

A GG-1 Story

by Neal J. Conway, Jr. 81-16707

It is, by no means, the best looking GG-1. It is the common 2332 with one motor and its stripes and lettering have been, as usual, defaced by time and thumbs. A previous owner removed the E-unit (which is fine with me because I think old E-units are a pain in the caboose!) but, I am as delighted with this locomotive as I was on the day, many years ago, that I got it.

The acquisition of this old Lionel GG-1 concluded a long and often disappointing search made all the more painful by the intense desire and impatience of childhood. It was the one "toy" I wanted more than any other, not just for one year but for three years. I have never since desired to own a particular train as much nor have I had as much difficulty obtaining one as I did that 2332.

Of course, there were many other kids who would have given their throttle arms for a Lionel GG-1 but, there was a big difference between them and me. I was not alive in 1947 or 1956 nor was I cognizant of trains in the early 1960s when the Corporation last made GG-1s. I was a kid in the late 1960s, a time when all the other kids wanted

G.I. Joes (I couldn't have cared less about a doll that looks like Bob Vila in fatigues!).

But, the other kids didn't have train-collecting fathers who frequently took them to Washington, D.C.'s Union Station to watch the trains. Exploring this convergence of four railroads in the pre-Amtrak days was like stepping into the pages of a Lionel catalog. One could see Budd Cars, B&O, and Southern F-type diesels and, at this southern terminus of the Pennsylvania Railroad, plenty of GG-1s. It was at Union Station in 1953 that a GG-1-pulled passenger train lost its brakes, overshot the end of the track and fell through the station floor.

On one of these visits to Union Station, I fell in love with the GG-1. Perhaps it was the time around 1965 that my parents took me to see the circus. I don't remember the circus at all but, I remember spotting three or four GG-1s with solid-stripe and five-stripe paint schemes parked on the bridge next to the Coliseum.

At about the same time I became enamored of the prototype, I discovered, probably by looking at the Lionel catalogs that my dad had been accumulating since the early '50s, that the GG-1

also existed in toy form. I had to have what I called "The Pennsylvania Electric" and I made my desire known to my parents but, getting hold of one, as I said at the outset, proved to be very difficult.

There were several Lionel GG-1s for sale at the first T.C.A. meet Dad and I attended on the outskirts of Baltimore in 1966. None of them were to be mine, however. Perhaps my dad thought they were too expensive or, never having bought a secondhand postwar engine before, he thought we could probably get a brand new one somewhere.

Eventually, we discovered that Lionel had not manufactured the GG-1 in several years and in 1967, it looked as if Lionel wasn't going to make anything anymore. A year later, when it appeared that the manufacture of Lionel trains would resume again, Dad said (quite prophetically, as it turned out!), "Be patient. Lionel will make the GG-1 again."

I was flirting with "HO" gauge at the time and for my seventh birthday, Dad bought me an A.H.M. GG-1 which I still have and which is probably a collector's item in its own right but, this little, long, lithe scale model wasn't like Lionel's GG-1. Who could tell when Lionel would make the GG-1 again? I would settle for a used one.

In March of 1968, the W.B.&A. Chapter Meet was held in Pikesville, Maryland, at the National Guard Armory, a place which probably still smells of musty train boxes and old grease. I managed to save up seventeen dollars for the event in the hope of getting a used GG-1 but, seventeen dollars was, of course, far below the asking prices of GG-1s. Dad and I were shocked when the seller of a 2360 declared his engine to be a bargain at seventy-five dollars. After all, Dad was getting Standard gauge sets for thirty-five to fifty dollars apiece. Some of you newer collectors may not believe these 1968 prices but, then, trains were selling for about one tenth and less of what



they sell for now.

For fifteen dollars, I did get a secondary object of desire: a 624 C&O switcher. The remaining two dollars went for a 6414 Auto Loader bearing two Lionel cars and two Hubley cars.

In those days, it was no trouble for me to save train money for an entire year. By the time the Pikesville meet of March, 1969, rolled around, I had, thanks to relatives who always remembered my birthdays and Christmases, managed to accumulate a small fortune: forty dollars!

I can't remember how long Dad and I were at the meet and how many GG-1s priced beyond my capital we saw before I spotted "It". It was sitting on shelving that rose above its seller's table, price tag turned from view. I rushed toward it and reached out a tremulous hand to turn the tag. I must have been in a kind of feverish daze

because it took a few seconds for my mind to interpret the figure on that little, white tag. The asking price of this old, green 2332, owned by a husband and wife who quickly sensed that before them was a little boy who really wanted a GG-1, was forty dollars!

Off to the test track Dad and I bore this golden-striped fleece. Affordable it may have been but, did this locomotive run? Trains to us at that time were not so much collector's items as they were operating items. If this GG-1 didn't run, Dad would try to persuade me not to buy it and I would try to persuade him why I should buy it: Argument #1 being, "I've been looking for this thing half my life!"

To shorten a story that is probably already too long, the locomotive ran fine but, as we returned to the couple's table to close the deal, Dad whispered, "Why don't you ask them if they'll

take thirty-five for it?"

Being innocent of train meet bargaining, I thought this was a crazy thing to do. What if the man and woman were insulted by the offer? They might get mad and refuse to sell me the GG-1! I wanted to give them my forty dollars and split!

Dad insisted. I made the offer and it was accepted with an unexpected smile. After three years, I finally became the owner of a Lionel GG-1.

A few years later, Dad and I got another GG-1 and a few years after that, when the real GG-1s were being taken out of service after four decades, we found ourselves talking to an engineer who had piloted GG-1s between Washington and New York.

"We have two GG-1s in our basement," my dad told him. He responded, "They take up a heluva lot of room, don't they?"

"A GG-1 Story" by Neal J. Conway was first published in the July, 1989 issue of *The Train collectors Quarterly*. Neal Conway is the author of *Tales From Old Bethesda* and lives in Washington, DC. See nealjconway.com. Subject: Neal Conway reminisces on his boyhood quest for a favorite Lionel train engine: the 2332 GG-1.