

point. And if an artist sees nothing wrong with spending the money but not filling my order after three years' time, then I see nothing wrong with pursuing a postal fraud suit against them.

Bad-Apple Pie Is Best Served Cold

Every so often, an unscrupulous individual surfaces in the hobby, advertises widely, does nice work and gains a good-sized following, but then disappears—taking hundreds, sometimes thousands, of hobbyists' dollars, and leaving a trail of angry customers and lawsuits in their wake.

You may have heard about a person like this. You may have been a victim of a person like this. Or you may be in the process of dealing with a remaker, tack maker, or photographer who really seems as though they're on their way to *becoming* a person like this.

If that's the case, there's not much you can do, besides grump and walk on eggshells, hoping against better judgment that you'll someday, *someday* see your models, or tack, or photos. It goes without saying that you're angry. Maybe hurt, and feeling a wee bit used too—after all, they've had your money for a long time now, and it's no doubt been spent. Should you ask for a refund? (If you do, will they refuse to deal with you again? And if so, are they really doing you a favor?) Well, no, you *want* what you've paid for, so you'll ride it out a while longer, with plenty of frustration to keep you company over this long haul.

However, in the meantime, there are a few things you can do to make yourself feel better, and protect other people from being ripped off by these individuals too:

- If you usually credit the remaker, photographer, or tack maker on your show photos' backs, and you already own and show some of this person's work, *don't* credit them. Don't list a name at all. By listing credits on a photo back you're doling out free advertising where it counts most—and it's hard to be generous to people like this when they won't even do you the courtesy of completing the work you have paid for.
- If someone asks about your dealings with this person, be truthful. Seeing that you have a horse, or tack, or photos by this artist, another hobbyist asks about the person's work. Do you praise their work? If you like it, of course. But as you have learned the hard way, getting that work out of the artist is another matter, and be sure to mention this problem. Don't go overboard, but be sure to let them know, calmly and precisely, what you are experiencing.
- If, while you're waiting, the artist puts out a sales list—models or tack, or a discounted "special" on photo services—*don't* give them your business. You could well be throwing good money after bad, as you wait, and wait, for what you paid for off the sales list, in addition to your original order. If you really want to add more of that artist's work to your collection or show string, save yourself the frustration and high blood pressure—simply buy their models or tack second- or third-hand from other people's sales lists.

- The appearance of the artist's sales list is a cue for action. If they can do a sales list, why can't they do the work you were supposed to have received a year or more ago? If you haven't already, write them a letter (*never* call—keep a record of all communications in case you need proof of it later). At all times be polite, and try not to put them on the defensive. But state the circumstances, and see if the situation improves. If you don't receive an answer after a month, write again. If you still don't receive an answer, write every two weeks. And, again, keep a copy of everything.

- If the waiting becomes too much to bear, there's a step that a few people have taken. I emphatically do *not* recommend it, but can understand the reasoning that leads to it: selling the model or tack before you have received it. Then, when it sells, you've got your money back, and the sale has brought additional pressure on the artist to make good...but the new buyer inherits the wait, and you have acted unethically yourself by selling something you do not actually have in your hands.
- You hate this slimeball! You're sick of waiting! And when you look at other pieces of their work that you own, you're constantly reminded of the one you're waiting for! Again, this step isn't recommended, but some people resort to it: sell off what you own of that artist's work, and state in big bold letters, "For sale because I'm sick of waiting for an item from this artist that I paid for three years ago!"
- Three years ago? Yep, it happens—and some people have waited even longer for paid-for horses and tack. How does it happen? You don't want to rush the artist...you feel sorry for them, since they must be swamped...they have real life to contend with too, like the rest of us... But if they've made you wait for more than a year, with unlikely explanation or none at all, then the end is *not* in sight—you're a sucker, and they know it. Your patience is going to be milked for all it's worth, so you can just wait until they get around to you.

So now it's time for action! If you know other people with the person's work or who have had dealings with them, contact them. Ask if they have ever had problems, and explain, clearly and rationally, your situation. (Your inquiry will not constitute libel, because it is a private, unpublished letter.) You may find people who have been waiting for their orders even longer than you have.

And if there turns out to be several customers who have been hung out to dry, and you are collectively owed a great deal of money...well, remember, there is strength in numbers, and a postal fraud lawsuit against the person who has taken your money will, with any luck, prevent other hobbyists from being suckered by them.

All in all, most hobbyists are here to enjoy the hobby, and we treat each other as we'd like to be treated, whether we're buyers or sellers. There are a few bad apples out there, though, and they tend to turn up where there's money to be made...but they can't spoil your fun if you watch your step!