

Lionel Bi-Level SF El Capitan Passenger Cars



Story by **Peter Conrad** Chicagoland Lionel Railroad Club Pictures by **Peter Conrad** and **Herbert W. Koch**

In July, 1956, the E.G. Budd Company delivered a unique order of passenger cars it had custom built for the Santa Fe Railway. These new cars, constructed entirely of welded stainless steel, were the 1st bi-level intercity passenger cars and were used by the Santa Fe as the consist of the railroad's all coach *El Capitan* traveling daily from Chicago & Los Angeles. When Amtrak inherited Santa Fe's passenger service circa 1973, they also gained ownership of these cars and used them as well. In fact, Amtrak loved these cars so much, that their design became the basis of Amtrak's new *Superliner* cars which, unlike Santa Fe's originals, included 1st class space for roomette & other sleeping accommodations as well. Today, Amtrak uses their Superliner equipment on all routes west of Chicago as well as the *Capital Limited* route between Chicago & Washington, D.C.

I purchased a 4 car set of Lionel's models of these coaches as well as a subsequent 2 car add on set which included a Sightseer Lounge car and a sleeper car. The sleeper car was a real surprise to me because, as I stated earlier, the *El Capitan* was Santa Fe's only **all coach** Chicago to Los Angeles Streamliner (but sleeper cars did run on the Chief). I speculate that Lionel did this because they chose to produce models of Amtrak's new Superliner cars as well.

The 6 cars are beautiful. They are constructed of burnished aluminum which replicates the welded stainless steel finish of the prototypes. A 7th car, the railsounds dinner, is also available. I did have a chance to see and hear the railsounds dinner and must admit that Lionel's sound is very dynamic.

Each car comes with 2 switches under the trucks to turn the marker lights on or off at either end of the car and the interior cabin lights as well. While 21" is the proper scale length of these cars, I personally find Lionel's 17" length to be sufficient. The cars come with separately applied windows and fully detailed interiors-including passenger figures. The cars include many separately-applied details such as grab irons, number plates, sprung trucks, and rotating bearing caps.



Updated interior by Author



Interior by Lionel