

Resin d'Etre

Has anyone actually sat down and counted how many resin cast models have been offered for sale by artists and companies in the past couple of years? Had many of us even heard of resin casting much before 1990? How did this form of model suddenly become the hot ticket?

Resins have actually been around in the hobby, albeit on the periphery, since the late 1950s. If you are a British hobbyist or know someone who is, you may have heard of Rydals—a make of model produced for a decade or two out of resin, with hair manes and tails. Rydals today are much sought after because of their good detail and durability, as well as their scarcity. And if your memory goes back to the early 1980s, you might recall that Black Horse Ranch produced a couple of resin models which caused quite a stir, partially because they were heavy as lead and comparatively costly (my TB resin foal was over \$20 I think...shock, horror!). So resins are not exactly new. So what happened to cause this resin boom?

I think "what happened" is really a number of issues that hit the hobby all at the same time:

1) Breyer quality went down. Because this manufacturer had (and probably still has) by far the largest share of the market, we all were affected by the perils of the new packaging, the less than perfect new molds, and poor finishing quality. People began to surmise that there must be a better way to get good quality models.

2) The quality of customized horses improved. Artists simply got better at producing accurate models, and were getting better and more consistent placings at shows, particularly live shows.

3) The number of live shows increased. More people got a chance to see good custom work in the flesh, and wanted it for themselves.

4) Quality custom prices skyrocketed. The demand for a top quality custom pushed the going price for a high-end model by one of the best remakers (note I didn't say "most famous") from a couple hundred to several hundred dollars. (Are the rumors true about the \$2,000 model?) Artists weren't necessarily gouging: they were finally getting a fair return on their time. But the demand for their work far exceeded what they could produce, even at such high prices.

And somewhere in all of this, someone thought: "We need more quality models. I'm a skilled artist with custom orders coming out my ears that, despite the price, I'll never be able to fill and still lead a normal life. Now, if I could create a good quality body—better than the Breyer ones of late—I could produce my own molds. Then I could give them custom paint jobs and hair relatively easily, and then more people would be able to afford a good horse. Hmm...let's see what I can come up with..." Explorations into plastic molding a la Breyer proved expensive, and thus the comparatively simple resin cast was born.

The first well-publicized custom resin cast of this new generation was the Carol Williams QH, which as we all know was a big, big hit. Why? It was a quality body, with quality custom paint and hair, at a price that was competitive with the going rate for a good customized model. We lapped it up.

More resins began to appear, forming two distinct classes: the "made from scratch" class and the "glad you liked my remake so here's a few more of them" class. The "made from scratch" class had an original sculpture as its inspiration, or what essentially passes for original sculpture if no trace of the original model can be seen. The other class of resin model uses a successful remake as its base: the remake is used to make a mold for producing resin copies which can be painted and otherwise further customized. Some purists turn up their noses at the resins made from remade Breyers, but both classes of resins sold well, and continue to do so.

And, just as in the days of Rydal, a British firm is once again producing resins in the form of North Lights. From relative obscurity in the late 1980s (I think I saw my first North Light in 1988), North Lights have really taken off, due in part to their good detail and wonderful paint jobs.

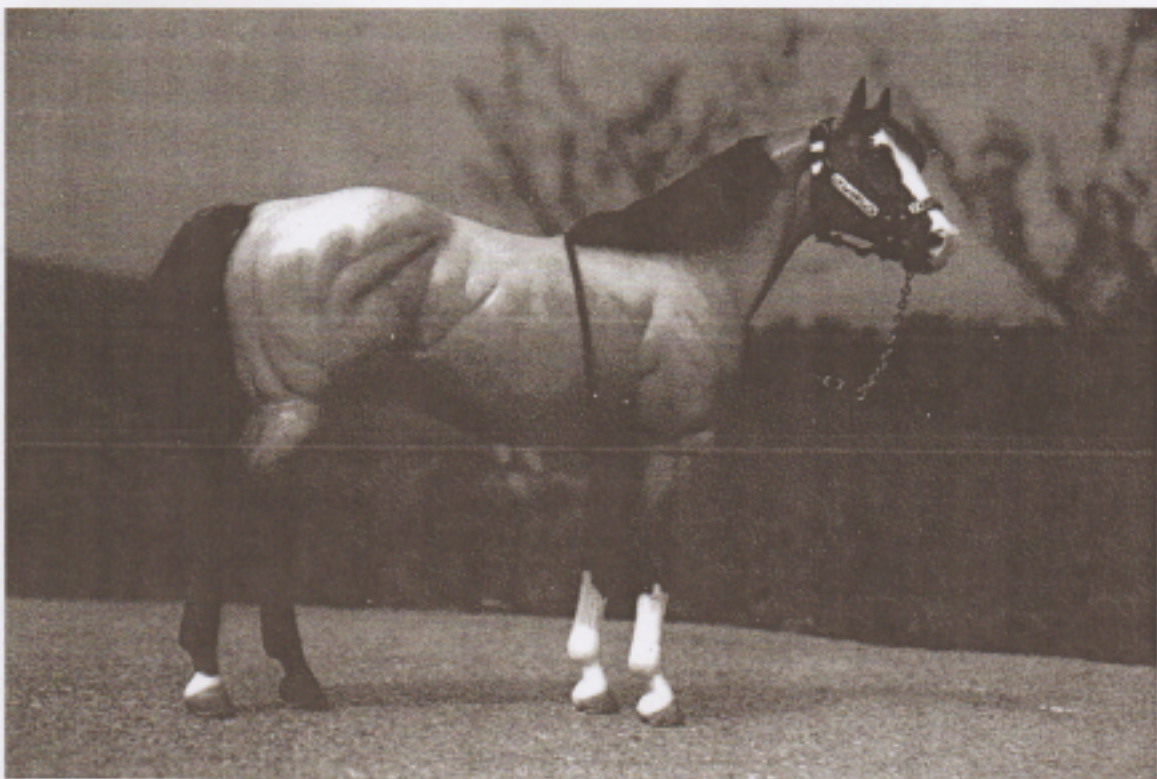
So why are we paying comparatively big prices for models which may not be original (the resins from winning remakes), may not be unique (the North Lights), or may not even be terribly good representatives of their breed or type (I'll let you fill in your own example here)?

Well, the artist does need to recoup her time and materials for painting, hairing, and for preparing the resin mold in the first place. There's advertising expense too, which can be high because a photograph or two is vital to the successful marketing of a resin mold that no one has seen. And don't forget a margin for profit. (Profit is not a bad word,

although some in the hobby might argue to the contrary. To them I ask: do you think Breyer makes models out of the goodness of its heart? Why should Breyer make a profit but not a quality resin artist?)

I submit that a lot of the prices we're paying are holdovers from the days of ordering remakes—if we'll pay \$300 for a remake, we'll pay \$300 for a resin we like as much.

"No, Steph", you say, "we pay more for a resin because it takes the guesswork and the waiting out of getting a custom horse from



"Trabuco Road"
Rio Rondo Quarter Horse
stallion owned by
Kate Cabot