some cars are more popular than others, perhaps due to its colors, roadname, or body style. In some areas of the country, a convention host does not have much of a selection to choose from, while in other areas there are many choices. The officers of the club usually go along with the convention host's recommendation. The club president must then negotiate with Lionel over the available body style, graphics and price. There is usually a second convention car alternative in case Lionel cannot produce the first choice.

In the early years, the treasurer handled the convention car program. He also would rubber stamp the member's membership number on the cars ordered by that member. This was done with the first four years' convention cars. This

practice had to be stopped as the club was growing and the treasurer's office was still handling the convention car program for the next few years. At this point in the club's history, a Convention Car Agent was appointed each year to over-see the program. For the last four years it has become part of the convention committees' responsibility to handle the distribution of the cars.

The LCCA Convention Car program has been very successful, both in giving its members some truly unique cars that Lionel has not put into their regular production line and to provide the club a small profit.

The 1989 and 1990 convention cars are in the works along with a 1990 steam engine to complete our second decade train set of LCCA Convention Cars. The LCCA has issued the best convention cars there are!!! As you read the information about each car, please keep in mind that I did not refer to prices when discussing a car's availability. They vary in different parts of the country and not everyone places the same value on them.

9701 Baltimore & Ohio Double Door Boxcar

There seems to be a bit of controversy over this car as to its production and introduction into the LCCA Convention Car family. As Fundimensions began their Famous Name Collector Series in 1970, they started them with the 9200 series of numbers - the first generation of cousins from the old 6464 boxcars.

In 1971, a 9210 Baltimore & Ohio black double door boxcar was produced as well as a 9250 Waterpox 3 dome tank car, thus interrupting the "Famous Name" intent of the 9200 series. In 1972, they began the 9700 series, with one of the cars being a 9701 Baltimore & Ohio double door boxcar painted silver and molded from grey plastic. There were left-over blank black bodies (9210) in the factory and since the heat stamping was already set up, it was decided to make use of these. I have heard throughout the years that 900 to 1200 black 9701's were made. Lionel had plans to put the black 9701 in a set, since there weren't enough to package as a single sales item. The

Detroit-Toledo Chapter TCA purchased all of what there was and planned to sell them to their members to raise funds.

Prior to this time, the LCCA was looking for a convention car souvenir for the up-coming convention in Kansas City, Missouri, and offered to purchase some from the TCA chapter. Remember this car was an uncataloged item. The LCCA purchased around 260 to 265 of the cars. All of the LCCA Cars had a white rubber-stamped "LCCA Convention Car" on the frame. Only about 110 of these cars were decaled on both sides with the letters saying "L C C of A K C Mo 1972", above the Baltimore & Ohio heat stamping on the body. These cars were decaled in a motel room the night before the convention in Kansas City. The balance of cars not having the decals were shipped out to members who did not attend the convention but had ordered it. A few members who were to pick up their decaled convention car were told that after the convention it would be mailed to them with the decals on the car. It was found that there were no more decals of the same type, as they were a discontinued item. Rather than create a variation of the 9701 with different decals, none were used. Some of these cars were later faked by the rubber-stamping on the frame. If you are considering a purchase of this car without decals, make sure you have someone assist you who knows the difference between the original and fake stamping, most likely a person who is an early member of the club.

The 9701 is molded in black plastic painted black and is a 6468 body style VII with 9200 series end plate and Lionel-MPC logo on the other end plate. The doors are black plastic painted black and the door guides are metal. The car sits on a type I frame with plastic Symington-Wayne trucks. All of the lettering is white and the car has a built date of 2-72. For comparison, the silver painted body of the 9701 also has a built date of 2-72 but the black 9210 has a built date of 1-72.

This LCCA Convention Car goes for the highest premium, especially if it is one of the decaled cars from the Kansas City Convention.

Bill Button