

GOING IN CIRCLEZ GUIDE No. 1

The Tyco Trailer Jet (piggybacks etc)



It's no secret that I love piggybacks. As a kid I discovered early on that while HO scale automobiles were hard to come by - and expensive - the trucks sold alongside HotWheels in the toy aisles almost anywhere were almost perfect... ..And cheap... I had *lots* of HO scale trucks!

I don't remember who gave me that first Tyco overhead unloader set: a friend or a relative. Surely they had no idea just what they'd wrought, because those shorty trailers were Just. So. Cool! You could fit **two** of them on a flatcar! And they actually got lifted up by this giant industrial-orange rig! And sometimes, if you were good... you could lift up other things, too. Sometimes it just made a mess, but that was fine too.

Somewhere along the line I picked up another overhead, and the motorized loader too. And a few more Tyco trailer sets. My 4x6 was devoted to pig service, with the overheads dominating the main and that motorized 747-sized Forklift guarding the yard behind. The shadows that the locomotive headlights cast on the wall as they curved around and through the overheads in a dark room were things of beauty.

All in all, I thought I had a nice collection of Tyco piggyback stuff, but that all changed when I found Tony Cook's site in 2001. Oops. It didn't really bother me then, because I'd grown up some, and with the Athearn impacks and Walther's wellcars and tons of 40- and 45-foot lading, well, who has time for Tyco?

But then one day I found the box that had all those Tyco trailers. I found the box that had my cherished, weathered old piggyback loaders – one of the few survivors from that 4x6, harking of the days when my free-lanced road was affiliated with the Santa Fe instead of Chessie.

I went back to Tony Cook's site, trolled ebay, found this forum. Always had a voice in the back of my mind that I refused to indulge. Then one day I found more trailers at my favorite haunt – the same ones I already had, but more of them, for virtually nothing. And then I decided: this is the NOW, and the time has come. It's time to meld my modeler with my inner child. It's time to run a railroad, a hotshot freight like has never been seen. It's time to give credit. It's time to finally assemble what has longed to be: the Tyco Trailer Jet!

Trailer Jet (*trā·lěr jět*) *n.*: Moniker assigned to regularly scheduled priority-clearance intermodal freight trains operated by the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) Railroad, and its corporate successor the Chessie System. “Jets” were named for their origin, ie. *Chicago Jet*, or *St. Louis Trailer Jet*. The destination, while variable, was usually the Port of Baltimore. Typical power was provided by a three- or four-unit set of 4-axle EMD power (usually the newest GP40 and GP40-2 series locomotives), although 6-axle power (SD40-2) was often sighted on occasion.

Tyco Trailer Jet (*tī·kō trā·lěr jět*) *n.*: A representative model of these famous trains, assembled using all appropriate toy train products manufactured, cataloged, and sold under the “Tyco” trade dress.





The *Saint Canard Jet* is caught departing its namesake town, pulling a hotshot consist of the entire Tyco intermodal catalog, and then some! While a leading six-axle unit is unusual in a Jet, one can't dispute that corporate pride is best served by putting the best face forward when assigning units based out of Tyco shops. To that end, leading the way is HO scale railroading's version of Beauty and the Beast, as seen vis-a-vis B&O 2908 (an SD24 in stunning regale) leading C&O 4301 (an Alco C430 with woeful paint). A fanciful but spitefully sharp F-7 A-unit provides assistance; it's lettered for the Western Maryland, the only Chessie member road to preserve their F-units during the Chessie Era. Thus, all three of the Chessie's corporate subsidiaries are represented!

Dutifully ranked behind the locomotives is our treat: a near-chronological consist of Tyco intermodal gear (with minimal re-arrangement to facilitate discussion).

348- & 354-Series Piggyback sets**348-A(1): Santa Fe (Silver) (Version 1)****1968-1970**

Tyco's very first intermodal offering appears in the late 1960's as a red box set, offered only in this pretty silver ATSF livery. While their new piggyback cars at first seem to be clones of Athearn's famous offerings, there are some important differences. While both are a scale 24 feet in length, Tyco's noticeably feature vertical ribs on the trailer bodies. In addition, Tyco offers folding landing gear, which is narrower and further inset on the chassis by a full scale foot; most tellingly as result, the Athearn trailers don't fit the Tyco deck cradles properly (although they are certainly operable).

As this was a new "Action Accessory" item, it initially came exclusively with an unloading platform as an extra, but initial releases omit a tractor cab. Some of these first examples are notable for a rare variation in graphics, which finds the herald over the "Fe" as shown directly above...



348-A(2): Santa Fe (silver) (version 2)

1968-1970

...instead of over “Santa”, as most commonly seen here. This version continues to be found exclusively in the unloading-platform accessory sets, which do eventually begin to include the “Dodge” tractor cab.

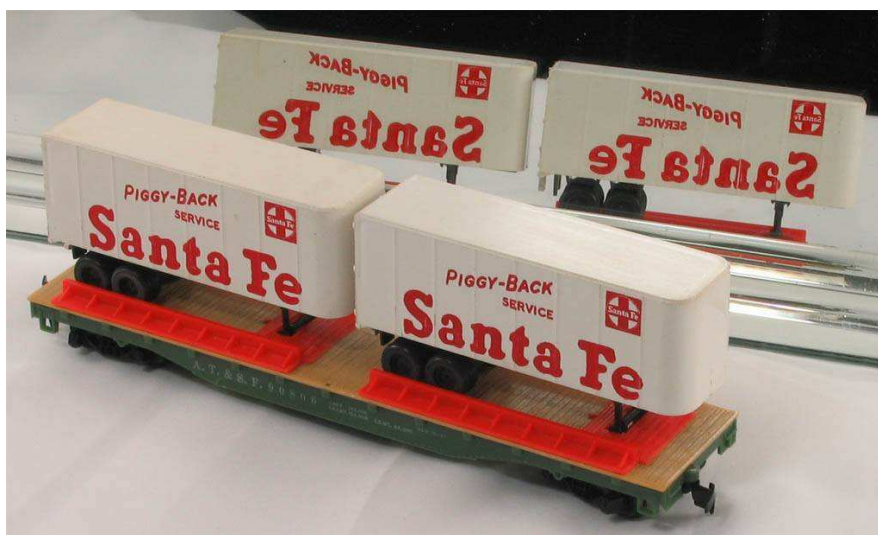
Regardless of herald location (some sets even packed one of each), the silver trailers are available only for a year or two. Very soon after the addition of the tractor, and coinciding with the transition to art-boxes, the silver-painted trailers are replaced with...



348-A(3), 354-A: Santa Fe (White)

1970-1977

... white revisions, which provide the balance of Santa Fe offerings throughout the 1970's (until Santa Fe was replaced by other roads on revised trailer bodies in 1977). While the white Santa Fe sets are known to be brown-boxed as a piggyback car only (354-A), they were and are still primarily found as complete accessory sets with the unloading platform, etc. They were also included with the initial release of the motorized piggyback unloader.



Interestingly, white trailers have also been spotted with the herald over the "F" – in very limited quantities. In fact, given my experience in browsing train shows and auction sites, the availability ratio of White, to Silver, to Herald-over-Fe (in either color) versions seems to be on the order of 45:10:1.

352-series Container Flat cars

Tyco's next intermodal offering, also appearing late in the RedBox era, is a "container" flat car. The "container" is the same box trailer body without a chassis; when loaded on the flatcar (after breaking off the ICC bar) this bottomless, hollow box now takes on the crude form of a shipping container - though shipping containers don't have the rounded ends that Tyco's sport (and 24 feet is an odd size). However, these "containers" are easily swapped onto the trailer chassis, making for versatile interest and variety. Though only two are cataloged, there are actually four (possibly five) versions of the container flat car.



352-A(1): Seatrain (blue)

1969

The first of only two officially cataloged container offerings appears in the Red Box era, decorated for Seatrain. Incorporated in 1928, Seatrain Lines was an early pioneer of containerized shipping. Tyco's containers sport a reasonable reprise of Seatrain's then-new logo scheme seen above...



352-A(2): Seatrain (black)

1969

...although at some point, Tyco's livery changes to an incredibly dark blue (indeed, nearly black) "S-arrows" logo. Also note the black version's basecoat of painted white, versus the blue version's unpainted, argent molded color.

Amusingly, it could be said that both versions tempt the viewer to "Seat rain".



352-B(1): Sea-Land

1970-1975

A wholly independent entity from Seatrains Lines, the more widely recognized Sea-Land Corp. is generally credited with building the US Intermodal industry to what it is today. Sea-Land came to the forefront about the same time that SeaTrain fell into difficulty, so Tyco trades the SeaTrain livery for a somewhat crude

(and incorrect) rendering of Sea-Land's world-famous logo. The real SeaLand livery in this era featured words in a red band, not black - but if you think that's bad....



352-B(2): Sea-“J”-Land

(1970-1975)

...try stamping a few with the logo upside down for good measure, and you get another true Tyco original! The elegant symmetry of Sea-Land's logo, and a hint of the model production process, say nothing of quality control, are evidenced through this bizarre error. The correct version seems to be far more common, although both turn up with fair enough frequency; it's not known when these errors were made. Both versions also are most commonly found with poorly registered separate colors – compare the two “J” containers for example.

Tyco *did* get the Sea-Land scheme right eventually, as we'll discuss in a few moments...

369-series Piggybacks

In 1978, stock numbers on the piggyback sets change from 354 to 369 to reflect an important design change: the trailers are modified to sport a slight roof overhang lengthwise, allowing compatibility with Tyco's new manual, overhead piggyback loader. Although very scaled-down and planted to a fixed-platform, the overhead loader did evoke an authentic appearance and was an extremely popular accessory, included in many train sets and available separately right through Tyco's exit from the model/toy train business in the 1993.



The author's weathered-in-childhood survivors demonstrate the need for the new roof eaves on 369-series trailers. Though very scaled down, Tyco's durable toy piggyback loaders nonetheless convey a rugged and convincing appearance.

The subtle roof eaves on 369-series trailers enable the overhead loader's jaws to grab the trailer securely. While the 354-series trailers can sometimes be used with care and luck, the process does not work smoothly, requiring an overhead loader with taught springs in the jaws or the addition of pads, and a balancing act against the bogeys. Both 354- and 369-series trailers may be used in the older, motorized forklift piggyback loader, making it a much more versatile (although slow and cumbersome) intermodal terminal.

As supplied, the loads on 352 Container cars do not interact with any accessory – perhaps causing their relatively short lifespan.

Another change that takes place in the 369-series trailers concerns the wheels and axles. 354-series trailers (and "Dodge" tractor cabs) featured two-piece axles with flush wheel hubs, made to be inserted into fully-enclosed bogeys. The inner wheels were separate pieces, thus, a complete wheel & axle assembly used four individual parts.



The author's painted & detailed chassis provide a good look at the differences in wheels between 354 (Santa Fe, Dodge) and 369 (Burlington Northern, Kenworth) trucks.

369-series trailers (and the new "Kenworth" cabover tractors introduced shortly after) sport one-piece axles with deep-well hubs, made to snap into opened bogeys. These axles are also *slightly* shorter, allowing for easier fits into the flatcar's piggyback cradles.

I have received a new 369A Sea-Land set with a trailer that had both axle styles. In addition, I have noticed many examples of late-production 354-series "flush" hubs that are distorted to rather obviously less than round. Perhaps problems were encountered with the original molds, necessitating a change to something new... although one can't deny that the new assemblies were much cheaper to produce and assemble.



369-A: Sea-Land

1978-1979

The first offering in the new piggyback trailer series is Tyco's third attempt to represent Sea-Land! Happily, they succeed by using a much crisper graphic with correct color arrangement, nice registration, and subtly different font. Note that this is NOT just a SeaLand container slapped onto a trailer chassis: the trailer box sports the full ICC crash bar at the rear, as well as the new overhead-loader compatible roof eaves. These full-pig Sea-Land trailers seem to be the least common of Tyco's "two-and-a-half make three" Sea-Land offerings.

I have also seen a 352-B Sea-Land container flatcar in box with this correct livery applied to containers with roof eaves, but it's impossible to confirm if this is an original variation, some 30 years post-production. It is very easy to break the ICC bars and make containers out of any Tyco trailer – the original 352 Seatrain & SeaLand containers show evidence of this exact treatment by the factory. One could do this to the trailers above and make a "correct" SeaLand container car; there is no way to prove any such example came from the factory or otherwise. The correct livery on a container without roof eaves *would* in fact be a genuine factory item, but is not known to exist.

Going back to the 354-series to finish it out, we'll find:

**354-B: Tropicana****1975**

This highly attractive set suffers from an identity crisis. While only offered with full piggyback gear, the box flap describes it as a “container” car, while the stock number (correctly) pegs it for a piggyback. Trailers are a painted white base with 4-color tampon graphics – one of only two trailer schemes to be decorated with 5 colors of paint.

The Tropicana piggyback was only available in a mid-70's promotional set which also included two Tropicana 62' reefers in similarly attractive dress. Indeed, Tyco's Tropicana cars might arguably be the best-looking of all the varied Tropicana offerings from contemporary RTR vendors AHM, Athearn, Bachmann, and Life-Like. While the reefers turn up with frequency - presumably they were made in a 2:1 ratio - the piggyback set turns up much less often than one might expect, and commands a hefty premium.

**354-C: True Value****1975**

Another premium Tyco piggyback find, the True Value car is alleged though not proven to be another promotion-only item. With painted white trailers nicely printed with True Value's logo (very striking in blue), it's an attention-getting set, and nowhere near as common as its popularity might demand.

By catalog number, the True Value set is the last hurrah for the original 348/54 trailer design.

With the 354's done, we'll go back to the 369's.



369-B: Burlington Northern

1978-1985

In the 1970's, Burlington Northern seems to replace Santa Fe as Tyco's adopted "pet" railroad of choice, as nearly everything in the catalog formerly offered in Santa Fe could be had in a BN version (often with several variations to boot!). And so, having enjoyed a near-exclusive run as the only readily available common-stock piggybacks for over 8 years (all others being promotional or limited-release), the Santa Fe trailers are finally phased out in 1977. Indeed, packaging for both the motorized piggyback loader and terminal platform sets is changed to show BN trailers in place of Santa Fe; stock numbers also change. And, just like the Santa Fe cars, standalone boxed BN piggybacks are not quite as plentiful as you might expect – they turn up most often in the aforementioned sets.

Tyco's Burlington Northern trailers are a fairly accurate (if forcibly compressed) representation of BN's first trailer scheme. Interestingly, and perhaps owing to their rather simple appearance of green graphics on silver paint, the BN trailers are the only common-stock multi-year catalog trailers that did NOT have any variations over the years! I do have two examples – one set painted on white plastic, and one set painted on an odd sherbet-colored plastic.

Although the BN was a favorite road of Tyco, these trailers had a relatively short lifespan; they were replaced by UP in the early 1980's.

**369-C: Bekins****1978-1979**

Another somewhat elusive set, the brightly-colored Bekins set is an attractive one. (Indeed, along with Tropicana, True Value, and certain SeaLand & SeaTrain variations: it seems if the trailers are white and not Santa Fe, they are a worthy find). The Bekins set disappeared from catalogs in 1980, but a similar item returned in Tyco's new US-1 Electric Trucking line in 1981. The Bekins piggybacks sport rather faithful livery, and because they were available for such a short time, they encourage thorough hunting.

**369-D(1): Union Pacific (“Deluxe”)****1978-1989**

Perhaps the prettiest of the three railroad-themed sets (of a total of 9 distinct names), are the original releases of Union Pacific trailers. UP trailers are quite plentiful and easily the most readily found after the white Santa Fes. Two were provided with every overhead unloader set; additionally, many train sets sometimes included an additional third trailer with a tractor cab (catalog number 903). Finally, both the piggyback flat car and the solo tractor/trailer combo were available as separate common-stock items.

Note the livery applied on the first few years’ batches as shown above: nice yellow paint; bold red letters, with squarely-registered thin black outlines. Compare them to the version below:



369-D(2): Union Pacific (“El Cheapo”)

1989-1993

As the RTR HO dark ages of the mid-80’s wore on and Tyco began spooling down its support for trains, offerings were cheapened substantially. The universal UP trailers suffer this fate, trading their lovely paint and trim for plain molded plastic and heat-stamped fuzzy lettering without a trace of black outline. While the cost savings certainly can’t be denied, the contrasts in appearance are telling.

The “deluxe” and “plain” UP trailers seem to be about equally plentiful.

**B-998: Bubble Yum trailer & cab****1985**

While not offered by Tyco in the traditional “intermodal load” sense, one would be remiss not to include this very striking item. The Bubble Yum trailer, which came with a matching boxcar in a 1985 promotional mail-order train set, is the last unique livery ever applied to Tyco’s famous piggyback trailers. Packaged only one to a set (with a Kenworth tractor cab), getting two to make a full piggyback load is a challenge, although the brightly-colored livery makes for a rewarding visual.



354-STC: Saint Canard Midland

Appropriately seen in our *St. Canard Jet* is this pair of trailers promoting the home road, naturally. Created to promote the Saint Canard Midland's then-new "Tree-Track" logo by testing it on select examples of their old teal equipment, the sum image is and was rarely seen. These were not offered to the public by Tyco and are a unique item ;)



953-3: Stake-bed trailers

1974-1988

Like the Bubble Yum trailers, these aren't really intermodal trailers in the purest sense. However, as they share the same chassis tooling and are clearly modified box trailers, they deserve mention and inclusion here.

Stake-bed trailers were found mostly in sets such as the western-themed Durango train set, and action

accessory & car items such as the short-lived **#900 Operating Crane Loader** (where it carried pipes), and the more common **Horse/Cattle Car & Depot Set** (where it handled livestock, naturally). 953-3 is the stock number for a standalone boxed stake trailer with cab, although label descriptions differ (“Trailer & Cab H-953-3”; “Cattle Car Depot Trailer & Cab 953-3”).

There are two different color variations: yellow (packed with a contrasting red cab), and orange (packed with a yellow cab). The orange trailer was likely the first, as examples are found with the full-bogey four-piece-axle chassis. The included cab was the “Dodge”. Yellow versions ride on the simplified chassis given to the 369-series box trailers, and are usually lugged by the “Kenworth” cab-over. Both versions have a unique tan-colored simulated wood floor insert in the bed, that snaps into the chassis bogeys.



353 & 353-A: Flatcar with trucks

1969-1975

The final loadings in our Jet are again not the typical intermodal load, but fitting nonetheless. After all, those trailers need to move somehow once the railroad hands them over, right?

Tyco offered two flat cars fully loaded with 3 tractor cabs. The first of these, #353, featured the Great Northern 50' flat with 3 Dodge cabs in the each of the three known colors: Red, Blue, and Yellow.

In the late 70's, Tyco ended production of the Dodge cabs and replaced them with new Kenworth-inspired cabover-sleepers. Reflecting this change, the Semi-truck flat got a new stock number, #353-A, to identify its new lading. To date I have yet to come across one of these, so the photo above is a mocked stand-in using a standard piggyback flat. It should be noted that catalog pictures show a plain blue 50' flat car hauling a set of Red, Green, and Yellow cabs. The yellow KW cab is notable for being rarely seen; perhaps only in this set and a handful of stake-bed-equipped accessories. The red cab is by far the most common, although the two pictured are slightly different shades. The green cab could be found in many BN loader sets.

Flatcar marking, load cradle, and trailer chassis variations

The ATSF 90806 flat car is the defacto standard of the Tyco intermodal line: assigned underneath every load, this car truly defines the word "ubiquitous". What separates used examples is the presence of the often-lost brakewheel, which is somewhat tough to fabricate separately. There are also two known lettering variations:

Version 1: ATSF 90806 reporting marks are left of center, with full capacity data filling the rest of the sideframe

Version 2: ATSF 90806 reporting marks are squarely centered, with less copy data (LT WT and build date are omitted) on the right (compare the two SeaTrain container cars cataloged above).

Of the over two dozen ATSF flats I own, only two of them are the latter version. I'm not sure which set(s) it originated from, although I have seen original red-box sets that include this version, as well as the more common full-data variety.

Three different deck bases or "cradles" are used to carry the loads:



Left to right: Piggyback cradle; Container cradle; Unloader cradle 2 on line-painted deck.

Piggyback cradle: The most common base for piggybacks is bright orange, with low sideframes. These cradles are fully modular and reversible: they may be oriented such that both trailers face the same direction (towards either the A or B end of car), or opposing in any direction.

Piggyback cars may be found NIB in all configurations, but there seems to be a preference for “wheels center, landing gear out” in the mid-1970’s offerings (one should note that prototype practice dictates that all trailers should face the same way, at least on the same car). Most of the time, the cradles can be easily rearranged to the desired configuration; sometimes they are rather stubborn and will not come out without breaking a pin, which is hardly a calamity.

Container cradle: Found only with chassis-less container cars, these bases are a brown/tan color and feature lugs to retain the standard trailer box only, which takes on a crude similarity to a container in this role (shipping containers never had rounded ends). These bases are NOT reversible: the single, large lugs for the rounded ends must face the middle of the car. Orienting them differently results in a slight overhang off the end of the flatcar which can interfere with the brakewheel if it is present. Presumably, keeping the rounded ends centered exposes the doors to the ends of the car, helping the cause of these moonlighting “containers”.

Unloader cradle: These are less common, being installed only on flats that were included with the #933(SF) and #927(BN) ‘motorized forklift’ Piggyback Loader/ Unloader Set. These cradles are red, and sport a higher portion of the frame that hides the wheels of the loaded trailer. This retaining wall acts as a stabilizer when using the forklift unloader. Like the standard orange versions, these red cradles are also modular and reversible, although they are only found NIB facing the same direction.

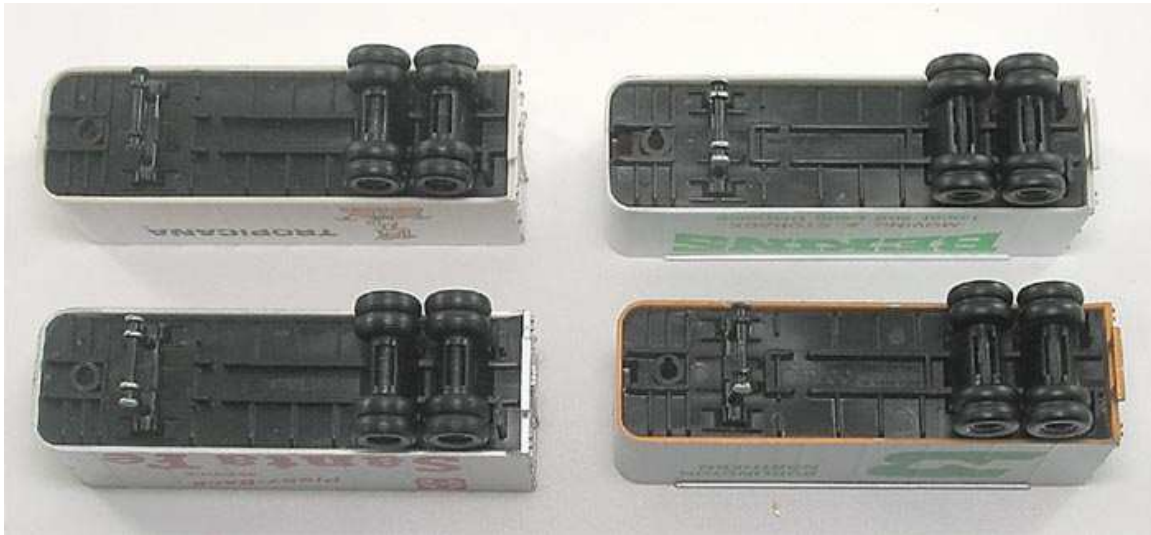
Initially, flats that held these cradles also had a pair of guide lines painted on the deck: one line ahead of each cradle. Presumably, they might have helped properly align the car alongside the platform for (un)loading. However, it’s not difficult to gauge the proper alignment in any case, and these guide lines are missing in many BN motorized unloader sets.

Semi-truck cradles: The cradles for the 353 and 353-A semi-cab cars are different yet again, even from each other. The #353, “Dodge” version has two cradles that are neither modular nor reversible: they must be oriented in a particular manner in order for all three cabs to snap in securely.

I have yet to find the 353-A “Kenworth” version of this car to review. However, the Kenworth cabs have a longer wheelbase than the Dodge and thus do not fit into the Dodge cradles. Also, careful investigation of the Kenworth’s chassis reveals a beveled mounting lug molded underneath; likely this was to securely

attach the Kenworth cabs to the cradles designed specifically for them. Catalog pictures show what appears to be a long, one-piece orange cradle.

Trailer chassis: There are four variations of the Tyco trailer chassis:



Clockwise from bottom left: Chassis versions 1, 2, 3, and 4.

- 1) Original chassis. 124 / 348 / 354-series releases only. TYCO stencil logo. Bogey's are fully enclosed. Axles are two piece, with separate inner wheels (thus a complete wheel & axle assembly requires four separate pieces). Wheel hubs are flush with tires.
- 2) Similar to original release, 354-series only, TYCO stencil logo, with "Made by Tyco in Hong Kong" added. At some point in late production, the included axles and wheels begin exhibiting a warped and out-of-round appearance, which is common on many examples.
- 3) 369-series chassis, introduced with overhead-loader compatible trailers. Markings are same as chassis number 2, but with opened bogey for use with new one-piece snap-in axles. Hubs are a deep well design.
- 4) Like number 3, except Tyco logo is changed to the "Slot-car figure 8" design, which had actually been in use since 1972. (It's interesting that this change wasn't made when the 369 chassis was first introduced).

Just for the Fun of It...

Having now reviewed all the intermodal offerings offered by Tyco, it might be fun to summarize a few interesting points regarding the box truck & container offerings:

The Catalog

- Number of unique catalog and/or stock# releases: 10
- **Actual number of variations: 16 or 17***
- Railroad-themed roadnames: 03
- Shipping company roadnames: 03
- "Fantasy" / Billboard roadnames: 03
- Number of confirmed promo-only releases: 02

*a SeaLand container car in correct livery may or may not be original Tyco...

Decoration Rank:

Not all Tyco trailers were created equal. While some were quite simple in graphics and decoration, others were quite complex. Here is a list which arranges them in order, based on the number of paint colors applied:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Union Pacific cheapo (ink + molded-in-color plastic) |
| 2 | Santa Fe (all variations)
Burlington Northern
SeaTrain "blue" (paint + molded color) |
| 3 | Union Pacific "deluxe"
SeaTrain "black"
SeaLand (all variations)
Bekins
True Value |
| 5 | Tropicana |
| 6 | Bubble Yum (paint + molded color) |

When searching for examples, it pays to have a sharp eye. Color registration is important. SeaLand containers are notorious for having poor alignments; even the trucks aren't always perfect. Santa Fe trailers may be found with nice crisp heralds, or heralds that have blurred to obscurity.

GIC Scarcity Rank

While assigning a value may be foolhardy at times, it's certainly impossible to dispute the availability of some versions versus the scarcity of others. My ranking here is merely subjective based on my experience in putting this collection together, and my finds at train shows, internet auctions, fellow hobbyists' layouts and garage sales over the better part of the last decade. I have not numbered them in absolute rankings – so while items listed next to each other may "trade places" so to speak... the ranking is a good general guide:

Easy Pickings >>

- Union Pacific – "deluxe"
- Santa Fe White – "Santa" logo
- Sea-Land container – normal
- Stake Bed - yellow (x2)
- Burlington Northern
- Union Pacific – "plain"
- Stake Bed – orange (x2)
- Sea-Land trailer
- Sea-Land container - "J" logo
- Sea-Train (Blue)
- Santa Fe Silver - "Santa" logo
- Bekins
- Sea-Train (Black)
- True Value
- Tropicana
- Bubble Yum (x2)
- Santa Fe – "Logo over Fe" (either color) (x2)

<< **"Happy" Hunting!**

GIC Guide No.1 Version 2.0 July 2007

*All text, descriptions, and original photos © 2007 Tony Lucio. All Rights Reserved.
Redistribution beyond goingincirclez.com, Tony Cook's HO Scale Trains Resource, and the Tyco Collectors' Forum is strictly prohibited without permission.*

Comments, corrections, submissions and other communication is welcome: goingincirclez@gmail.com