

Carol Williams of Rio Rondo

The more seasoned hobbyists know her as Carol Williams, but newcomers to the hobby may be more familiar with her business name, Rio Rondo. Carol was introduced to the hobby 15 years ago, and along the way was greatly influenced by Chris Cook who graciously shared her knowledge. In 1980 she began production of her renowned line of Western tack. The self-employed 27 year-old artisan now has two children and several live horses at home in Copland, Kansas. Time has compelled her to now sell completed tack occasionally only through sale lists. However, she does offer do-it-yourself kits so that hobbyists can try their own hand at tackmaking. Leather, hardware (saddle trees, jump rings, hooks, clasps and chains), and stock silver are now available by mail order, and she has just sent out a "sneak preview" of a line of plates, buckles, bits and conchos, all castings scaled from real styles. Carol designed all but two of them, which were designed by a jeweler. At this time she says there are plans "on the drawing board" to produce English and Harness supplies as well.

Carol's credits also include her photography services and remaking, both discontinued to the public. Because she has worked over so many of the familiar Breyer molds, she prefers to extensively remake a model whenever she does do one, setting her base price at \$500. "I have to laugh when I see ads (by remakers) proclaiming they offer carved ears and hooves and sanded seams," she says. To her, these things are a given when remaking, not a bonus or separately charged service. She cannot stress enough the importance of detail in an RRH; it is the exquisite detailing and style of the artist that makes the model "a classic." As for complaints of high-priced RRH's, Carol stood firm on one belief. "Buyers have created their own market. Everyone wants a versatile super-duper model for \$100 or less." Therefore "...they're more likely to get 'plain' average types of work. If you want 'unique,' 'exquisite' or 'one-of-a-kinds' you'll have to pay for the work done." She adds, "Some people say, 'if we refuse to buy models at these prices the artists will lower their charge.' I won't do it. I charge what I need." She believes hobbyists don't take into account or realize the overhead expenses of remaking (or any model business). It is not just a matter of materials and labor. One must also consider time taken to buy the materials, gasoline spent, phone bills from ordering the materials and perhaps talking to the customer, postage and envelopes, and advertising, among other things. When added on a yearly basis, the total can be quite substantial. Besides, according to Carol, if a person is paying a high price for a well made horse, "they're not buying a mere model—they can buy a model out of a box." They're buying the product of a talented artist. In addition she says, "The high prices are an incentive for me to do my best work." However, when she sees a mere repaint and hair selling for \$100-\$150, she shakes her head. "You can get more (for your dollar) from another remaker, who might be lesser-known but just as qualified."

A model by Carol Williams is still possible to obtain. In 1988 she produced an original sculpture of a Quarter Horse



One of Carol Williams's creations, Paint stallion High Lonesome, has won numerous awards.

stallion. It was released in January of this year as a limited edition of 200 signed and numbered copies. Does she plan to make another in the future? "Oh yeah." She'll probably go with another stock-type model (the QH is her favorite breed) but will try other breeds as well. She's also considering offering an unpainted original sculpture.

An ongoing pet project that has demanded considerable time and effort is "Project '88," a comprehensive rulebook and guidebook for hobbyists. Under the direction of coordinator Jill Jones, Carol and 16 other volunteers have worked on the project on a constant basis. The group keeps in contact by phone and by bulletins that can sometimes be 50 pages long. Already the information accumulated could amount to 400 pages of finished text. "It's a lot (of work)," says Carol. "You don't realize the state of the hobby until you pick it all apart." She believes the future could see Project '88 as a lobby-oriented group, expressing the need for model hobbyists to be represented. Carol says individual complaints against companies like Breyer are futile. "We must lobby together. We must define what we want, and show the manufacturers also what's in it for them. If someone says, 'I want quality,' well, let's define quality. What do you want to see more of? Two very clear problems I can see with OF's are (lack of) realistic detail and (lack of) smooth overall body seams. We can look at the models and prove these problems exist. If we can get together to help get these problems solved we could see more realistic OF models...and realism is quality." Furthermore, "Project '88" devotes itself to guiding showers. "Showers often are victims at live show," says Carol. "What if you arrive at a show and the judge isn't there—what do you do? Project '88 provides a plan of action." The book provides sets of guidelines and rules to give showers something to set standards by, to fall back on. It clearly lists what judges and showers should and should not do when certain situations arise. It also provides definitions for terms such as "Novice" and "Senior" showers, and rules they should follow. One proposal is to set up