

Lionel Product Review – FastTrack 10/27/2015

Write up submitted by Joe Smolinski / Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club

Pictures by Joe Smolinski



In 2008 I decided to go back the one hobby I always loved, Lionel Trains. Prior to this I had several HO layouts but I was never really satisfied as I was when I had a Lionel train layout as a youngster. There was always a feeling I was settling with HO instead of having what I really wanted, those big Lionel trains.

When I started to reacquaint myself with the Lionel product line, I was thrilled to discover that Lionel came out with a new rail product called “Fastrack”. This product was introduced in 2003 and replaced the traditional 3 rail pin track. It is still the same 3 rail track but it now the Fastrack has a realistic gray roadbed that looks great. The track snaps together but unlike the traditional 3 pin track the Fastrack stays tightly fitted together so no more problems of the track coming apart. Lionel makes Fastrack in the following radius curve degrees:



Figure 1 – My 8' x 16' layout

- 036 degrees – To make a full circle you will need 8 pieces of track
- 045 degrees – To make a full circle you will need 12pieces of track
- 060 degrees – To make a full circle you will need 16 pieces of track
- 072 degrees – To make a full circle you will need 16 pieces of track
- 080 degrees – To make a full circle you will need 32 pieces of track

My layout is 8' x 16' and I am using 36 degree curves through 72. You can see in the picture 1 how nicely this looks as well as providing plenty of clearance so the cars don't clip each other. Having the variety of degrees available allows me to runs run my “Celebration Series” Lionel engines and cars that only need 36 degree turns as well as my newer engines and cars that require a larger radius curve.

Lionel makes Fastrack straight track in the following lengths:

5 inch, 10 inch, and 30 inch.

These pieces come in handy for long runs and rail yards. I like that Lionel also offer the small pieces of Fastrack that I call “fitters” to be able to make your layout connect together. By “fitters” I am referring to half and thirds of curve track and straight track pieces from 5 inches to down to a 1 3/8” inches. For those of you familiar with Atlas Snap Track for HO, Lionel use the same principle by making many of those small size track pieces available with Lionel Fastrack.

Switch tracks or turnouts are also available in Fastrack. The degree turn outs are available in:

036 degrees, 048 degrees, 060 degrees, 072 degrees and there is also 072 degree Wye turnout.



Figure 2 – Switch Track

You can buy the switches with manual operation or remote. The remote switches include a 3 foot cord from the switch to the switch controller.

Cross tracks are available in the following degrees:
22 1/2 degrees, 45 degrees, 90 degrees

Lionel also has a variety of Fastrack accessories you can buy such as bumpers (lighted and non-lighted), road and signal lighted rail cross overs, trestle sets, and more. All of these are compatible with Fastrack to make your layout look uniform. One of the neat pieces Lionel has also included is a transition track that is a combination of the traditional 3 pin track and the newer Fastrack. This allows those railroaders to use your existing traditional 3 pin track as you convert over to Fastrack at your own timetable.

One tip I will offer is I use a pair of those white canvas gloves when connecting my track. These are the ones that cost about \$1.00. When I started to lay down my track or make major changes to my own layout the edges of the roadbed can dig into the palms of your hands after a while, especially if you are working on a large layout.

I've included pictures from my own layout, which is all Lionel Fastrack, so you get a better idea from what I've described. There are also many books available with Lionel Fastrack plans. These plans range from first time set up, to around your Christmas tree, to elaborate layouts. There are no boundaries with Lionel Fastrack ... only your imagination. Enjoy ... and happy railroading.



Figure 3 – 072 Switch Crossover



Figure 4 – Cross Track



Figure 5 – Bumper Track