

L & L MODEL TRAIN CO.

FAQ'S (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS!)

FIRST: There **are** no silly questions! Even experienced model train collectors and operators have questions about our service. Here we will do our best to answer your inquiries, and hopefully, save you a phone call. Following below are the most “frequently asked questions” we get regarding our services.

1. Should I restore my trains? I heard that will kill the value!

A. This is, without a doubt, the most common question put to us during our many years of restoring LIONEL trains. While the short answer is, ‘yes, you should definitely restore your trains if they need restoration’, the fact is, most trains that are brought into us REALLY DO NEED restoration. Therefore, their collectible value has been seriously compromised already, so restoration will only help bring back, at least some of its value. While a restored train or, for that matter, a restored antique of any kind will never command the value of an Exc+ or LN original, you should bear in mind that this only applies to an original item that is in BETTER THAN EXCELLENT ORIGINAL CONDITION. If you are considering restoring your trains, chances are they’re pretty beat-up – and, unfortunately, no longer have any significant collectible value in that condition.

****By the way, “better than excellent condition” means the item is in above-average shape, with no rust, dings, cracks, and warping, no battery acid damage, and only tiny minute paint flaws and at worst, slight, very unobtrusive scratches. A beat up, scratched, dented and/or chipped item is NOT ‘excellent’ condition –not even close!*

2. Will I get my same shells back that I send in, even if I only want the bodies restored?

A. This is the second most- asked question of us, particularly when referring to F-3 diesel bodies. We mark each shell with a code on the inside; to identify it later, as, once body shells are stripped of paint, there is no way of telling one from another- if they are of the same year and vintage. There is no “advantage” for us to swap shells with you, other than if we feel we have one that is in better condition for you than the one you sent in which hopefully, will result a better overall restoration – for you!.

3. Can you re-paint my entire shell, but leave the hot-stamped lettering indentation and just “fill it in” with screen printing -without losing the indentation of the plastic?

A. No, and no. Once your shell is stripped of its original paint, all the previous plastic distortion from the heat stamping must be sanded smooth in order to re-apply the lettering correctly. The same theorem applies to die cast-metal shells. Silk screens “stretch” during the printing process and, no matter how perfect the image is compared to the original, even the slightest deviation of 1/64th of an inch or even less will result in a poor, blurry job. Besides, the finished result will simply look like an amateurish attempt to TRY and make the shell look like it is still original – which, obviously, it is not. I might add, trying to “fool your friends’ into thinking a poorly executed repaint is a bona fide original, especially if you try to sell it, will probably prove to be hazardous to your health.

4. I have an original LIONEL steam engine. Can you repaint the entire shell, but just leave the original number of the cab boiler?

A. No, and for similar reasons listed above. First, for us to "mask off" the cab number area, and repaint the remainder of the unit, the masking tape (even the new, 'lo-tack types') will invariably pull some of the existing paint right off – and sometimes along with part, if not all of, your original number. Also, if we don't completely strip your boiler shell of all old existing paint, then prime coat it first, our newly applied finish might not even last a month before peeling and/or flaking sets in – maybe sooner.

5. I have an original LIONEL GG-1 that's not too bad. Can you leave the paint and lettering intact, and just re-stripe it?

A. No, and for the same reasons listed above. LIONEL post-war GG-1 bodies were manufactured from the same die-cast zinc material as steam boilers. Also, there is no cosmetic, aesthetic or financial advantage to "leaving the original paint" if an engine is re-stripped, as it is still, technically "restored".

6. Do you have shells for sale that I can just buy from you? This way I won't have to send mine in, and wait!

A. Usually not. I say "usually" because we often try to buy both unpainted, blank shells, as well as used, worn, non-broken bodies whenever we can. However, since our restoration work is done on primarily on 'post-war' items, body shells for these items (F-3s, FMs, EP-5s, GPs, Steamers, etc.) are not readily available, certainly not in bulk, as they were in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Newer LIONEL® and after-market manufactured bodies WILL NOT retro-fit onto your old frames, and as such, we do not have any reasonable amount of inventory that we can advertise broadly for sale. Yes, we do keep a few, select items in stock, but mostly to replace a customer's shell when cracked or broken. We try to buy at local train shows, E-Bay, and take trade-ins whenever possible, but the supply is dwindling.

7. I can buy paint and would like to paint my own shells, but can't letter them. Can you just sell the lettering and striping sets?

A. Our work is done by high quality screen-printing and pad printing for optimum, professional results every time, We DO NOT sell dry transfers, decal sets to any other type of 'hobby-style' lettering. If you want to paint your own shell, that is certainly your right and a great way to enjoy your hobby, but we can't help you with separate-sale lettering – we don't use it, and don't sell it.

8. How about, then if I send in my shells to you, completely painted, and you could just silk-screen the graphics?

A. We generally avoid taking on work of this sort, as our industrial-based inks used for our screen-printing and pad-printing might not adhere to your paint; even worse, it might attack the paint and possibly ruin the plastic shell underneath. Therefore, we'd have to say "no" to this one. Sorry.

9. I have some very nice original trains, in otherwise excellent plus – to like NEW condition, but with some paint loss. Can you match the paint and just “touch them up” without noticing where they’ve been fixed?

A. This is a real “grey area” when it comes to restoration as many trains are found today in this “middle of the road” condition – too nice to completely repaint, yet with enough scuffs and scratches to detract from an otherwise attractive looking item. Yes, we CAN do touch-ups, but it is on a case-by-case situation, and quite often you will pay more for this service. Price quotes can vary tremendously. Occasionally the touch ups can be made “invisible” but not always; also, we won’t know that until we have your item in our possession and try. Therefore, the risk is yours! As a general rule, we advise against touch ups, as they will invariably detract from the item’s overall value. In either event, we strongly suggest a consultation first before sending in your piece. Quite honestly, in most instances, we’ll try to talk you out of it.

10. I have heard that your work notoriously takes a very long time for completion to get back to your customers. Sometimes, many months. Is this true?

A. While we try to make every attempt to expedite delivery, sometimes it’s just not possible. For example, popular items like the ‘Santa Fe’ F-3s require up to five coats of paint (that’s 2 coats of Primer, then a silver, red, and clear coat) and each coat of paint needs at least four to five days to dry, with the final clear coating needing an additional week to 10 days before wrapping in tissue. This means you are looking at a five week minimum as our best-case scenario-and that’s just to paint them! When you add into that the additional work, like stripping off the old paint, body filler and sanding, screen printing the stripes, lettering and roof, and applying the decal and assembly of the trim – even working as fast as we can, that’s 6-8 weeks! To be on the safe side, we like to wait TWO WEEKS upon completion before shipping. If we are very busy, or, if you have a ‘custom order’ piece that is NOT a regular-production run item, then yes, it can take months. We don’t like keeping your trains here any more than you like waiting for them. But “rush jobs” only result in poor work and dissatisfied customers – two things we never want.

11. You insist on payment in full to be sent in with my order. You have my trains. Why can’t I just pay you when they’re completed?

A. Unfortunately, experience has taught us that many customers will send in their trains, then either forget to call us back when we request payment or, tell us the payment is coming, but for some reason it never arrives, or, we’re not paid for months, while we have to store, clean, and maintain their trains around our own inventory. Further, in these instances, duplicate invoices are invariably needed to be typed, sealed and mailed, as many customers ignore the first one –or three! This additional work only slows our production, which is why we instituted our payment-with-order policy. While it is true, the majority of our customers DO NOT fall into this category, even the 10%-25% that do slows us up tremendously. We hope you understand. We have been in business for 40 years and have never had a complaint we could not solve amicably.

Hopefully this answers most of you queries. If not, please don’t hesitate to call and we will try to help you however we can!

We look forward to doing business with you.