

## The Test of the Press: Do We Show Them our Best?

"Here we sit in a branchy row,  
Thinking of beautiful things we know;  
Dreaming of deeds that we mean to do,  
All complete, in a minute or two—  
Something noble and grand and good,  
Won by merely wishing we could."  
—Rudyard Kipling, *Road-Song of the Bandar-Lot*

It filled an entire store in the mall.

—Hobbyists were chatting as they perused the shelves of merchandise. Many people from outside the hobby, captivated by the incredible detail of the store's window displays, had been drawn inside the shop and were browsing too.

A wall-mounted video monitor broadcast a promotional tape of the hobby in action, with glimpses of shows, collections, and examples of some of the hobby's finest creations. A nearby rack of hobby publications served not only as a handy "newsstand" for hobbyists, but also a convenient, enticing, and relatively inexpensive way for the interested but uninitiated to get an "inside look" at the hobby.

"And I had thought people were just *playing* with these," more than one person was heard to comment. Their awed voices blended with the camaraderie of the hobbyists and the steady chime of the cash register to create a symphony of success for the hobby. And as I left the shop, I was brimming with respect—those model railroad hobbyists certainly knew how to do it right.

### Reaping Respect

Model railroaders and dollhouse miniaturists participate in "respectable" hobbies, far outdistancing our model horse hobby in the public's esteem. A large part of the reason is the professionalism with which each hobby organizes and presents itself. Let's face it, right now the model horse hobby as a whole is as centrally organized as milkweed fluff in a windstorm. And when it comes to public relations, some hobbyists present an image that seriously undercuts the most "respectable" aspects we have going for us: equine education and art.

While many of our publications play vital roles in keeping readers in touch with what makes our hobby tick, there are no professional publications produced by hobbyists. (*Just About Horses* does not count—while a pro publication, it is produced by Breyer chiefly to promote Breyer's products.)

Besides a cornucopia of club newsletters, hobbyists produce a handful of much broader-based publications such as *The Hobby Horse News*, *Model Horse Gazette*, *The Arena*, and *The Equine Miniaturist* (formerly *American Model Horse Collector's Digest*). But each are amateur publications, and their ability to "reach out" to an audience beyond the immediate circle of their subscribers is limited. Editors' time, energy, and resources are often at a premium. At times, the inclusion of news and a variety of views may be neglected. But there are only so many hours in the day, and when you work full time to keep a roof over your head, food on the table, and model horses on the shelves, that leaves precious little time for producing a magazine.

What model publication could turn enough of a profit to earn a living for its editor, much less for a staff? Who has the money, talent, and time to invest in and support a smartly designed, well-written, and—dare we dream?—perhaps even colorful magazine that might enjoy toy-store or hobby-shop distribution? Not me. And probably not you.

So we have our amateur publications that serve quite capably as the collective "heart" that keeps the lifeblood of our hobby flowing. But we don't have a professional magazine to spread the word, to attract attention, to keep the hobby active and growing and strong...to bolster our image, in both the eyes of the public and ourselves.

But there are plenty of pro magazines out there that already share some common ground with us! Magazines on horses in general, breed-specific publications, equine and animal art publications, even doll and miniatures publications—each is suited to carry a story about at least one aspect of our hobby, and all have a constant need for content. To have an article on our hobby appear in a pro magazine, especially an equine-related publication, is a golden chance to gain some needed prestige, recognition, and respect. And positive press has a definite "domino effect"—once one publication portrays you in a good light, others are more receptive to the idea of giving you space. And the more people there are who read about the hobby, the less likely they are to pigeonhole us as ninnies who make plastic ponies whinny.

### The Quest for Press

Our hobby had its most influential shot at print nirvana over a decade ago, when *Classic*—the now-defunct equine magazine that boasted superb production values, high-class advertising, and some of the finest writers in their fields—devoted seven pages, six color photos, and a total of 66 inches of print to the hobby.

When author Sandy Treadwell arrived at the 1978 Model Horse Congress to gather material for the piece, long-time hobbyist Julie Froelich recalled, "At first he looked rather confused, and then you could see the light dawning—kind of like, 'wow, this wasn't like I expected!' He told us he thought we'd be on our hands and knees on the floor making our horsies gallop around—he never expected us to be handling them as art objects."

"We had a lot of fun," chuckled Froelich. "Remember, this is before there were so many egos involved. We were having a good time, and at the same time, we were trying to impress this nice man from the press that we weren't a bunch of weirdos."

And Treadwell's report reflected the fun. "At the very least, they are misunderstood," he described the show's 65 attendees, and then let the showers speak for themselves. And speak they did—on the hobby's history, on the purposes it serves, on the many makes of model available, how models are sought out, how they are remade. They defined what attracted them to the hobby, and how hobbyists view their models and themselves. In all, Treadwell captured the how and why of the hobby, as well as an element that has eluded our latest chronicler—the fact that there's no use poking fun at hobbyists who realize that their hobby can't be taken deadly seriously in the first place.

Perhaps prompted by the coverage in *Classic*, other articles on our hobby began to pop up in major equine magazines in the early 1980s. *Western Horseman*, which had published an assortment of short pieces throughout the late 1960s and '70s (for example, a contest to "name" Breyer's then-new Quarter Horse Yearling mold), published "Model Horses—The Tiny World of Kathleen Maestas" in its October 1982 issue. In the article, author Timothy Farrell described the art of customizing model horses in general and the work of Maestas in particular.

Hot on its heels was an uncredited piece in the November 1982 *Appaloosa News*, "Sometimes They Lay Horses On Their Sides." This article also discussed the creative aspects of remaking, with emphasis on portrait models, and highlighted artist Linda Leach.

A regular feature in *Peruvian Horse World* magazine, "Salute To An Artist" placed model hobbyists in the spotlight at least twice. A 1982 issue focused on the miniature tack, wood sculptures, and remakes of Paso enthusiast Charlene Marshall. And all the stops were let out in the August 1983 *Peruvian Horse World Review*, as Susan Guffey was profiled with three full-color model photo illustrations, two others in black-and-white, and various other photos of models scattered throughout the issue! The magazine was clearly impressed, and a telling quote from Guffey was