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Small Fry Railroads Fight For Control

NEW YORK, April 6 (UP)—The biggest toy year in history. A brass-knuckled competitive battle is shaping up this year among three major "railroads."

Lined up against each other are Lionel Corp., A. C. Gilbert Co. and Revell, Inc.

These three companies have two things in common—they all make model electric trains and they all hope to capture a bigger share of the market in 1957.

Toy electric trains have fascinated men and boys alike for half a century. At Christmas, there are more miles of track running through living rooms than real railroads have laid around the world.

NO ONE HAS any idea of how many sets actually are owned by "railroaders" from one end of the globe to the other. The only thing that is certain is that the number is growing at a clip that has the manufacturers smiling.

The manufacturers this year have their big sales guns leveled at all age brackets in the nation's booming population.

Lionel, the biggest and oldest of the major train makers, has come out with a set of trains featuring pastel-colored cars. It's strictly for the girls.

Buoying the electric train industry's confidence this year is the prediction that 1957 will be

the biggest toy year in history. * * *

THE TOY manufacturers of America predicted that Americans would shell out more than \$1.5 billion for toys and games of all kind in 1957—easily a new all-time high.

Right now, industry attention is centered on the miniature train sets, featuring scale model cars only a few inches long. They're making a comeback.

Lionel President Lawrence Cowen said his company presently does not market the miniature sets, although it once did. He said the market for these trains has definite limitations.

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"FOR ONE THING," he added, "small trains are difficult for children to operate. Another is that there are few operating accessories to go with them, which hurts their salability."

However, both A. C. Gilbert, which makes "American Flyer" trains, and Revell are sold on the Lilliputians.

A spokesman for A. C. Gilbert said the smaller model sets are designed specifically for the hobbyist. "They are not toys," he emphasized.

"The children born during World War II and the early postwar years now are beyond the toy stage and in the hobby stage. There is a big potential

market among those youngsters and adults for the tiny trains."

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HENRY BLANKFORT, an official of Revell, Inc., said his firm invaded the electric train field for the first time last year with a pigmy line of trains. Revell also makes plastic model kits of ships, airplanes and cars.

"The demand was so terrific we had to stop taking orders. We look for an even better year in 1957."

He noted some homes on the

West Coast are being constructed with built-in train layouts that fold into the walls like ironing boards.

The first successfully operated electric train was developed by Joshua Lionel Cowen, founder of Lionel, around 1900. By 1915 his sales totaled \$8,000, growing to \$300,000 in 1913 and more than \$22 million last year.

All told, Americans must shell out in the neighborhood of \$40 million for trains and accessories each year.