

prominent in their respectful treatment: "I hope that through my showing of Peruvian horse models, more people will become as enchanted as I am with the breed."

Now there's a valuable angle to pursue in seeking print coverage! Horsemen tend to be impressed when an artist loves their particular breed enough to portray and promote it in miniature model form. In a way, aren't we flattering the real breeds by creating and campaigning miniature likenesses of them...perhaps even doing them a favor by spreading their appeal?

The last article in this admittedly sketchy review was also published in our brief boom of print in the early '80s. Featured in an issue of *Horse and Rider* magazine, hobbyist Bettye Brown's "The Patter of Tiny Hooves" was a short, lighthearted look at the hobby in general. Illustrated with various photos of remakes, the piece sums up all the good we have to offer: "The hobby of model horses teaches the young horse lover proper show techniques, breed requirements, record keeping, photography, judging, tack making, painting, history of the horse, color genetics and responsibility. It also encourages imagination."

Good press like this gained our hobby, and ourselves, some valuable respect. All this inspirational ink reinforced to large readerships that we are artists, we are sculptors and tack-makers and photographers. We are knowledgeable and appreciate fine horses, whether real or tiny replicas; we are as respectable as participants in any other hobby, and we are fun-loving folks to boot.

But then the trickle of articles stopped. Maybe it was because our own hobby publications were becoming bigger and more ambitious through the middle '80s, and hobbyists were redirecting their time and effort into writing for those rather than pursuing the elusive dribs and drabs of pro magazine print. After all, those magazines that had featured us in their pages couldn't do so issue after issue. And of the other likely magazines, perhaps their editors still felt that our hobby was unworthy of space.

Whatever the reason, it's been a long dry spell...but at long last, we have our biggest scoop since the glory days of *Classic*! The magazine: the December 1990 edition of *Horse Illustrated*. Its circulation: over 125,000 a month! And the glorious booty: ten pages, three color photos, and a titanic 126 inches of type! And that's not including a fine sidebar by Kate Kruschwitz on Jeanne Herrick's creation of the Roemer model (to the tune of 20 inches with a color photo), and an obligatory 12-incher on "Where To Write." Now that's big-time exposure!

But many hobbyists aren't celebrating. They aren't even salivating. In fact, a good many are downright mortified.

The Double-Edged Sword

History may prove "The Secret Life Of Model Horse Collectors," by Marsha King, to be the decried Satanic Verses of the model horse hobby. Like Rushdie's book, the article is being protested by many hobbyists—they find it offensive and lax in the facts, and are writing the magazine to say so. Some hobbyists denounce the piece as a blind shill for Breyer, and many say that they dread their friends or family will see the issue and ask,

**Any Senior shower interested in
a Live Show**

**in Illinois,
in June 1991,**

**send a SASE to:
Kerri Gehrman**

"This is what you do for a hobby?" A few females have even said that they envy the men in the hobby—camouflaged by being a micro-minority in the first place, the existence of male hobbyists wasn't even acknowledged. Every reference in the article is to girls and women.

"The whole thing makes us sound like we're sick," one female shower complained hotly after reading the article. "There's this 'model horse sickness' theme all through it. And we sound like Satan-worshippers, with the 'cult' stuff."

The "stuff" in question? King wrote in her opening, "It is said that these horses cast spells and fevers upon masses of women who then form cults that meet periodically to praise the finest of these creatures." She went on to stress, "Some cult members toil far into the night, handsewing exquisite saddles and bridles, and even working with strange oils and materials to further enhance the beauty of these creatures."

Another comment that angered hobbyists was the depiction of a spoiled brat-like "symptom" of "Model Horse Fever": "excruciating pain when denied the one model horse needed (at the moment) to complete a collection."

That's anything but complimentary to the image we've been striving for. Those quotes suggest that we fuss and fume when we miss out on much-wanted models, and get together and cackle and crow over our models whenever our "cults" meet.

But first of all, these quotes are out of context. Distance yourself from taking things personally, and read the actual article. You'll find that King was trying to be funny. Trying is the operative word here—the humor is a bit forced—but since "most people unaffected by Model Horse Fever think this activity is pretty silly," as King noted, then doesn't an attempt to present the hobby in a humorous vein make it more palatable for the average reader outside the hobby? You and I may not agree, but following this line of thought, King's comments really shouldn't be construed as malicious. She was simply out of her league as a comedienne.

And second of all, regarding showers throwing fits over missed models and clamoring together in catty cults—I've seen it happen. Haven't you? Not that you would want to admit it to a single soul outside the hobby, much less a journalist...but yes, we must have all seen it. It's an element of our hobby that makes us look silly, and it exists. And either Marsha King has seen it, or someone told her about it. It's our hobby's secret shame, and now it has been preserved in print.

Marsha King touches on several aspects of the hobby, but the elements that make us most socially acceptable are mentioned only briefly when at all. Artistic creation—remaking, tack, vehicles—is given short shrift. Wowzers, here's a photo of a nice remade model, complete with a scaled-down fence, ooooo! But what would a reader's reaction have been to a photo of an OF standing next to a well-done, extensive remake from the same mold? Better yet, think of how we would have grabbed their respect with a state-of-the-art performance photo, complete with a real "doing" horse, ultra-realistic tack, and a rider! The opportunity was sadly wasted.

Our second ace in the hole, the educational aspect of the hobby, was also not mentioned beyond the obvious "an exhibitor must have at least a basic knowledge of breeds, classes, tack and attire." The same parents who will cringe at the thought of their children participating in our smirkingly-depicted "cult" would have forgotten their reservations in a heartbeat had they read about how the model horse hobby has been accepted by 4-H programs as an educational tool. Where was any mention of that claim to respectability, or of the wonderful model horse presentations given at the 1990 Wisconsin Horse Fair? For the majority of us, our hobby is first and foremost an educational experience, a way for anyone of any age to learn about horses through their miniature counterparts. Doesn't anyone who Marsha King interviewed also believe that—didn't anyone tell her that? Or did they, but it didn't fit with a view that King wanted to present? Only those who spoke with King know.

But as you read "The Secret Life Of Model Horse Collectors," keep in mind that a journalist can only report what he learns about his subject. There are errors, vagaries, and holes in the article that hobbyists either