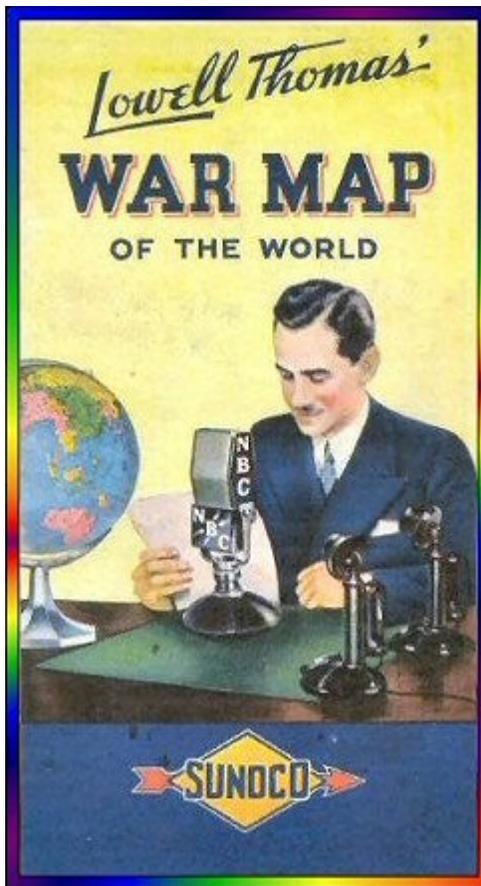


# Sunny Days For Sunoco As Radio Sponsor

“When you stop at *Sunoco*.....  
you go with confidence!”

Lincoln, Me. (DG)—

In numbers, the *Sun Oil Company*, or *Sunoco* for short, didn't sponsor very many radio programs during the golden age. In this case, the number of programs the company sponsored isn't very important--- it was the longevity of 2 of the programs it did sponsor. From 1932-1965, *Sunoco* and its petroleum products were heard as a radio sponsor of the weeknight newscast at 6:45 PM. Since we have 33 years to cover in a short time, let's start at the beginning.



It all started on Monday, June 20, 1932 at 6:45 PM over the stations of NBC's **Blue Network**. This was the first *Sunoco* sponsored newscast with Lowell Thomas, one of radio's greatest and most popular journalists.

On his newscasts, Thomas didn't use theatrics, make personal comments on the issues, or create controversy--- he simply presented the latest news. For the most part, the news wasn't pleasant for the listeners to hear, but Thomas had an optimistic sound in his voice that the news wasn't very good today, but it might be good tomorrow.

If you think a newscaster needed to be colorful and controversial on the air to be successful, you might be surprised with the ratings of the radio news programs. While the colorful and controversial newscasts achieved so-so ratings, Thomas' *Sunoco* program was consistently the highest rated newscast. As an added bonus, there were several radio seasons where Thomas was listed with *AMOS 'n' ANDY*, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and other radio programs with high ratings.

For the 15 years *Sunoco* sponsored Thomas newscast, it seem all went well. In all honesty, it did--- except for a weakness Thomas had on the air every now and then. At the most inopportune times, Thomas had an attack from his funny bone.

These outbursts occurred either when Thomas read a story that struck him funny or he accidentally mispronounced a word into a naughty (and censored) word. When it happened, Thomas broke out in uncontrollable laughter.

As you know, laughter is very contagious and it was no exception with the people responsible for presenting the **Sunoco** news program.. On the close of a particular newscast, Thomas had an attack of the giggles. In closing out the broadcast, announcer Hugh James had to say a few words about **Sunoco Motor Oil**. To his credit, James kept his composure in presenting the message, but the listeners could tell he was struggling in doing so. When he closed the brief commercial, James turned it back to a laughing Thomas who barely got off his famous “**So Long Until Tomorrow**” closing. James, now on the brink of the tee-hee’s, managed to close with “**This Program Came To You From New York**” before joining Thomas in laughing. **Sunoco** may not necessarily be impressed with Thomas laughter outbursts, but it showed the radio listeners that he was human and his popularity increased even more.

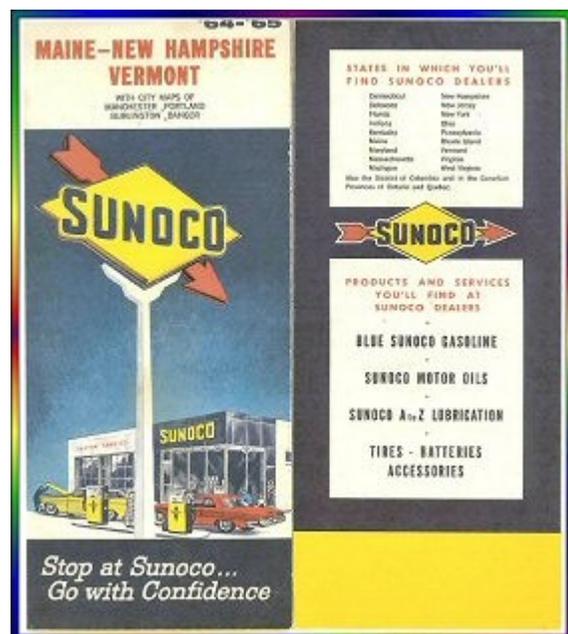
The combination of Thomas and **Sunoco** began in 1932 on **NBC’s Blue Network** and went all the way until **NBC’s** breakup in 1943. **NBC’s Blue Network** was now known as the **Blue Network**, a completely independent radio network. Newscast, sponsor, and timeslot continued on **Blue** until 1945 when newscast and sponsor moved to **NBC’s** weeknight 6:45 PM time slot.

It has been said all good things must end. The relationship between newscast and sponsor was no exception. After 15 good years, Thomas and **Sunoco** went their separate ways after the Friday, September 26, 1947 broadcast. The following Monday, the journalist was heard weeknights at 6:45 PM for **Ivory Soap** on the **CBS Radio Network**. As for **Sunoco**, the oil company was still sponsoring the weeknight 6:45 time slot on **NBC**, but now the sponsor was in the unenviable position of competing against Lowell Thomas. It was going to be tough, but there was also a new idea in how the newscast was conducted. Instead of having 1 journalist presenting the news, the new **Sunoco** news program had 3. The new **Sunoco** news program was known as **3 STAR EXTRA**.

The newscast featured Ray Henle, Ned Brooks, and Felix Morley. Henle was the program’s editor-in-chief, while Brooks reported and commented on domestic news, and Morley reported and commented on the news from overseas. In the news competition between **NBC** and **CBS**, Thomas was still very popular with the listeners, but **3 STAR EXTRA** also had its fair share of the radio audience. Both newscasts competed with each other for the next 18 years.

Now that we have briefly covered 2 long running programs **Sunoco** sponsored on radio, let’s get to the sponsor itself. It wasn’t your typical oil company during radio’s golden age--- and even in those years before leaded gasoline gave way to unleaded gasoline. The following information is based from a combination from what I personally remember about **Sunoco**, and a brief history of the company found in a wonderful book, *Guide To Gasoline Logos* by Wayne Henderson and Scott Benjamin.

**Sunoco** stations were originally found in the Northeast (including good ol’ Maine), Mid Atlantic, Washington, D.C., Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, and Florida. Instead of selling 2 grades of gasoline (the famous “**Regular**” and “**Ethyl**”) as other oil companies did, **Sunoco** sold only 1--- **Blue Sunoco**, a premium grade in the dark blue gas pump. Although it



was a premium gasoline, *Blue Sunoco* didn't cost any more than the regular gasoline from other oil companies.

Briefly after World War II ended, *Sunoco* went the traditional route and sold 2 gasoline grades. Since *Sunoco* did things a little different, there was something more than meets the eye concerning its 2 grades of gasoline--- they were both premium grades. In addition to the familiar *Blue Sunoco*, there was a higher octane premium gasoline known as *Dynafuel*. This experiment didn't last very long, as once again *Blue Sunoco* was the only gasoline sold at all *Sunoco* stations until the late 1950's.

When the 1960's was getting under way, some changes were being made in the *Sunoco* camp. Instead of just 1 grade of gasoline, there were 6 different premium grades found in only 1 *Blue Sunoco* pump.\* For those of you who aren't familiar with *Sunoco* during the 1960's and early 1970's, you might find it unusual, but clever.

When a motorist stopped at a *Sunoco* station, he/she called out a specific number from *200-240* or *260*, and the *Sunoco* attendant filled the vehicle with the gasoline that went along with that particular number. The motorist had the choice of *200* (premium), *210*, *220*, *230*, and *240* (all mid premium), and *260* (super premium). If the motorist asked for *200*, the attendant moved the "Blend Selector" dial on the side of the *Blue Sunoco* pump to *200*. From there, the attendant was ready to fill the vehicle with *200* gasoline. If the motorist asked for a higher number, it got really interesting! The *Sunoco* attendant moved the Blend Selector dial to the desired number. The vehicle was being filled with a combination of *200* gasoline and a specific amount of octane additive for the desired number. The higher the number, a higher amount of octane additive was used. This unique method was known as "Custom Blending." As far as I know, *Sunoco* was the only oil company to do this.

While the type of gasoline it sold was unique, *Sunoco* also featured the traditional automotive products to help cars and trucks perform on the roads and highways. *Sunoco Motor Oil*, *Sunoco's A to Z Lubrication*, *Kelly-Springfield Tires*, and other automotive accessories and services were also available in each *Sunoco* station. To get in a plug, they were mentioned from time to time in the commercials on the 2 *Sunoco* radio newscasts.

For 33 years, *Sunoco* sponsored legendary journalists who presented the latest news that began with the era of The Great Depression and ended with the turbulent times of the 1960's. While most the news presented over the 33 years was bleak and a little scary, it was sunny days for *Sunoco*.

\*-Editor's Note: In later years, grade *190* was added to the *Sunoco* Custom Blended gasoline grades. I'm not sure if there was ever a *250* grade