

All Aboard!



photo by David Ellis

Have you ever watched a model train as it makes its way around a track? For more than 100 years, model trains have been an exciting part of the holidays.

German manufacturers were the first to make toy trains. They made trains that kids could pull or push. Later they made wind-up toy trains. Most were made of iron. People began putting these toy trains into their Christmas displays.

What is a model train?

Model trains are close copies of the real thing. Some model trains are even exact copies, right down to the nuts and bolts. A **scale model** is an exact, but smaller, copy of the original object.

For example, the most popular size model train is exactly 1/87th the size of a real train. This means everything on the real train, right down to the seats and the wheels, is 87 times bigger than on the scale model train.

Rolling along

In 1900, an inventor, Joshua Lionel Cowen, passed by a toy shop in New York City where a toy train was on display. But the toys all just sat there. None of them were moving.

Cowen told the store owner that he could make a toy train that would run nonstop all day. He promised this would bring people to the owner's store.

Cowen went home and invented a moving freight car. His "Electric Express" looked like

a wooden box with wheels. The tracks were made from strips of tin.

Cowen powered the train with a fan motor and a battery. Shoppers did more than just look at the train in the store window. They wanted to buy one for themselves.

Cowen formed the Lionel company to manufacture these moving toy trains. Other companies, such as American Flyer, also began making electric toy trains.

On the right track

In 1910, Lionel made electric locomotives based on the design of a real locomotive engine. A **locomotive** is the first car on the train. It pulls the rest of the train.

In 1939, companies displayed scale model train sets at the New York World's Fair. After that, model trains became the best-selling toy in America.

Trains at Christmas

Model train sets can be expensive. In the first half of the 1900s, they were usually given as special Christmas gifts. After the holiday, many parents put the trains away, bringing them out again each Christmas.



Cowen's Electric Express looked similar to this.

The appeal of trains

To many people, real trains seem romantic and adventurous. In the mid-1800s, there were no cars or planes. But trains were exciting because they could travel much faster than a horse. They made it possible for people to travel much farther in a shorter time than before.



A Shanghai maglev train leaves the Pudong International Airport in China.

Faster than ever

Today, high-speed trains like the Amtrak Acela in the northeast United States can run up to 150 miles per hour. In other countries, such as China, high-speed trains can go more than 200 miles per hour. Model train companies have made models of these high-speed trains.

A way to learn

Experts say kids who play with model trains can learn about electrical wiring, since they have to follow the instructions for wiring the tracks.

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPLionel

At the library:

- "Model Trains: Creating Tabletop Railroads" by David Jefferis
- "Cars, Trains, Ships and Planes" by Clive Gifford

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of model trains are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

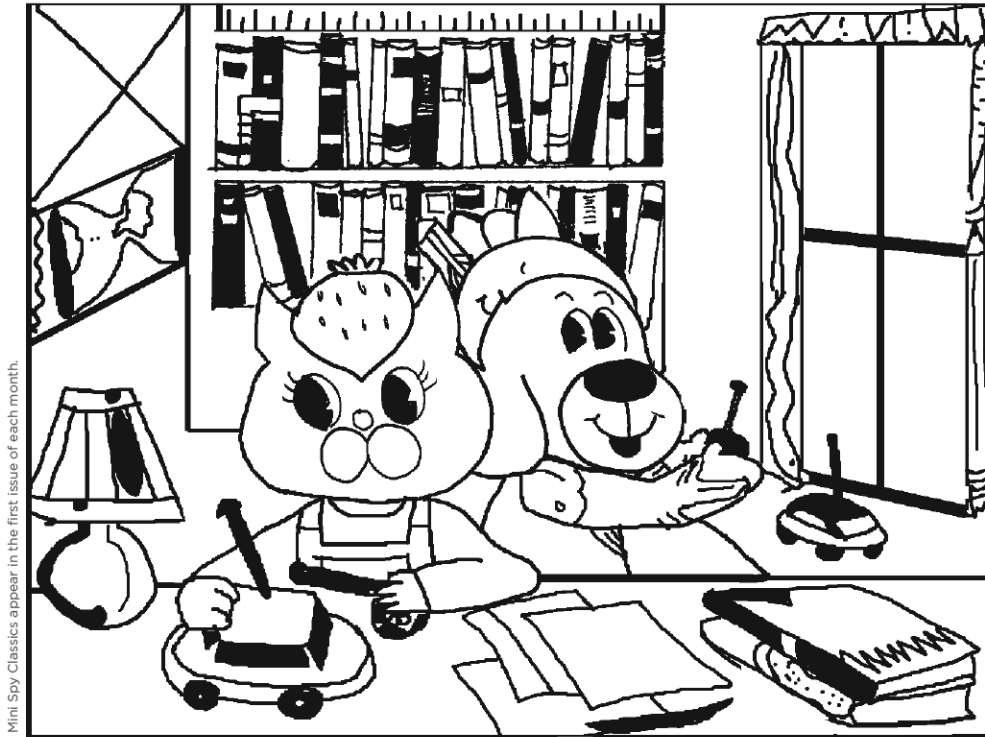


ACELA, CHINA,
DISPLAY, ELECTRICAL,
FAIR, GERMAN,
HOLIDAY, INVENTOR,
LEARN, LIONEL,
LOCOMOTIVE, MAGLEV,
MODEL, SCALE, STORE,
TOY, TRACK, TRAIN,
WINDOW, WIRING.

L N T O Y Y V E L G A M F M Y
E R R N K A N I H C S T O R E
D A A A L O C O M O T I V E T
O E I M W I N D O W I R I N G
M L N R X A I N V E N T O R P
U K M E M A C E L A X R X H K
Z R C G T B Q Y A L P S I D V
H O L I D A Y S C L E N O I L
O S C A L E K C A R T F X Z M
L A C I R T C E L E K F A I R

Mini Spy Classics

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- man in the moon
- word MINI
- letter V
- letter I
- hourglass
- sailboat
- strawberry
- pencil
- carrot
- question mark
- snake
- arrow
- number 8
- exclamation mark
- peanut
- ruler
- comb
- fish
- kite

Mini Jokes



Trevor: Can you think of a train that has no wheels, no engine and no caboose?

Thomas: A train of thought!

Eco Note



Trains are more energy-efficient per passenger mile than planes or cars, making them one of the most eco-friendly transportation options. Carbon emissions from trains are less damaging to the environment than those of airplanes because train emissions are not released directly into the upper atmosphere.

For later:

Look in newspaper ads for model trains. Ask your parents or grandparents if they had a model train during the holidays when they were children.

Teachers: For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bit.ly/MPstandards. And follow The Mini Page on Facebook!



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