

R36 "Main Line" 9542-9543

Surviving pair of the R36 (Main Line) series, 9524-9557 (34 cars).

In 1963, with the World's Fair due to open in nine months, the New York City Transit Authority (NYCTA) decided to have the last 40 cars of the R33 IRT order (8806-9345) rushed out as single units in the bright turquoise livery and large windows for World's Fair service on the Flushing Line (R33 WF). These would be operated with 390 R36 cars (pairs) for 11 car service on the Flushing Line. The first 500 R33s were Main Line IRT cars with conventional windows (drop sash) and bright red livery and yellow grab irons.

The 40 R33 WF single units resulted in leftover "conventional" R33 shells for the builder, St. Louis Car Company (a subsidiary of General Steel Industries). 34 of the leftover R33 car shells were assembled and delivered to the IRT Main Line (1/2/3/4/5/6 routes) at the end of the R36 order, between July 1964 and early 1965. These were the last of the 2,860 IRT "SMEE" postwar cars built and delivered between 1948 and 1965. One other leftover R33 shell ended up at Sperry Rail Service (SRS) in Danbury, CT and was assembled by Sperry in 1965 as SRS railcar 140.

The Main Line R36s are also the last new build rail equipment in North America (excluding cabooses and historic replicas such as streetcars) to use the conventional railroad drop sash windows similar to school buses (though replaced in 1994-95 with inward hinged vents, these could be retrofitted to their original look).

The last four R36s were delivered in February 1965 (9540-9543). With this, the SMEE generation was complete on the IRT division, though postwar generation cars on the B Division (IND/BMT) continued through the R42s in 1969-70.

9542-9543 began service on the 5 (Lexington Express), before moving to the 6 in early 1966. They followed the rest of the small 34 car fleet to the 1/3 lines in 1970 and remained there into 1987, then briefly on the 5. The pair was rebuilt at 207 Street Shop in 1988 and reentered service on the 6 in the "Gunn Red" (Redbird) livery, being based there until the delivery of R142As (later converted to R188s in 2013-2015) from Kawasaki in 2001.

The remaining Main Line R36s on the 6 then moved over to the 7, with 9542 and 9543 being the last two in service on May 16, 2003.

This marked the last conventional window cars and last "Main Line" IRT cars of any type in service at NYCT. 9542 and 9543 joined the New York Transit Museum fleet in 2004.

Historical significance

In addition to being among the very last of the postwar IRT generation cars (R12/R14/R15/R17/R21/R22/R26/R28/R29/R33/R36) to be delivered, 9542-9543 are among the very last rail equipment in North America (excluding cabooses and historic replicas such as streetcars) to have the conventional railroad windows. These are also among the few Westinghouse IRT cars in the NYTM fleet (most being GE). 9542-9543 are also the last of their class in service. The Main Line R36s were also the first cars to be radio equipped (1965), on the Lexington Avenue Line.

In 1988, 9543 tested Westinghouse (AdTranz/Bombardier) E-Cam DC traction. This electronically controlled cam propulsion would later be installed on the GOH R44 rebuilds in 1991 and now on all R62, R62A, R68 and R68A cars.

Written by Kevin Wong¹

¹The author was chairman and founder of R36 Preservation, Inc., 2010-2015 and contributed funding for restoration of aforementioned cars.



New R36 9541 on the 5 at Intervale Avenue, May 1965, about three months old.
Doug Grotjahn photo



9543 at Chambers Street on the 1 local, May 1972, seven years old.
Doug Grotjahn photo



9543 (left) and 9542 (right) at Simpson Street on the 2/5, early 1988. Camilo Jose Vergara photo



R36 9543 with R33 WF Single Unit 9307 at 207 Street Yard. Kevin Wong photo



R36s 9543 (left) and 9542 (right), November 11, 2018. Kevin Wong photo