

Of Burgers and *Bolognese*: *American Locomotives in Italy*

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Gr.735 - 2-8-0 Consolidation “Wilson”



The steam engines of Group 735 owe their existence to a series of exigencies that arose out of the First World War. Italy's railroads had only been consolidated as a government entity at the beginning of the century. At the outbreak of the war, the engines in use were a heterogeneous mix of types from the three predecessor companies, and few were particularly impressive when it came to heavy hauling.

Aligned with the Allied Nations, Italy was having a difficult time moving the mass of materiel required by the war effort. The F.S. did have a 2-8-0 type locomotive that was up to the task; the problem was that there just weren't enough of them. With much of the manufacturing capability engaged in directly supporting military needs, there was little capacity left for the construction of new, more powerful locomotives.

The solution was to order locomotives from the United States. The F.S. contracted with the American Locomotive Company (ALCO) to build 400 Consolidations based on the design of the Italian-produced Gr.740.

This Gr.735 shares many similarities with its Italian prototype, but there are noticeable differences as well. Most significant were the cast steel frame and the typical American style pilot wheels. The engine also featured a superheater system and simple expansion cylinders.

The first 108 units were delivered in 1917 and were rated at 980 horsepower. The remainder, delivered after war's end, developed 1,080 hp. Eventually, modifications were made to the engines of the first series, bringing them up to equal footing with their stablemates. Typical maximum speed was 65 kph (40 mph), with a working weight of 66,900 kg (just under 150,000 pounds).

Italian railwaymen nicknamed the Gr.735 "Wilson" after the American President of the era. Of the 400 units ordered, only 393 arrived in Italy; seven were lost when the ship carrying them to their final destination sunk.

Gr.736 - 2-8-0 Consolidation



These oil-fired locomotives were constructed in the United States and purchased by the U.S. government specifically for use by the advancing Allied armies during World War II. They were built to the British clearances (loading gauge) which would also allow them to be used in Europe. The first locomotives of this type entered service in Great Britain in December 1942.

Several hundred additional locomotives arrived in 1943 and were put into storage ready for post-invasion shipment to the continent, which began in late 1944. By December 1945, 560 locomotives of this type were in use in many parts of France. They were only ever on loan, and by the end of 1946 none remained in SNCF service.

Until 1946 many of the locomotives were marked Transportation Corps U. S. A. on the tender. As of 1946 the markings were changed to UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), and during 1946 and 1947 they were disposed of by the military.

The countries where they found civilian use were Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Russia, Turkey, and Yugoslavia. In addition to the locomotives sent to

Europe, at least 149 locomotives were shipped to North Africa. Italy received 243 locomotives, many via North Africa, with the remainder directly from the USA. They later became FS 736.001 to 243.

In Italian Railways, P.M. Kalla-Bishop writes, “It always seemed to me that the Italian engine crews were rather alarmed by these modern locomotives. When the driver opened the regulator, they accelerated any weight of train up to an unsafe speed before he had time to notice what was happening.”

Kalla-Bishop also reports that at least 20 of these locomotives suffered major firebox failures that were later traced to a design flaw involving the firebox stays. Replacing the stays and lowering the maximum permissible boiler pressure solved the problem.

D.143 - Centercab Diesel Bo-Bo “Truman”



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At the close of the Second World War, Italy received 49 U.S. built Witcomb center-cab diesel-electric switchers. Like the “Wilson” 2-8-0s, these engines also took on a nickname based on the U.S. president in office. They were called “Truman.”

These locomotives arrived in Naples with the Allied armies and were each originally powered with a pair of 300 HP Buda engines, one in each hood. The FS numbered these Ne.120.001~049 and later retrofitted 250 HP Fiat diesels. In the 1960s, all were again rebuilt with a single 570 HP OM (Officina Meccanica) diesel engine and the designation was changed to D.143.3001~3049

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