

Cooking with Gas—More “Inside Straight” Stew!

Thanks to all for your swift response to last issue's dilemma! It will take both this issue and next to shoehorn in your ideas and comments, but we'll certainly do it—this is an issue where all voices should be heard! If you haven't yet written and would like to, please do it soon (no unsigned letters please, but if you'd like your name withheld, just say so), and we'll wrap it all up next issue.

From Jane Chapman, Director of the Customizer's Club, Perry, GA: I was very upset about your “article” from the Oct/Nov 1991 *THHN* (and the following article as well). I decided to wait a while before writing so I could “cool down” (otherwise, my letter would have been more like Carla's letter and your hasty closed-minded reply). I was very insulted by your “Death Of A Showhorse” rhyme. You, whether intentionally or not, lumped all customizers into some unfair categories.

There is very little money in customizing! Most of us do it because we love it—it's “in our blood” so to speak. I've done over 250 models since 1977. I would have loved to keep them all, but that's not how it works. Every one I sold helped keep me in supplies. But, once they're gone, does the buyer keep you posted on its show career—maybe they'll tell you how it did at its first show, but I've never heard anything beyond that. One of my “regulars” has bought 6 of my works over the last three years and she has never told me anything about their show records—even though I always say “let me know how they do,” etc. They must be doing well, she keeps coming back for more. If we don't know how we're doing, how will we improve? I wish I could count my customizing on my income taxes! My “losses” would wipe out my income from my part-time job last year! I entered over 120 photos shows in 1991 with an average conservative cost of \$5.00 per show, I spent money on model magazines/ad/club fees, plus on film/developing/ filters etc., plus on models/tack/obstacles and customizing supplies, and on and on. I worked part-time last year to pay for my hobby.

Your complaining about doubles is way out of line. I know there are a couple of “bad apples” out there but they are in the minority. I've held at least 26 shows in 1991—seen *thousands* of models and I have never seen any doubles in all of those models! Actually, in the last 15 years of holding model shows (at least 10 per year) I don't remember ever seeing “doubles.”

As far as a model's “show life,” there is no reason why a well done model can't go on winning indefinitely. The secret is to retake your photos every year or two. Don't send the same picture/same model to the same judge too often. The first time I see a model, as a judge, it may “wow” me enough that I don't notice its faults right away (by the way, an owner seldom sees any faults—they wouldn't have bought it if they did). Once you see the same picture of the same model a few times the “wow” wears off and you start to “see” it more objectively. Also, customizing has changed a lot in the last 10 years. There are new horses being done all the time. Your horse may be state of the art today, but who knows what tomorrow brings.

You did some totally bizarre math. Your 19 artists doing 25 customs for \$75 each is way off base. First, our members include about 40 percent beginners who don't do custom orders and are in the club to learn and have fun. Second, most of our members don't do more than 12 models a year (me included). And that “average” price is ridiculous. I would say our average for all our members would be more like \$30 with all the Stablemates, Little Bits, Classics and beginners we have. But even if your figures were anywhere near right, and I could get 25 models done in one year and make \$75 each on them—\$1,875 a year isn't much money to live on, is it?

Of all the models shown in our club, at least 70 percent of them are owned by the artist, and the other 30 percent are ones they were very proud of. There is no way I could “ask the current owner.” Who are they? Where are they? Get serious! The people I did them for over the last 15 years have moved, sold the model or are no longer in models at all. I have also done models for people who were never “model people,” but just wanted a pretty horse for the mantel or whatever.

I started the customizer's club because I seldom heard about a model

I had done. I want to know how I'm doing. I want to be able to improve. I want to see how my work stands up to the competition. Maybe if buyers were a little more considerate of the artist, this club would not have been necessary. I will show any model that I'm proud of within the small confines of this club. If someone asked me not to show a certain horse I wouldn't. I will be judging only 1 or 2 shows a year for this club, plus a few other clubs shows I've volunteered for. We now have 25 members and growing!

[Note from Ardith: A Customizer Club member recently supplied a confidential list of the club's members, which at that time numbered 22. Of those 22 remakers, more than one-third are professionals who have advertised in *THHN* and who price their traditional remakes in the \$100-\$300 range. I stand by last issue's theoretical \$75 average.]

From a remakers whose name is withheld by request: I am a professional Model Artist, a long time shower, and a member of the Customizer's Club. I agree with your statements—I think once a horse is sold and gone, you have no right to show it!

I never show a horse that I've sold (within the Customizer's Club or not!), and as soon as I decide to sell a horse, I stop showing it as a courtesy to the new owner. I try to treat people the way I would like to be treated. I do keep an album of all of my horses, and I do on occasion show them to people, but there is a world of difference in showing them as examples of your work, and “showing” them under a judge! I think it's positively *rude* that people do this! I can't believe people do it, but I have good friends that do!

I have never heard any mention of this within the club, *except* for the one rule stating you *may* show horses that are sold (on the rulesheet)—a rule I choose to disregard. I'll continue to only show my currently owned showstring!

From Margie Johnson, Roswell, GA: On the issue of artists showing work they don't own, without permission: There is a huge difference between putting something into your professional portfolio, which every artist/writer has an informal right to do unless the material is sensitive or confidential, and exhibiting work one no longer owns in competition. The only reason this is *possible* in our hobby is that part of the activity is showing staged photos of art pieces competitively. Artists in traditional media cannot exhibit work they do not own without the owner lending it physically to them, nor are images of it used without permission or without a notation of whose collection it resides in.

In light of this, the only place a photo of a sold model should appear without permission is in a photo album on the artist's expo table. Permission of the new owner should be obtained for: photo showing in customizer's shows, sending photos out in the mail as samples of the artists work, and continued use of the horse in the artist's advertising or articles. As a consumer issue, I'm very curious to know the membership of the customizer's club you mentioned. On an informal level, with friends passing photos of their latest or proudest work among each other, there is no problem, but as for holding shows, that's *juried* competition. If they're all artists, any work of merit should be self-evident as such, and the details of style, realism, and ever-improving craftsmanship a matter of personal taste and mutual admiration. Why *SHOW* in such a forum, as this is the sticking point with the customer base? Why not have a round-robin letter and photo exchange among a small group of friends for artists feedback and enjoyment of what's new even though you won't be taking it to the next expo because you just sold it? It seems that the desire to learn from, share, and enjoy one's creations is well-placed, but the activity of showing is off the mark.

An interesting twist to the question of using photos in ads involves a custom model created for me that recently appeared in an ad. A friend used an imaginative photo she took of my model in her ad without my permission, and none was needed. The existence of the model itself, after several offers of refunds as time dragged on, was due to a mixture of her good business ethics, a good hobby friendship, and her personal interest in doing some