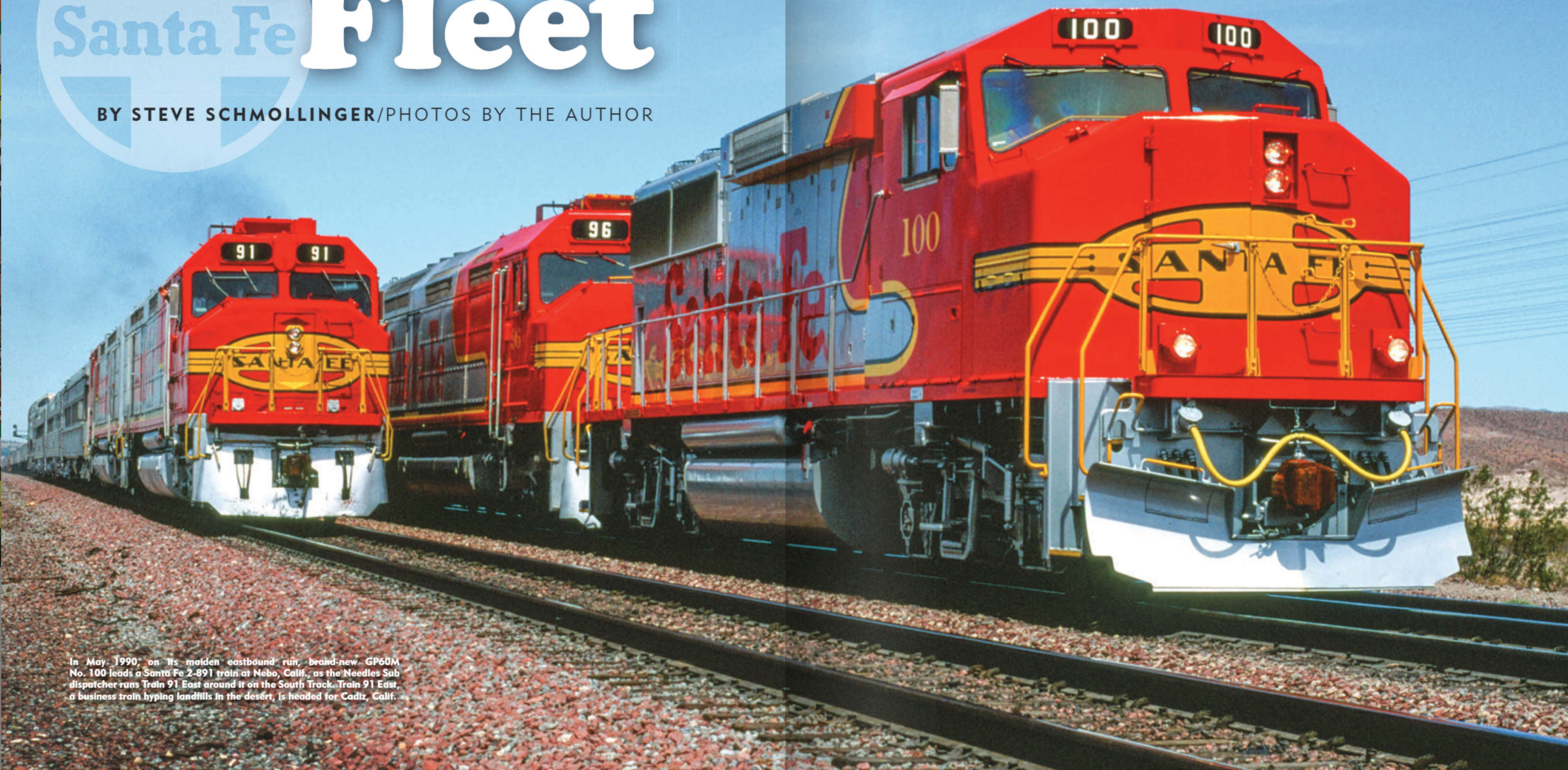


REIGN OF THE

Super Santa Fe Fleet

BY STEVE SCHMOLLINGER/PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



In May, 1990, on its maiden eastbound run, brand-new GP60M No. 100 leads a Santa Fe 2-891 train at Nebo, Calif., as the Needles Sub dispatcher runs Train 91 East around it on the South Track. Train 91 East, a business train hyping landfills in the desert, is headed for Cadiz, Calif.



WHEN DESIGNER Leland Knickerbocker created the “warbonnet” paint scheme for the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, it was a stroke of marketing genius. Even more, it became one of the most easily identifiable schemes in history. It was created in 1937 to inaugurate the revamped Santa Fe *Super Chief*, and because of that it came to embody the classic streamliner’s premium service and allure. By the same token, when railroad president Mike Haverly resurrected the warbonnet in 1989, it was another stroke of genius, as it helped the company market its premium intermodal service to the likes of J.B. Hunt and other major shippers.

In a *Chicago Tribune* article dated August 14, 1989, Haverly stated, “I think that restoring the warbonnet is a way to demonstrate to our customers

and the industry that we deliver quality transportation. At the same time, the warbonnet will give our employees a sense of pride in their heritage. We’re in some tough times now. Competition is tough. There is an overcapacity of all transportation. So only the fittest will survive, those that are innovators and aggressive. And we will.”

Haverly was as good as his word. On December 13 of the same year, *Tribune* reported, “Chicago-based Santa Fe Railway and one of the nation’s largest trucking companies, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Tuesday signed a partnership agreement to offer customized, truck-rail freight service between the Midwest and California. By working together, Santa Fe and J.B. Hunt can make deliveries between Chicago and California in three days or less, compared with four or five days through an agent, officials

said. The cost would be higher than regular intermodal service but less than what a trucking company would charge for hauling freight the same distance. They estimated that the service, named ‘Quantum,’ potentially could generate up to \$90 million in annual revenues for Santa Fe and J.B. Hunt.” Indeed, that deal alone was worth millions to Santa Fe, and successor BNSF Railway is still reaping the rewards.

Haverly’s “Super Fleet” variant of the warbonnet, with “Santa Fe” emblazoned in large Cooper Black lettering across the sides of his red-and-silver locomotives, not only raised the morale of his operating folks, but also elevated the profile of the railroad in the public eye. No other transportation entity in the U.S. possessed such an emblematic icon when it came to projecting an image. Much of the public was immediately

OPPOSITE TOP: Santa Fe 138 West shows off the striking “Super Fleet” colors on its GP60M as it leans into a curve late on a September 1990 afternoon at Avon, Calif., location of the Tosco Oil Refinery.

OPPOSITE: As the morning haze starts to dissipate at sunrise on a December 1990 day, three GP60Ms and an FP45 pulling a 991 (hot intermodal) train are reflected in the still waters of the boat harbor at Orwood, Calif., where the Santa Fe has an active drawbridge over the Old San Joaquin River.

ABOVE: Early on a March 1991 morning, a hot 991 train roars through a huge sweeping curve at Balllico, Calif., and onto the Merced River Bridge on the first leg of its journey towards Chicago.

RIGHT: In August 1996, while crews move power around at the west end of Mormon Yard in Stockton, Calif., 612 West, symbolled 199, chomps at the bit waiting for a work crew to get the Stockton Sub CTC up and running.





aware the paint was that of the *Super Chief*— or at least the same as the beautiful little train that used to run around the Christmas tree — with its inherent appeal. It conjured an emotional, as well as an intellectual, response. Whether it had a direct effect on the success of the railroad can be debated, but certainly Haverty's use of such a powerful, ingrained image increased the Santa Fe's brand equity in the 1990s. Once the Super Fleet became ubiquitous on the property, there was little that was generic about the Santa Fe.

One way to test how "identifiable" the warbonnet scheme was would have been the following — remove the "Santa Fe" from the sides of a locomotive, as well as from the "cigar band" on the nose, and then ask members of the public — especially the shipping public — to identify either the train or the railroad the paint scheme was associated with. I

suspect given those choices, you'd have gotten few wrong answers, especially in the 1990s. This same characteristic was one solid reason BNSF could have used the warbonnet to advantage, although some argued that it smacked "too much" of AT&SF. Nevertheless, the feeling of "quality and tradition" would still firmly be present even with a "swoosh" version of "BNSF" on the sides and the nose.

So what was the magic of the Super Fleet paint scheme? What was Knickerbocker's most powerful tool when he designed the original warbonnet? What made the scheme elegant? In a word, simplicity — a simple, straightforward design using colors that captured the imagination of the public and the spirit of the Santa Fe. Red and yellow — colors that caricatured if not characterized the Southwest, contrasted against shiny steel-and-silver that glowed in the sun. Coupled with the stylish yet elementary

ABOVE: On a beautiful afternoon in April 1991, the red-and-silver paint of Santa Fe 112 East is an elegant counterpoint to the greenery of California's Tehachapi Mountains. The train is about to enter Tunnel 3 just east of Bealville.

OPPOSITE TOP: Climbing the abrupt 2.33 percent grade out of Mojave, Calif., a long, heavy Santa Fe manifest with C40-8W No. 815 on the point grinds slowly but irrepressibly through an elongated S-curve in July 1995. The train has six powerful diesel locomotives to help it conquer the steep eastern slope of Tehachapi Pass.

OPPOSITE: In December 1990, a 199 train on its 52-hour schedule between Chicago and Richmond, Calif., crosses Tehachapi Creek just west of Woodford. The low morning sun lights up B40-8W No. 526's warbonnet attire.





curve of the warbonnet to delineate its main elements, with a stylized Santa Fe emblem on the nose, the scheme became both memorable and eye-catching. To management's credit, it decided to use red and yellow in the separation stripe and on the sill of the Super Fleet locomotives, instead of simply red as on the road's U28CGs of yesteryear, while adopting their large lettering.

After the railroad painted its eight FP45s in the new paint in 1989, the following May it started taking delivery of its first new locomotives in the red and silver, the GP60Ms, which were also the first diesels on the road to sport ditch lights. The author was privileged to ride in GP60M No. 100 on its maiden westbound run between Barstow and Needles, Calif., with the late great Homer Henry at the helm. On that run, the pride and excitement of the three Santa Fe men on board — Homer and the crew — were clearly palpable. At Nebo, just west of Barstow, the dispatcher stopped our 891 train on the North Track so a special headed for Cadiz could run around us. On the point of that train of silver Budd cars was a pair of sparkling clean red-and-silver FP45s. The



TOP: On the morning of Veterans' Day 1991, Santa Fe 544 West comes up out of Barstow Yard onto the North Track at Valley Junction, Calif. In the distance, a Union Pacific coal drag waits to proceed west behind the pig train.

LEFT: We're pacing an eastbound Santa Fe stack train across the Mojave Desert east of Goff's, Calif., with four Super Fleet GE Dash 8s for power in January 1995. The train is visible in the photographer's rearview mirror.

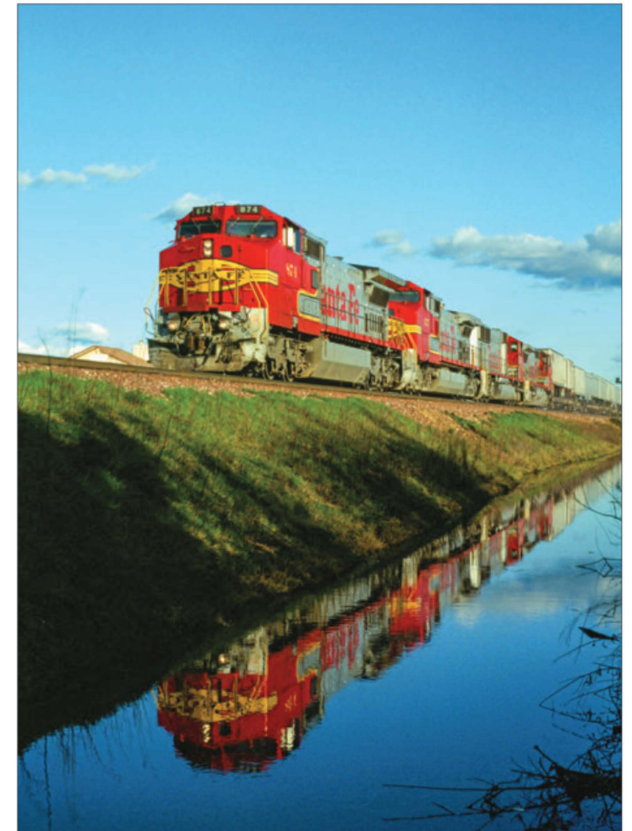
ABOVE: Late in the afternoon on September 22, 1994, Santa Fe 228 West, a 589 train out of Texas, wends its way through curves and hills at the west end of Franklin Canyon in Hercules, Calif.



OPPOSITE: A hot eastbound BNSF pig train hustles through multiple hogbacks at Sunshine, Ariz., in July 2003. The lead Dash 9 proudly wears the warbonnet, but with "BNSF" in the cigar band and on its flanks. Some say this is the scheme the BNSF should have stuck with.

BELOW: One of Santa Fe's beautiful Super Fleet trains is reflected in a pool of rain water in February 1994. The train is flying through Oakley, Calif., at nearly 70 m.p.h., having just crossed the heart of the San Joaquin Delta.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: EMD F45 No. 5983 leads a 199 train with three new red-and-silver GE's in the consist as it crosses the Muir Trestle in Martinez, Calif., in May 1994. The deep afternoon shadows beyond the bridge help the Super Fleet's bright colors stand out. Mike Haverty's return to the classic paint scheme to highlight Santa Fe's premium pig trains is a marketing move that will long be remembered.



warbonnet was back in force!

The *Chicago Tribune* stated that while Haverty was the Santa Fe's vice president for operations, he promised "that if he became president he would return the warbonnet motif to service. On June 1 [1989], the 45-year-old Haverty was named president. A week later, he ordered that eight locomotives formerly assigned to *Super Chief* service be restored to their red-and-silver glory. "We're going to refer to our freight trains as the Super Fleet, and we're going to

use the warbonnet scheme in a \$500,000 advertising campaign in national magazines and the business press," Haverty said."

His vision was inspiring, and helped put Santa Fe in a position of strength when it came time to merge. That vision also returned to the rails one of the most beautiful paint schemes ever conceived. The reign of the Super Fleet will long be remembered as one of the most exciting times in U.S. railroading. ■

