

Modeling a Santa Fe Big Dome in N scale



The Santa Fe Big Domes were distinctive, signature passenger cars, used in the Santa Fe passenger fleet from the early 1950s right up to the advent of Amtrak.



Here is a picture of what is possible with some very basic mods:



On the following pages are hints and tips to easily allow you to make your own acceptable scale model of the Santa Fe Big Dome for use in your N scale Santa Fe passenger fleet.



What's needed:

- 1) A Bachmann N scale full dome passenger car, lettered for Santa Fe
- 2) A small bottle of PollyScale acrylic Stainless Steel paint
- 3) Microscale Santa Fe streamlined passenger car decals (60-114 or 60-4190)
- 4) Two complementary small bottles of paint for painting the seats under the dome
- 5) A small strip of .005" or .010" styrene for view blocks on the trucks (if you have one of the Bachmann big domes with high cutouts over the trucks)
- 6) A fairly short period of time

Overview:

- a) Dis-assemble the car gently per the attached photos.
- b) Remove the overly large 'Santa Fe' on the Bachmann, brush-paint the lettering panel with Stainless Steel Pollyscales, then apply a proper-sized Santa Fe decal
- c) Paint the seats under the dome glass, a lighter color for the floor, a darker complementary color for the seats. I used a light grey floor with a darker gray seats.
- d) Glue small 'view block styrene strips' to the inside of the truck frames, so that there is not longer an unsightly 'gap' that can be seen under the cars
- e) Re-assemble and enjoy!

Photos showing various steps:

Overview of how everything assembles together:

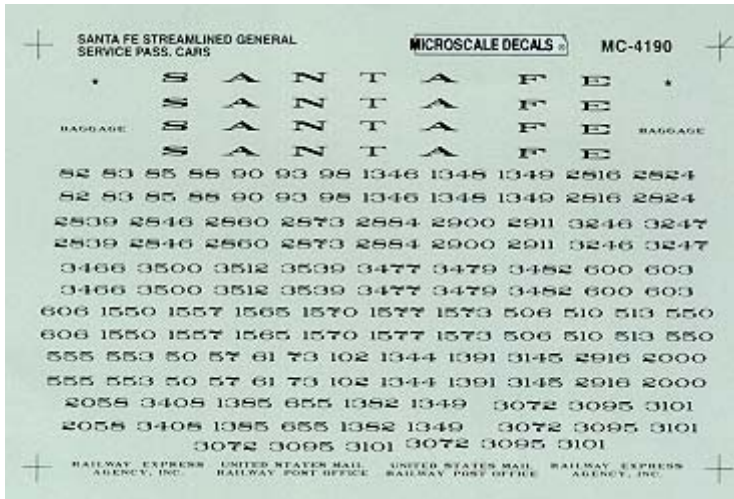


The car comes apart by unclipping the sides, then gently pulling up.

Remove the too-big Santa Fe lettering with 91% alcohol and a Q-tip:



The paint underneath will come with it, but it's easily re-covered with Pollyscale Stainless Steel acrylic paint, I brush-painted it. Then re-decal using any Microscale Santa Fe streamlined passenger car decal, such as 60-4190, there are others:

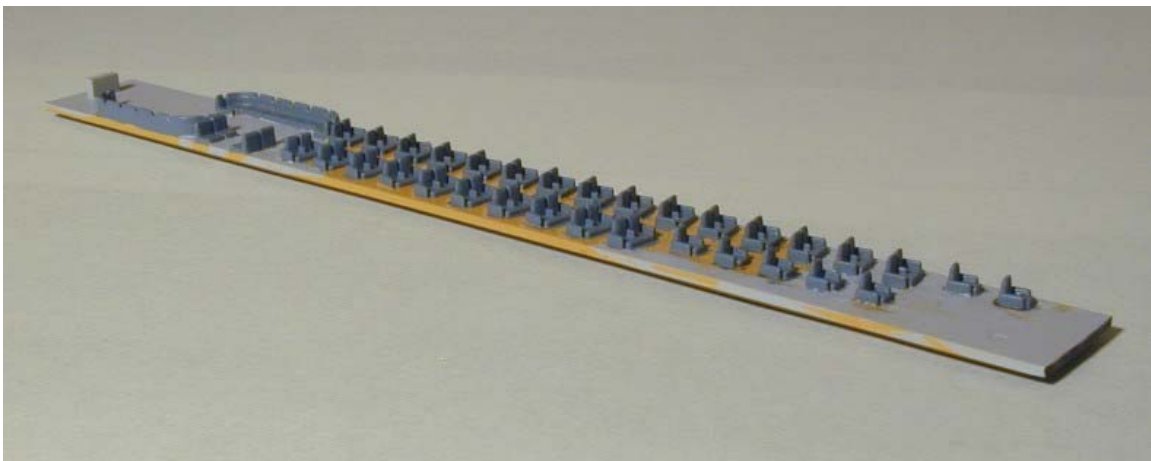


Here's the complete car side:

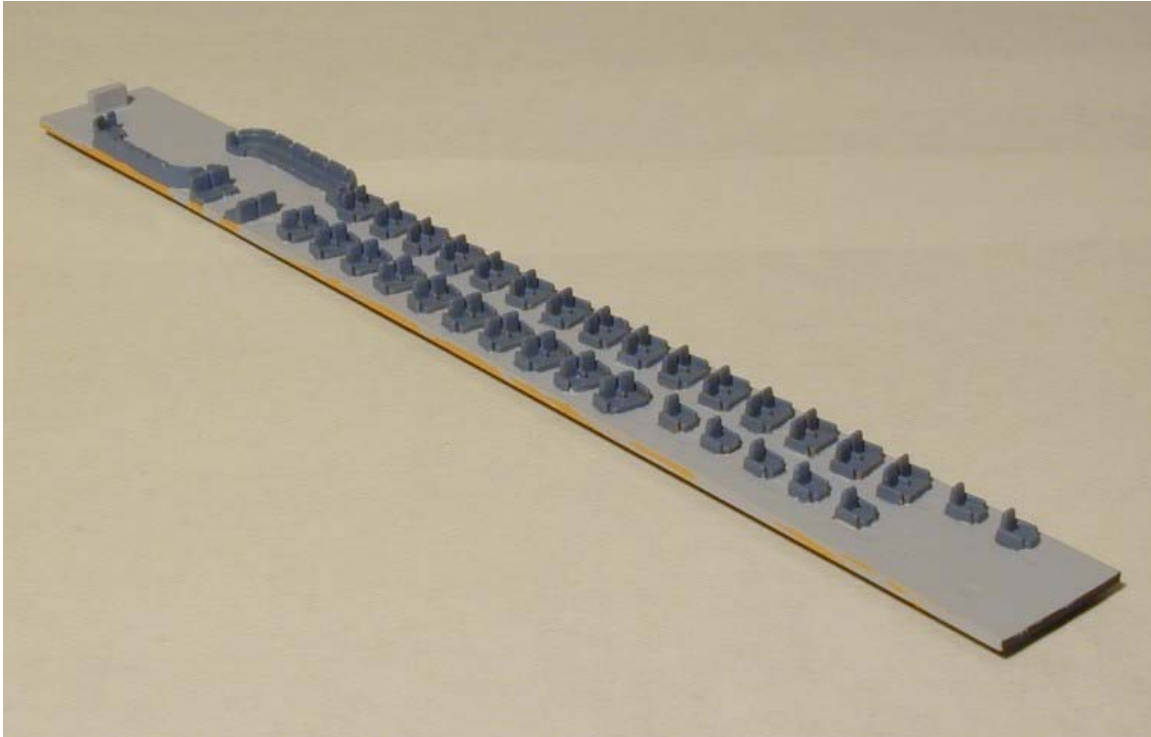


Big improvement!

Next, we paint the interior under the glass:



And a final result looks something like:



There are apparently two different generations of N scale Bachmann Big Domes out there.

The 'newer' version, which you can tell because it has silver trucks, does not need the following modification 'view block' to the gaps over the trucks. It's preferable to start with this version if you can.

However, I had on hand the 'older' version (you can tell because the trucks are black).

This version's shell has an excessively high cutout gap over the trucks. So, I hid that visual gap under the trucks by super-gluing a small rectangle of .005" or .010" styrene to the inside of the truck:



The coupler is a standard Kato knuckle coupler, filed at a slight angle to allow it to 'droop' down to the proper level to mate with other Kato Santa Fe passenger cars.

Reassemble the car:



And then you have the following:





Enjoy!

John Sing
San Mateo, Calif
January 2006

History of the Santa Fe Big Dome

In 1952 the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad placed an order with the Budd Company for eight stainless steel full-length dome cars.

These Santa Fe cars were series numbers 506 to 513 and were completed and in service by 1954 on the AT&SF El Capitan, Chicagoan and Kansas Citian trains. The cars were designed with 57 full-dome seats, 18 upper-level lounge seats, and a 28-seat lounge on the lower level with a bar and a traveling nurse's room.

Realizing the potential of such cars, and believing that they would be both popular and practical, the AT&SF ordered six additional cars from the Budd Company in 1953. These cars were series 550 to 555 and were put into service on the San Francisco Chief in May 1954. The cars had 57 full-dome seats and 18 upper-level lounge seats. The cars' lower level had an eight-seat lounge, a bar and a crew dormitory.

In 1956, when the Santa Fe's premier El Capitan was refurbished with the Hi-Level cars, the Santa Fe Big Domes were reassigned to service on the Chief, which, like the El Capitan was operating between Los Angeles and Chicago.

In 1968, when the Chief was discontinued, the full length dome cars saw some service on the Texas Chief and on the San Francisco Chief. (The Big Domes were never used on the Super Chief, for those of you who want to know).

The Santa Fe Big Dome (along with similar cars on the Great Northern, Milwaukee Road, and others) were distinctive, beautiful cars.