

L&N

A LITTLE COLOR, PLEASE

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The late 1950s and all of the 1960s were clearly not the best of times for the American railroad industry. The ascendancy it enjoyed in the earlier years of the 20th century had largely dissipated by the time of the Great Depression. Except for the resurgence during the national emergency of World War II, and a brief time in the post war economic renaissance period, the industry would slowly see its share of interstate freight and passenger traffic decay. The reasons have been more thoroughly documented in countless theses on the subject, but the wholesale disappearance of passengers, mail, and express; the emergence of the Interstate highway system; and growth in trucking and barge services were the major factors. The overbuilt "Rust Belt" of the Northeast was hardest hit, but railroads in virtually every region of the country had to economize and do more with less.

In August 1957, Louisville & Nashville Railroad found itself with a 138-unit increase in its motive power fleet thanks to a merger with the smaller and corporately controlled Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis. In that year, L&N's own diesel fleet had evolved from an Alco HH660 and an EMC SW1 in 1939 to a diverse fleet of EMD, Alco, Baldwin locomotives, and even a pair of small GE units (but nothing from Fairbanks-Morse). As with virtually every company at the dawn of mass dieselization, L&N relied on the stylists at one of the major builders (in this case, EMD) to come up with an attractive paint scheme for its new locomotives. For L&N, EMD suggested an attractive black (for freight power) or blue (for passenger units) basic body color, accented by a cream-colored nose mask trailing down the side in a pine-tree pattern, and trimmed in orange with yellow-gold lettering and a crimson and yellow-gold variation of L&N's 1886-era herald. Switchers stuck with more basic black.

The NC&StL units also wore EMD-designed paint schemes — Confederate blue and gray for its dual-purpose cab units and a mineral red and gold livery for most of its Geeps and yard switchers. There was little debate these alluring paint schemes made a positive statement about the two

companies and the pride their employees felt for the strategic transportation mission they delivered in their respective service areas.

But, these early paint schemes were spawned in less expensive and more labor-intensive times. The L&N scheme, for example, used lacquer paint, which dried faster (necessary with the multiple layers and masking these schemes required) but was much less durable than enamel. The scheme meant longer periods in the shop rather than hauling revenue traffic, and more frequent encores for repaints. Time is money, and the corporate bean counters at the company's headquarters at 908 West Broadway in Louisville were feeling the pressure on all fronts to squeeze more from every dollar in view of the mounting pressures from other modes of transportation.

L&N was not alone in this rush to motive power painting austerity. Missouri Pacific; New York Central; Gulf, Mobile & Ohio; Atlantic Coast Line; Southern Pacific; and Southern Railway are just a few roads of that era that retreated to "quickie" locomotive paint schemes. Southern abandoned its pleasing dark green for

Above right: Train 55's connection from Corbin, Kentucky, to Norton, Virginia, is running quite late, and thus the Cumberland Valley dispatcher has elected to annul the schedule and run it as an extra freight. On this May morning in 1967, the southbound freight rolls through the big cut at Appalachia, Virginia, behind a mixed bag of Alco and EMD units.

Right: You could still smell the fresh enamel paint on L&N F7A 1828 at Appalachia as it paused briefly while doing station work on Train 66 on Saturday, May 29, 1965. The unit — an ex-Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis engine picked up by L&N when acquired the former "Dixie Line" by merger in August 1957 — sports what was arguably the best-looking iteration of the several L&N gray and yellow paint schemes of the 1960s and 1970s. — Both Ron Flanary photos



black, and ACL ditched its Champion-era purple and silver for black with silver and yellow. The “Friendly” SP said goodbye to the “black widow” scheme for freight units and what was indisputably one of the most attractive paint schemes of all time — the *Daylight* livery of two shades of orange — for its passenger units. In their place came the gray and scarlet paint scheme most remembered by SP aficionados — not too bad of a replacement, but no match for the predecessor colors.

Returning to L&N, the 1957 merger (along with the drive toward lower cost and greater efficiency) drove the Kentucky-based carrier to field a few “guinea pig” units in test schemes. Ultimately, a dreadful all-black for freight and all-dark blue for passenger was adopted. These “dip” schemes were relieved only by the application of reflective 3M Scotchlite yellow-gold lettering along the sides and small variations of the old L&N herald — a small round metal version on the nose of cab units, and a more conventional rectangular design on the cab sides of hood units. These somber schemes were slathered on all repainted power beginning in summer 1958.

By 1962, some key upper management changes in the company resulted in a revisiting of the earlier decision to adopt such a drab corporate image for its locomotives. While there is no specific documentation to substantiate the reasons, it’s clear that company president William H. Kendall, who moved up to the job in 1959, was a former general manager of

L&N’s jointly leased (with Atlantic Coast Line) Clinchfield Railroad. Kendall was there in 1950, just over a year after the CRR took delivery of its first F-units in an EMD-designed scheme of basic gray with yellow nose mask and lettering. Although the Clinchfield’s numerous tunnels and coal-dominant traffic base were harsh on the cleanliness of the lightly colored diesel fleet, there was little doubt a clean CRR F-unit was quite striking. Under Kendall’s leadership (and presumably influenced by his five-year stint as Clinchfield’s general manager), L&N fielded a test unit in 1962 (a repainted low nose GP18) in a slightly different variation of CRR’s colors. The L&N gray was a little darker and with a slight blue cast, and the CRR’s yellow was replaced by more of an imitation gold on the L&N unit. The venerable but rather antique-looking steam era herald was replaced by a modern italicized version with cleaner graphics. Everyone except the die-hard purists liked it.

For a time, the new scheme was so popular that two series of new steel bay window cabooses wore a similar gray, with red lettering and yellow trim scheme. Tradition eventually won out, however, and subsequent new “hacks” and repaints were painted bright red.

Beginning with the delivery of its first GP30s in 1962, L&N initiated a repaint program for its entire fleet. As with all paint schemes, it evolved over time, with lettering and number placement refined. By 1972, however, the bean counters gained a foothold in the process again,

and the Scotchlite lettering and heralds were replaced by less elaborate painted versions. Again, the drive to decrease out-of-service time in the paint booth was the principal motivating factor. This variation took its final, fatal plunge to simplicity in 1974 when the yellow nose mask was deleted altogether — resulting in an early day “stealth” scheme.

As L&N’s corporate owner Seaboard Coast Line Industries moved to consolidate its various railroad components — SCL, L&N, Clinchfield, Georgia, and the West Point Route — into a single “family,” the company launched the Family Lines as a common marketing brand. In 1977, the attractive French gray with red and yellow ribbons usurped L&N’s gray and yellow-gold as well as the corporate colors of the other members of the “family.” Individual reporting marks remained until two years after CSX Corporation’s formation, when the SCL-controlled lines were merged into Seaboard System. In a rush to eradicate all traces of the past, many units had their L&N reporting marks crudely painted over. For L&N, it was the end of 132 years of existence as a corporation.

While this photo feature makes no attempt to document all the many variations of L&N locomotive schemes during its more “colorful” era, it does help explain the marked increase in Kodachrome film purchases by railfans in the South after 1962. The several varieties of gray and yellow-gold that held sway from 1962 until 1977 made pressing the shutter worthwhile again.



Above: The 107 members of L&N’s Alco RS-3 fleet wore the gray and yellow scheme quite well. During a break between assignments at Loyall, Kentucky, in the summer of 1965, engine 124 of this group idles quietly at the sanding and fueling area. In an hour, a crew will come calling to use the 124 on the afternoon Loyall-Varilla mine run.



Left: On May 10, 1967, Southern subsidiary Interstate Railroad’s First Hill crew is safely in the clear at Dorchester Junction, Virginia, as northbound through freight No. 66 drifts downgrade from Norton. The L&N crew is just two miles into its daylong journey to Corbin, Kentucky. Like L&N, Southern also simplified its paint scheme in 1959, replacing its appealing green with cheerless black and deleting the distinctive “Southern Serves the South” herald from the noses of its cab units. — *all this page Ron Flannery photos*



Opposite page left: A southbound unit coal train bound for the Carolinas eases through the joint L&N-Norfolk & Western yard at Norton, Virginia, on March 3, 1974, behind three six-motor units. U30C 1564 leads the trio as they trade home rails for N&W trackage rights to St. Paul, Virginia. There, the loads will be handed off to L&N affiliate Clinchfield Railroad.

Right: The EMD-designed paint scheme for L&N's first-generation road units never looked better than this scene at the carrier's Canal Street depot in New Orleans on June 5, 1951. E7 761 and E6 756 are minutes away from departing with Train 5, the *Humming Bird* to Cincinnati. The streamlined "Bird" made its debut in 1946, and lasted until 1969. — *L&N Historical Society collection*



Below: A trio of ex-NC&StL GP7s waits for assignment at Nashville's Radnor Yard in April 1963. The all-black livery was cheaper to apply, more durable, and resulted in less out-of-service time — but it was no visual match for the attractive colors it replaced. — *H.G. Goerke photo, author's collection*



Above: On Derby Day — May 1, 1965 in this case — E7 760 and E6 753 are seen pulling "high" at Louisville Union Station before backing down to lock couplers with the cars of Train 99, the southbound *Pan American*. This all-blue passenger scheme of 1958 wasn't quite as vile as the all-black freight scheme. — *Tom Smart photo, author's collection*

Left: In late 1958, a freight swings through a reverse curve at Emerson, Georgia, on the ex-NC&StL mainline north of Atlanta. Two of the B-units have surrendered their blue and gray livery to all-black, but the other three units are still in full NC&StL colors. The B-units all have steam generators, while the As do not (although they have pass-through steam and signal lines for passenger service). The "N&C's" cab units were pure dual-purpose machines, handling the *Dixie Flyer* or *Georgian* one day, and freights like this the next. — *Dick Sharpless photo, author's collection*

Right: West of Big Stone Gap, Virginia, along the Powell River valley to Dryden, L&N hogheads were known to cheat on the conservative 35 mph speed boards. In August 1967 at a spot known locally as the "Strawberry Patch," Corbin-bound through freight No. 66 is running nearly 20 mph over the limit as the engine crew takes full advantage of the isolation this well-built stretch affords. Lead Alco FA2 317 was one of the earlier repaints into the new scheme, lacking the thin black line around the yellow nose mask and no front herald.

Below: It's January 7, 1968, and Train 66 takes leave of Loyall, Kentucky, on the last 68-mile leg to Corbin, and home. Engineer Sam Sturgill's charges today include two SD35s and two black Alco RS-3s headed for monthly inspections at Corbin. A vestige of big steam on the L&N is first out behind the power: a 12-wheel tender from one of the L&N's 42 "Big Emma" 2-8-4s that once handled big tonnage on this same route. Now, it shuttles diesel fuel from Louisville to the small engine terminal at Loyall. — Both Ron Flanary photo



Above: On March 23, 1975, brand-new SD40-2 3567 leads Second 864 through Big Stone Gap. The green flags denote a following section in this era where timetable and train order operations were still prevalent on many stretches of the L&N system.

Left: By 1974, L&N had taken steps to further simplify its locomotive paint scheme to decrease out-of-service time in the shop. SD35 1218 exhibits this "stealth" variation at Loyall in March of that year. In the foreground, however, ex-Monon 1335 (with its distinctive nose-mounted bell) still sports a yellow nose with Scotchlite numbers. — Both Ron Flanary photo





Above: The various paint schemes of the L&N were in evidence in this view from inside the remaining four stalls of the steam-era roundhouse at Loyall on May 26, 1980. Amazingly, the structure (which lost five of its stalls immediately after the end of steam in 1956) survived until 2008, when CSX finally got around to razing it. By then, the turntable was gone and the building condemned.

Right: The air compressors of SD35 1218 and U25C 1507 throb to rebuild train line pressure on a March 1968 evening at Appalachia. As soon as the brakes release, Train 865's engineer will be calling on the combined 5,000 horsepower of his two six-motor mounts to lift the 3,987-ton train another tough ten miles upgrade to its final terminal at Norton. — *Both Ron Flanary photos*



Above: There's no chance of missing engineer "Tiny" Ellison as he obligingly poses on the front of Alco C-628 at Loyall on April 28, 1974. Tiny's assignment this day is a Loyall Turn, which will shortly depart for a return to home base at Corbin — a heavy succession of 110 loaded coal hoppers on the head pin of its power. — *Ron Flanary photo*



Above: L&N SD40 1239 leads a southbound unit coal train upgrade at Blackwood, Virginia, in 1982. The Family Lines paint scheme was attractive, but it also signaled the end to the corporate identities of the L&N and its sister companies. No longer needed by CSX after a new connection was opened nine miles back near Big Stone Gap in 1986, this line was mothballed but later purchased by Norfolk Southern. NS rail-banked the line from Appalachia to Norton for possible activation at a future date.



Right: The Poor Fork mine run passes the storage track at Dione, Kentucky, as it heads for home at Loyall in 1980. Lead unit 904 — in the Family Lines paint scheme, but with L&N reporting marks — was one of five such GP18s the company acquired in 1960. The low-nosed units (L&N's first) were delivered in solid black paint in the 460-464 series. They were renumbered in 1965, when the 464 became 904. — *Both Ron Flanary photos*



Left: After L&N ceased to exist, successor Seaboard System initiated a "patch" repaint and renumber program, with this unit being an example of some of the sloppiest of the work. Ex-L&N GP38AC 2162 is now on its third road number as it sits at the fueling racks at Ravenna, Kentucky, in 1987. Thankfully, not all units were subjected to this degree of indignity.

Below: On June 23, 1984, a former Clinchfield SD40 joins ex-L&N brethren at Loyall. For the next several years, CSX's various heritage units would be a dog's breakfast of old paint schemes mixed in with some new until the company finally settled on a fresh corporate image for its locomotive fleet. — *Both Ron Flanary photos*

