

Right: Shortly after departing Houston Union Station at 12:20 p.m. on November 26, 1972, Amtrak No. 16, with the 315L leading, has just passed under the Gulf Freeway (I45) on Houston Belt & Terminal trackage. The *Texas Chief* operated on HB&T trackage from Union Station through HB&T's New South Yard to T&NO Junction (This trackage was part of the ATSF Southern Division Houston District) where it then entered SP trackage operating to SP's Tower 17 in Rosenberg. At Tower 17, No. 16 entered the ATSF Southern Division Third District mainline. —Ralph Back



A Yellowbonnet in Texas

Recollections of ATSF F7 315L and the Texas Chief

by Ralph Back

The Texas Legislature adopted the Blue Bonnet as the official state flower in 1901. It blooms in the early spring and can be readily found in fields and along the roadsides throughout central and south Texas.

There was also a “yellowbonnet” in Texas, one that captured my attention while living in the Houston area during the early 1970s. At the time, I was photographing Santa Fe F units in freight and passenger service at every opportunity. Red and silver Warbonnet F units on the Houston to Chicago train Nos. 15 and 16, the *Texas Chief*, were my primary subject. After Amtrak took over passenger service on May 1, 1971, members of the Santa Fe 300 Class F units were assigned exclusively to the *Texas Chief*. Leased by Amtrak, the 300 Class consisted of the remaining members of the Santa Fe’s original 300 Class along with sixteen 16 Class F3s and twenty-five 37 Class F7s renumbered into the 300 series. It wasn’t long before paint schemes

on Santa Fe’s Fs began to change. Members of the 325 Class bumped from passenger service were painted into various blue and yellowbonnet schemes.

In May 1972, ex-Union Pacific E-

units replaced the 300 Class on the *Texas Chief*, but the assignment of the UP Es lasted only about four months. The 300 Class F units then returned to the *Texas Chief* in late August 1972 for their last



Before the 315L was repainted yellowbonnet, red and silver ATSF 315L leads Amtrak No.16 at Houston, Texas on March 17, 1972 shortly after its 7:20 a.m. departure from Union Station. This view is the same location as the 315L passing under the Gulf Freeway above. —Ralph Back



Left: With the 315L leading, Amtrak No. 16 at Houston Union Station awaits its 12:20 p.m. departure on December 31, 1972. This was No. 15's train that had arrived the previous evening and backed into Union Station to be ready for departure as No. 16 the next day. Amtrak shifted operations to the Southern Pacific station in 1974. **-Ralph Back**



The 315L leads No. 16 past a pair of vintage semaphores at Orchard, Texas on March 17, 1973. Orchard is located at MP 76.2 on the Southern Division Third District. This was ATS territory and the maximum authorized speed for passenger trains at this location was 90 MPH. -Ralph Back



At Rosenberg, Texas December 16, 1972, the 315L and four B units accelerate No. 16 eastbound. The location is north of SP's Tower 17 at Rosenberg on the Southern Division Third District. This is the second unit to wear this number on the Santa Fe; the original 315L was renumbered to 334L in November 1952. -Ralph Back

stand in passenger service. At this time, ATSF Southern Division Timetable No. 12 was in effect (Effective Sunday, June 11, 1972), and the daily Houston departure time of Amtrak No. 16, the *Texas Chief*, had changed from 7:20 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. The return of F units assigned to the *Texas Chief* brought a change - the yellowbonnet paint scheme. Santa Fe painted two of the 300 Class F7As and one F3B (304L, 315L, and 319B) in this new scheme. F7A 304L was assigned to Barstow and not used in Texas, but the 315L and 319B were assigned to the *Texas Chief* (with a maintenance base at Cleburne), and the 315L could be found frequently as the lead unit.

The schedule change allowed for better photo possibilities. The accompanying photographs are all of timetable eastward Amtrak No. 16, the *Texas Chief*, on the Houston, Second, and Third Districts of the ATSF Southern Division, and are my personnel recollection of a short period of time in the history of ATSF F units in passenger service.

ATSF 315L (built as Santa Fe 37 Class 40L b/n 8307 b/d 9/49) was in Amtrak service for less than one year while painted in the yellowbonnet scheme, and I photographed her leading No. 16 many times. Amtrak reportedly did not like the yellowbonnet scheme, and no other 300 Class F units were repainted while in Amtrak service. In July 1973, the Amtrak SDP40Fs were delivered and assigned to the *Texas Chief* thus ending the use of Santa Fe F units. The 315L was then assigned to Chicago-Kansas City freight service until retired in March 1974. It was converted to CF7 2517 in June 1974.

325 Class Yellowbonnets

Two F7As of the 325 Class, 331L(2nd) and 333L(2nd), were painted in the yellowbonnet scheme similar to the 300 Class 315L and 304L – yellow nose, blue cigar band logo, and no nose stripe. Both these units had blue pilots and black trucks rather than silver, and were Phase II F7s with 48" dynamic brake fan, rounded corner side access doors, no rear roof overhang, stainless-steel Farr-air

grilles with vertical slits, and twin pairs of vertical-slit side air intake louvers.

Modeling F7 315L in HO Scale

ATSF 315L is a Phase I early model F7, and either the Highliner or Intermountain Railway undecorated version Phase I F7A is a good starting point for modeling the 315L. (Stewart Hobbies, Inc. also makes a Phase I early F7A with horizontal-slit grilles but these are molded to the plastic body and would be difficult to replace.) Both have the front pilot with hollow step on the side and headlight in the nose door which are correct for the 315L. Phase I early F7 characteristics include 36" diameter dynamic brake fan, rear roof overhand, square corners on side access doors, horizontal-slit side air-intake louvers, and horizontal-slit stainless-steel side grilles. Over the years Santa Fe made modifications to the 40L before it was renumbered to 315L. One of the most noticeable changes is replacement of the stainless steel horizontal-slit side grilles with the Farr stainless steel vertical-slit side grilles. Intermountain offers the undecorated F7A with etched-metal Farr stainless steel vertical-slit side grilles and choice of front pilot. The Highliner shell grilles must be purchased separately but they do have a Farr etched-metal vertical-slit side grille. The rear roof overhang may have been removed also but I could not find any photos of the rear of the 40L or the 315L to confirm this. The Intermountain F7A shell comes with rounded corner side access doors while the 315L had the square corner side access doors; and it also has the round style sand-filter hatches while the 315L had the slotted style hatches.



ATSF F7 315L rests at Houston Union Station on December 31, 1972. Note the 'CLEBURNE' maintenance stencil on the front of the unit and the Farr vertical-slit stainless steel side grilles that replaced the horizontal-slit grilles early on. The 315L was a Phase I early F7 and renumbered into the 300 Class as 315L from the 37 Class 40L. —Ralph Back



The 315L on No. 16 at Kenney, Texas on November 26, 1972. Kenney is located about nine miles north of Bellville at MP 116 on the Southern Division Second District. —Ralph Back

Right: At 12:20 p.m. June 17, 1973, Amtrak No. 16 with 315L leading is departing Houston Union Station. In just a few weeks Amtrak SDP40Fs would replace the Santa Fe F units on the *Texas Chief*. ATSF steam generator car 133 is in the consist. It was painted in this red, white, and blue scheme and used in the display train "The Spirit of '76" that ran from Richmond, California to Richmond, Virginia in late 1972. —Ralph Back





Left: Look closely at the second unit behind F7 311C and you can see that the B unit has a solid yellow stripe rather than the yellow/red stripe, and it also has yellow handrails rather than silver. This is the only photo I have that shows F3B 319B with the yellow scheme. The 319B (former 24A) was later renumbered into the 325 Class as 345B. Recently repainted 300 Class 311C (former 45L) leads Amtrak No. 16 a few minutes after its 12:20 p.m. departure from Union Station Houston, Texas on October 7, 1972. -Ralph Back



Left: **THE END.** The 315L was painted in the yellowbonnet scheme in August 1972 at the Santa Fe's San Bernardino, California shops and now lies stripped outside Santa Fe's Cleburne, Texas shops on April 16, 1974. Two months later it was released as CF7 2517. The yellowbonnet F7 315L had a career in freight and passenger service of less than two years. -Joe McMillan photo, Ralph Back collection



ATSF 333L WEST near Edmond, Oklahoma on December 11, 1973. The 333L(2nd) was one of two 325 Class F7s in freight service that was painted in the yellowbonnet scheme like the 315L. The 333L was converted to CF7 2443 in August 1977. -Ralph Back

Modeling F7 315L in HO Scale (Cont.)

The Highliner shell comes with both styles of side-access doors, two styles of pilots, and two styles of sand-filler hatches. The Highliner F unit shell can be configured for any EMD F unit version from F2 to F9.

Other changes to make the 315L model prototypically correct and represent its final appearance include:

- Remove fuel tank skirting
- Add seven grab irons up the engineer's side of the nose and foot step on the frame
- Add grab irons above the windshield
- Add nose-mounted lifting lugs
- Replace the dual horns with a five-chime Leslie S5TR horn and mount on engineer's side
- Add nose MU door panel
- Add kick-plate at bottom of both cab side access doors (not on 304L)
- Add spark arrestor on each (2) exhaust stack
- Add firecracker type radio antenna at the rear of the roof (can type on 304L)
- Add cab side-window rear-view mirror "wind wings"
- Add inertial air filter on the roof
- Paint and letter as appropriate - yellow hand rails and grab irons above the frame and pilot, yellow bonnet nose with black separation stripe, blue cigar band logo, silver trucks and pilot, no nose stripe (Microscale Decals 87-77).



The 315L was not always the lead unit on No. 16 as it's the trailing unit of this ABBA lash up at Kenney, Texas on November 5, 1972. -Ralph Back

NOTE: This document is an updated version of my article "A Yellowbonnet in Texas" that first appeared in the First Quarter 2003 issue of the Warbonnet magazine published by the Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society, Inc. The photo arrangement was changed to accommodate the updates made to this document. Five additional photos were added and two were replaced out of the original seven photos while the article text is essentially the same with a few minor additions.

The following updates were made to the photos and captions that appeared in the article, and reference the Warbonnet magazine article pages:

- Page 29 - The date of the photo at the bottom right of the page should be April 17, 1972. I replaced this photo with a photo that is a better view.
- Page 30 - Corrected the caption for the middle left photo on this page. The caption for this photo appeared under the black and white photo at the top right of page 31.
- Page 30 - Added a photo for the caption that appeared under the middle left photo on this page.
- Page 30 - The photo at the bottom left of this page does not reflect the caption that appears. I replaced the photo with the photo that should have been included. The photo that appears in the magazine should have the credit -Steve Patterson photo, Ralph Back collection, and is the 315L on Amtrak No. 16 at Temple, Texas on December 1, 1972.
- Page 31 - Corrected the caption for the black and white photo at the top right of this page, as this was the caption for the middle left photo on page 30.

-Ralph Back