

Artists Take Time, But a Few Will Take YOU

Anyone who provides tack, remakes, or photo services within our hobby is all too familiar with the customer's cry, "I need it *yesterday!*" A few newcomers expect custom work to be completed in two weeks' time, and some perpetually squeaky wheels pester artists about their orders once a month. Few things destroy an artist's love of their work faster.

For that very reason, buyers must walk a fine line when dealing with artists. If you are too demanding, the artist will feel rushed, may not deliver a quality piece, and will most likely try to avoid dealing with you in the future. But if you are too patient and accommodating, some artists will quietly slip your order onto the back burner, hoping that your patience will last while they take care of more compelling customers.

The majority of artists operate very professionally and efficiently. Unfortunately, there are a handful of artists in our hobby who believe that setting up a business means advertising widely, taking orders and payments but neglecting to keep good records (imagine the field day the IRS could have with all this untaxed income!), and then waiting to fill orders until they're in the mood to do it... maybe next month, maybe next year. Maybe, if they wait long enough, the customer will even forget about the order... easy money!

Again, most artists have more integrity than this. But if you have never dealt with an artist before, and don't know anyone else who has, it's really best to watch your step. And one of the trickier shopping situations for a first-time customer to navigate is the sales list.

The List Before The Horse

Money in your pocket and a remaker's sales list in your hand, you've found the perfect new model and can't wait to buy him! No photo of this remake was on the sales list, but he was described in great and glorious detail, and you just *know* that this is the horse for you! But if you ask to see a photo, someone else might buy him in the meantime—so you dash your money right into the mail and await the arrival of a splendid new model!

If you were in time to get him, then one of two things will happen. You'll either get your model within a few weeks—or you'll wait, and wait, and wait, possibly a year or more, for your model to arrive.

How could something like this happen? The problem is that some remakers distribute sales lists of new horses before the models are actually finished—or, in some cases, before the model has even been started.

If you look at it from the viewpoint of a person remaking the model (and cock your head and squint a bit), you can kind of see the rationale. Why put the time and effort into a model if no one is interested enough to inquire about it, or ask to see a photo, or out-and-out send money for it?

Unfortunately, the remaker can fall into a trap. Which should take priority—finishing and sending out the horse that has already been paid for? Or using the time to finish horses that potential customers have asked to see photos of? Money-wise, the better investment in time is to go after more sales. Which translates into a longer wait for the person who sent full payment for a model, sight-unseen.

Some remakers fall into the same trap with custom orders—after the money for an unstarted custom horse has been spent, it's far easier to follow the call of more cash and create new sales list horses than it is to go back and do the waiting custom order.

Not all remakers who put the sales list before the horse do it for the same reasons. Some create large quantities of models at a time, and so prefer to finish them in a batch: remake trotting models, then remake cantering models; paint all the rose-greys in a batch, then paint all the bays in a batch. This certainly saves time for the artist. But if a buyer's timing

is bad, there may be a long wait before cantering rose-grey season comes around again.

Remaking is a creative art, but distributing a sales list before creating the actual model can eliminate that spur-of-the-moment, "anything can happen" element that sometimes makes the difference between a good model and a great one. What if a model advertised and sold as a bay has not been painted yet, and it suddenly strikes the artist that the horse would be an absolute knockout as a chestnut tobiano? Oh well!

Of course, some remakers do state clearly on their sales lists whether certain models are still in the process of being finished. Some give an approximate date that the model should be ready by, while others offer the buyer the chance to choose the model's color; a few even offer a price break if you buy the model before it has been completed.

But let's backtrack to the moment that your eyes are ogling the description of that model that was clearly meant for you! If you send for a photo, it may be too late... but on the other hand, what if the model hasn't been finished? Are you willing to possibly wait two or three years, as some of your fellow hobbyists have had to do before?

A good idea is to see if the seller's telephone number is listed, and give them a short call. Let them know of your interest! If the model is finished and no one has beaten you to him, the remaker will at least know that you're interested and want to see a photo. *Always try to see a photo first.*

If the model hasn't been finished yet, but you still want him desperately, there are two important things to ask. First of all, if you buy him sight-unseen, when can you expect the horse to be completed and sent? And secondly, will the remaker return your money, minus postage, if the model doesn't turn out to be what you had in mind?

You decide to take the plunge. In this case, when you send the money, be sure to include a letter that states all the details (keep a copy for yourself, along with your money order receipt or cancelled check after the bank returns it). For example:

"Here is a postal money order for \$120 for 'Nine Across,' the cantering bay tobiano Paint mare RRH from a Lady Phase that you advertised on page 16 of the August/September 1991 issue of *The Hobby Horse News*. As we agreed in our telephone conversation last night, 'Nine Across' will be completed and sent by U.P.S. by October 31, 1991." [Or "within the next four months," or whatever time frame was agreed on.]

This way, both buyer and seller have the details of their agreement on paper. Something may well come up to push back the agreed-upon date of completion—after all, artists lead real lives too—but just in case the seller reneges on the agreement and tries to make the buyer wait for far longer than necessary, the buyer has proof of the transaction.

Incidentally, when buying a finished item from a sales list, this writer's own rule of thumb is to allow six weeks from the date that the payment was sent for the item to arrive. If it hasn't shown up after six weeks, I write to ask whether my payment arrived safely and whether the item has been mailed yet.

When ordering custom models or tack, I ask for a projected date of completion (and I'm willing to wait several years for certain artists' work!). If the item has not arrived two months after the projected completion date, I write to ask about it. If no projected date of completion was given, I wait until one year after I have sent payment for the custom order to ask after it. Two years is too long for most artists, and I will usually take action at that