

I am a long-time collector of O-gauge Trains and Department 56 Villages. As long as Department 56 issued their Christmas in the City Village, it did not take me long to incorporate my model trains with the Village. Hope this article is of help to those who wish to incorporate trains into their Village displays.

Brian Vaill

Christmas and toy trains got a huge shot in the arm in the late 40's when Joshua Lionel Cowen owner of Lionel Trains shrewdly negotiated a marketing coup and convinced the Santa Fe Railroad and the New York Central Railroad to pony-up \$ 25,000.00 each to use their names on two new F3 Diesel engines. These engines became a huge hit among young boys who wanted them as Christmas presents. It wasn't long thereafter that Lionel made a set of matching aluminum passenger cars. For several years, those early F units were a staple under Christmas Trees. At the time was 8 years old and I was no exception.

Joshua Lionel Cowen



The Sante Fe version proved to be so much more popular because primarily it had much brighter colors with their famous red & yellow Warbonnet at the front end. The grey NYC version was less colorful.



F-3 Santa Fe No. 2343 (A)

New York Central F Units



This popularity of the Sante Fe F units has continued to this day. Other than the Polar Express sets, this has been the most popular engine in the history of O-Gauge that best suits the Department 56 & Lemax Villages.

About 30 years ago was the first time I combined trains and D56 Villages. The times have dramatically changed since then and so have the Sante Fe F units that have become so much better. In the early 90's, remote control was introduced to Sante Fe F units in the form of new technology (TMCC). The famous rock star Neil Young developed this system for his handicapped son. He traded the technology for Lionel stock and was a part owner of Lionel for many years. TMCC has now advanced to what is called the Legacy System that affords the model train enthusiast many wonderful options in controlling their trains.

The impact of the Lionel F units has been very dramatic for those who have in the past combined their Villages with model trains. And the beat goes on. These

engines are an excellent choice for those who are combing trains with their Villages in the future. They run on tight O-Gauge curves, that is a plus for those working with smaller spaces. They are very attractive and make a big hit with all ages. They are heavy and the reliability factor make them pretty much bullet-proof.

My Sante Fe F units have been upgraded several times over the years. I currently run in our Christmas in the City MTH F units that are rather remarkable. They are extremely close to the real thing right down to plated shiny panels on the sides. They run so smoothly and are trouble free. For me, I have no intensions of removing them in favor of other engine choices. Call it nostalgia or anything else, they are just too good looking to want to remove them.

Good choice if you are thinking of addition a train to your Villages for Christmas 2022.

My Sante Fe F Units

