

Inside Straight Stew

For the last five months I've been pursuing a virtual jigsaw puzzle of a subject and planned to present the remarkable story in this issue. A prominent piece of the puzzle had been missing, though—the literal linchpin of the whole saga—and I had nearly given up on finding it. But as deadline looms, a fresh lead has just come to light... and with luck, next issue you'll find an epic chronicle that's worth the wait.

So this issue, we'll serve up some "Inside Straight Stew"—where what you have to say is the feature of the day! A lot of you have been putting to use my microscopic address in the column heading up there, and I've been absolutely tickled to hear from you. It's really gratifying, and thanks so much for taking the time to write! There's no finer feeling than to hear from someone who was moved to write you with their own experiences and views after reading your column.

Writing a column like this is not as easy as it might look. I can't put on the blinders and parade my personal opinion long and loud in print—I'm from the school of thought that if a writer is going to take up print space and a reader's time, that writer should put the time, thought, and effort into presenting a subject in as well-rounded and factual a way as possible.

Everyone has their own standpoint, and from there, you reach outward—learning through experience, sampling other views, deciding what works for you and what you believe in. That's what I try to do in writing "The Inside Straight." The writing itself can be a real roller-coaster ride—more than once the column has brought itself to a conclusion that I'd never expected in the planning stages! It's just that, as I listened to others' experiences, my own views mutated and grew. (Of course, this makes for much cursing and having to rewrite earlier sections to fit!)

But enough blah-blah from me. A variety of views is what gives this column any worth at all...and that's exactly what you've been sending! Here's what you have to say:

From Kate Cabot of Cambridge, Massachusetts

"Reading through the *Hobby Horse News* which arrived today, I was struck by how much our hobby has grown up! Not only are we all much older than we used to be in the beginning—when I first discovered the 'secret society' the average age was probably around 14, now it seems most of us are in our mid-twenties, many of us are married and more and more of us are having children. Now there are even a few showmen whose mothers were model showmen! Our toys have grown up too—we're paying adult wage-earning prices for things and we're getting more and more quality conscious and more and more competitive. We have a much more realistic hobby than we ever did.

"The most amazing thing to me is that we now are developing a philosophic approach to this whole hobby. Part of growing up is setting goals, being responsible, and finding our own place in the world. Your series of articles 'The Inside Straight' is an excellent example of our maturity. I can't imagine ever reading about the philosophy of the model horse as an art object back in the old days. We were too busy coming up with elaborate pedigrees and pretending that our models were the real thing... You've done an excellent job of getting us to take a look at our hobby in a newer, more critical, light!"

Thanks so much for your kind words, Kate! That's a well-put, sharp summary of the hobby's evolution. I hope the "newer, more critical light" still leaves us room to MAKE light of the hobby at times—I think it's vital that we keep a sense of humor and the element of fun. I certainly couldn't enjoy the hobby if I had to take it, the models, or myself deadly seriously all the time! But a serious approach is needed toward the integrity and quality of models and competition, and to prevent hobbyists from getting hurt by unscrupulous individuals. Thanks again for writing!

From an Anonymous Reader

"It has taken me a long time to decide how to respond to your article on the Remaking Industry in the August/September [1990] issue of the *Hobby Horse News*. Your article made some darn good points, and I hope to see more articles like it in the future.

"Your part about Susie Creamcheese is much more realistic than I'm sure many people believed. To make my point, I guess I am a Susie. My mother will rarely let me buy an RRH'd model nowadays. She says 'You can do a model just as good as anyone else can.' Right. Not to be depressing, but I am just not an artistic person. I have begged and pleaded with her to let me buy a few RRH'd models. The only reason I got them is because I told her that I needed a real RRH to see how it was done. It won't work anymore, because she thinks I have enough examples, and expects me to get started making 'big bucks' like all the other remakers do. 'If they can make money, then you can,' she says.

"I have tried and tried to tell her that I am just not good at remaking now, and to try to persuade her into letting me get some practice done, because I don't want to cheat anyone out of their money with buying a less than perfect remake, when they could spend the same amount on one that they would like much better. I guess her motives aren't all that bad, after all, she did buy me a Dremel Moto-Tool with every attachment I could ever use, an airbrush, and every imaginable type and kind of paints and paint brushes. I just wish I could use them to their full advantage. I feel guilty having her spend all that money for them, when I can't use them well enough to earn their keep.

"I just wanted to let you know exactly how on track your article was. I wish I had the nerve to sign my name too."

It's scary how many parents view their children's hobbies in this way, and don't seem to notice that they're pushing you in a direction that you just don't feel right about pursuing. Here's a true tale of terror: a mother with a teenage daughter asked a major remaker to teach her daughter how to remake. The daughter had no interest in remaking or showing—she simply liked to collect OF models. But the mother had seen the prices the remaker's work was commanding, and as this was a "girl's hobby," wanted her daughter to get right into business...as her family's chief source of income!

Your mother may honestly feel that she's building your self-esteem and confidence by insisting that you're capable of raking in the big bucks right now. Perhaps you could assure her that yes, you're looking forward to the day that your models will sell for lots of money, but since that day won't come until you're comfortable with your work's quality, you'll have to keep on practicing to make that day happen. Maybe you could photo-show your creations, and invite your mother to help keep track of their show careers—entering a wide variety of shows can be a good gauge of your horses' "ability" and how your work is coming along. With luck, this step will not only buy you some time to learn at a more realistic pace, but will also make your mother happy to see that you're "testing the competitive waters and getting your name known." By making it appear that you're making an effort to meet her halfway, hopefully she'll ease up on you.

You may well have all the makings of a major remaker, with talent just waiting to be brought out by practice. But if you just don't feel cut out to be a remaker, there's nothing wrong with that! I'm not an artistic person either, and after five years of buying others' work, I've only now begun to remake just a tiny bit as a challenging cheap thrill—strictly for myself, at my own pace, and not because I have to do it to make anyone else happy. I'd much rather pay a remaker who has the talent and skill than spend years and frustration learning to remake models myself! (But admittedly, I live on my own—if I had joined the hobby while living at home, my own folks might have insisted that I make the hobby "pay for itself.")

191 #15