

Santa Fe Boys Do It Again

By Errol Spangler

The end of May saw the arrival of yet another Santa Fe cabooses in Portola. The car, Santa Fe 999414, was purchased last month by the same group that owns the other Santa Fe cabooses already on the property, the 999197. The group, known around Portola as the Santa Fe Boys, recently formed Vintage Railway Equipment a corporation dedicated to preserving unique pieces of our railroading heritage.

Indeed, the Santa Fe 999414 is a unique piece of equipment. This car was the original all-steel cabooses on the Santa Fe having been built in 1927 by American Car and Foundry as ATSF 1500.

Altogether there were 150 cabooses built in 1927, numbered 1500 - 1649. This order was followed by an additional 225 cars, 1650 - 1874, in 1928. A total of 104 cars, 1875 - 1978, arrived on the property in 1930. The final batch of cars from ACF arrived in 1931, totaling only 22 cars, they were numbered 1979 - 2000. Altogether the Santa Fe received 501 of the 1500 class way cars between 1927 and 1931.

During the war years of 1942 thru 1944, the Santa Fe built an additional 200 cars in their own shops. These cars were numbered 2001 - 2200. Following the war the

road again built its own cars. The first 100 cars, numbered 2201 - 2300 rolled out in 1948 and were followed in 1949 by the last of the Santa Fe style cabooses, another 100 cars numbered 500 - 599. The 999197 came from this latter group, being built early in the year as number 507.

In all, the Santa Fe purchased or built a total of 901 all steel way cars between 1927 and 1949. These cars were in 2 distinct classes, the 1500 series cars built by ACF had radial roofs with the cupola set slightly back from the sides. The AT&SF built cars utilized a pre-fabricated pressed steel, peaked roof. Also, the cupola sides were flush with the car sides. These cars became known as the 2200 series.

In 1966 the Santa Fe began an extensive program of upgrading its aging fleet of Way Cars. Between 1966 and 1968 the shops at West Wichita, Kansas rebuilt a total of 315 cars designated as class CE-1 and numbered 999000-999314. During 1968 the West Wichita shops also rebuilt 40 cars for local service, identified by yellow painted cupolas, designated CE-3's and numbered 999600 - 999639. The San Bernardino shops rebuilt the next group of 223 cars designated CE-2's and numbered 999315-999537.

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In the rebuild program, the cars received new cushion underframes, new interiors, and 12 or 32 volt electrical systems where required. The cars also received new steel end doors to replace the original wood ones, and the windows were either plated

over, or were replaced with sealed, safety glass windows. The cupola also changed appearance somewhat as the side windows were moved from the corners to the center, in line with the switch from corner bench seats to center mounted, swiveling captains chairs on each side of the cupola. Of course, the most noticeable change in the program was the paint job. Prior to the program all Santa Fe way cars were painted a standard box car red with the car number and ATSF in white lettering centered on the sides. The cars emerged from the shops painted a bright Indian Red with a large Santa Fe logo and center stripe in yellow, and the car number and ATSF in white (cupola numbers were added later).

No new way cars came on the property for 25 years until 1974 when 5 extended vision cars, numbered 999538 - 999542, and designated class CE-6, were purchased from International Car Co. A second batch of 50 extended vision cars from ICC followed in 1978 classed CE-8 and numbered 999700 - 999749. Finally, in 1981 the last batch of new cabooses to probably ever grace the Santa Fe rails arrived from ICC. These 75 class CE-11 cars were also extended vision and were numbered 999750 - 999824.

In case you are wondering, the other CE classes which I have not mentioned here were minor rebuilds, renumbering, or acquisitions (TP&W) with some classes having as few as 1 car. Also, not all cars made it to the rebuild program, of the original 901 cars only 578 were modified. By the time of the rebuild program 162 cars had been either scrapped or sold and

the remaining 161 cars were down graded for use as transfer cabooses or road switcher service.

True to railroading form, cars were pulled in to be rebuilt and renumbered on a purely random basis. In his book "Cabooses Cars of the Santa Fe", Frank Ellington lists the old to new numbers of all cars which went through the program. It is interesting to note that only a third of the 1927 cars survived that long, having been either wrecked or sold to other railroads. By the way, there is one picture in the book of the 1500 apparently taken right after the car was built. Unfortunately this book is long out of print, and Mr. Ellington has no plans to re-issue it.

For more information about Santa Fe way cars, I highly recommend Joe McMillans book "Santa Fe Motive Power" which has one chapter devoted to cabooses, with dispositions as of 1985. In the book is a picture of the 999414 on the end of a freight drag as an example of the CE-2 class cars. Our thanks also go out to Joe as he was instrumental in helping us obtain this car.

Speaking of pictures, the February 1986 issue of Smithsonian magazine carried an article entitled "Cabooses may be rolling toward the end of the line". In the article the 999197 shows up prominently in a photo of the yards in Barstow.

It is interesting to note that the 999414 arrived in Portola almost one year to the day from the arrival of the 999197. What have the Santa Fe Boys got up their sleeves for next year????