

## Somewhere in Dreamland

It's times like this—in the middle of moving to a new house, with everything I need already packed inextricably away, and the next few days dotted with desperate deadlines—that make it mighty hard to get out of bed to face the dawning day.

BreyerFest is fast approaching, but at this end of the publishing time-war, it's further away than I'd thought. This issue in your hands is the one that comes out before BreyerFest; the next one comes out *at* BreyerFest...and guess which issue I was rolling along on a column for?

It's times like this, when realization broadsides you like a two-ton truck, that make you kinda want to do something completely else for a while...like go back to bed.

And maybe dream up a new column...



The sky was so brilliantly blue, if I had two wishes, they'd have been for a model horse in one hand and a loaded camera in the other.

All around on a level expanse of close-cropped grass, busy booths and trailers were attracting packs of people. Horses' whickers blended with the buzz of the crowd; every so often a neigh would ring out, and I noticed that horses were warming up in a nearby ring. It had to be a horse show, or an equine exhibition, or a horse festival, or something like that. Whatever it was, it was great.

Ahead was a huge, square, open-sided canopy, with passersby pausing at the perimeters to peer in. Nothing attracts a crowd like a crowd, and my feet steered me over to take a look too.

Inside was a model horse show! Cords and stakes marked the perimeter of the area, a polite reminder to the crowd to keep back. A good six feet under the canopy's protection—close enough for onlookers to see but not touch—long tables that had to be the show rings were placed along each of the four sides. Further under the canopy, showers' tables could be seen, arranged near the center of the area.

As each class was announced, showers brought their horses to the appropriate table—usually facing the crowd as the horse was set in the ring, but sometimes coming around to the side of the table nearest the onlookers. The corded-off area was wide enough to discourage spectators from trying to touch horses or showers, but there didn't seem to be any mischief-minded bystanders; in fact, they seemed to appreciate the enormity of the judge's task when each class began, murmuring among themselves and not pestering the judge.

Portions of the crowd would drift on to a different side of the square canopy, to take in all the "action" of the four-ring attraction. Most of the activity came when the class was placed and the ribbons laid down; not only were showers excited, but spectators had also picked horses to

root for during the judging, vicariously comparing their skills at picking a winner with the judge's expertise.

Insulated within the judging rings, the showers' camp of tables was bustling, but it was hard to tell whether there were any familiar faces in these. Then I noticed that the cords and stakes gapped at one side of the canopy to serve as the showers' official entrance/exit. A table had been positioned near the opening, piled with promotional materials on the hobby—freebie issues of hobby magazines, pamphlets on clubs, flyers on shows—and I headed over to check it out.

Have you ever been to a horse auction, and had the bid-spotter look right at you? "Whadd' I do?" you think frantically, wondering whether you scratched your nose or tugged at your ear without thinking about it and have now put an outrageous bid on a horse. Then the spotter's gaze turns to someone else, a voice from the far side of the hall up the bid, and with a sigh of relief you sit on your hands, just in case.

After a scare like that, you can immediately feel when something similar is happening—and heading to the entrance, I suddenly knew someone was watching closely. Sharp-eyed security to protect the showers? Or was I just paranoid?

Neither—it was simply obvious to someone that I was interested. And I glanced up from the promo table to find a friendly hobbyist wearing a button that said "MAY I HELP?" "Have you got any horses?" she asked conversationally.

"No real ones anymore," I said, "just some plastic and China horses." Two beats passed without her asking when I bought them, if I knew what make they were, and whether I wanted to sell them. I was impressed. "This is a super-great arrangement you've got here," I went on. "Wish I'd known about it sooner—it would be neat to actually show a model horse."

She looked mildly dismayed. "I guess we didn't advertise in your area," she apologized. "We tried to cover as much as we could—flyers at stores and stables, ads in newspapers and regional horse papers, and we even got a quick mention on yesterday's six o'clock news."

"Are you running this?" I asked. "Or are you showing?"

"Oh, no, neither—I'm here to answer questions," she replied. "This hobby might look a little silly to someone not involved in it, and we don't want anyone to think we're playing with toy horses."

"Heck, no, it's clear that you're not," I said. "I don't see how people can give the hobby anything but respect, what with all the promotion and with you answering their questions!"

She didn't seem to understand why I thought it was such a big deal—I obviously *had* to be

new to the hobby. "If you like the idea of showing," she asked kindly, "would you like to see what goes into it?"

"Could I? That would be great!" Horse and a camera, nothing; right then I wanted nothing more than my favorite model horse and money for the entry fee! She led me to the entrance, where another affable hobbyist, this one wearing a button emblazoned "TOUR GUIDE," came up. A loudspeaker blared over our introductions as the results of the latest class were announced. As the show's P.R. person strolled back out to the promo table to talk with a gaggle of teenagers, I followed the show's guide into the shady coolness of the canopy.

We paused at a table where a shower sat tacking her horse. He seemed to be the only horse she had, and he was a beauty, with an eye-popping western set. As the guide explained briefly about tack-making, performance showing, and the use of dolls, the shower startled me by offering the now-tacked horse to hold; mouth watering, I turned him, marvelled at how perfectly the leather was laying, and handed him back.

As the guide motioned me to follow, we walked on...as, behind us, the shower *unsaddled* the horse. She wasn't readying the horse for a performance class after all—she was there to demonstrate for people on the "tour"! My mind raced. Was she part of the show's public-relations staff? Or a shower who had volunteered to work that spot? What about the horse and the superb western set—were they donated by their creators for educational purposes, or did the shower just not mind the wear and tear if it encouraged someone to join the hobby?

The next stop was at a table that was arrayed with remaking displays, including an original finish Proud Arab mare, a mid-stage remake on the same mold, and a finished remake that was unrecognizable as the PAM it had started life as. The remaker stationed there briefly explained the remaking concept, and then the tour guide added that for showing and collecting purposes, there were three general classifications of model horses: mass-produced molds in their original finish state, called "MOP" (mass-produced original finish); molds of which only a limited number, between two and 500, were produced, called "LOF" (limited-edition original finish); and models that were the result of existing molds being altered or customized in any way, called "C/U" (customized and/or unique).

"What if someone, uh, does a one-of-a-kind sculpture?" I asked. "There must be a lot of talented artists doing sculptures."

"That would be considered a C/U model," said the remaker. "Unless it gets cast—then the original and all the castings are considered LOFs."