

Welcome to "The Inside Straight," a brand-spanking-new column for The Hobby Horse News. Ardith Carlton is a staff writer for Hoof Beats, the monthly magazine of the U.S. Trotting Association. She worked with Standardbred racehorses for six years, has collected model horses since 1971, and specializes in photographing show models.

For issues to come, there is a spread of unusual topics on tap—some rarely discussed in our hobby's print forums, others a fresh look at different elements of the art, competition, and psychological motivations of model horse collecting and showing. High-brow stuff indeed! And from a person who knows that you can't enjoy the hobby if you take it deadly serious!

But don't worry, this shouldn't hurt a bit. In fact, the point of this column is to help readers enjoy the hobby even more. There are pitfalls and pratfalls galore awaiting any model collector or shower and hopefully this column will help you avoid some of them.

"Live Show Quality": Elusive Ideal, or License to Steal?

"I know it when I see it." That was the closest that Supreme Court Justice Stewart could come to defining pornography. And many model horse hobbyists say the very same thing when asked to define an equally slippery topic: Live Show Quality.

Live Show Quality—three simple words that have revolutionized the buying and selling concepts of our hobby. They are supposed to guide the buyer to a sure winner, guarantee the seller of a certain sale, and draw customers to artists that bill their work as being of this caliber.

But what does "Live Show Quality" really mean? Something a little different to everyone, it seems. In general, the term is used to describe a model that fits your standards however high they are, which can leave a lot of leeway right there! And unfortunately, the picture is muddled even more when opportunistic artists and sellers cash in on the vagueness of the term. After all, if everyone has a different idea of what "Live Show Quality" is, how can one person say what isn't?

Compounding the confusion is that the phrase "Live Show Quality" is used in so many ways. With various interpretations of its meaning surfacing in saleslists, artists' advertisements, and everyday model-hobby conversation, it can be hard to know who means exactly what.

Let's take a look at some of the different wavelengths that you, as a buyer in search of a "Live Show Quality" model, or as a seller or artist debating how to grade your stock, may encounter. And to help, we'll recruit an imaginary RRH Breyer model named "Nine Across."

Quality of Workmanship

Nine Across is the epitome of the most common definition of "Live Show Quality": a model of high-quality workmanship. A Breyer Yellow Mount remake walking, the remake has been well-done, with all his remake areas sanded smooth to remove any ridges and bumps in the filler material used, and body and legs muscled correctly where necessary. Where his original plastic mane was removed has also been sanded smooth, with no roughness pointing out where it had once been. There are no cracks in the remake work, nor should it crack with time.

His legs, moved from their original standing position to a walk, have been remade in a realistic way. They have not just been yanked forward or backward, with bent cannon bones, swollen hocks, or other serious leg faults that would "lame" Nine Across in any way. His legs have definition, and aren't rubbery looking tubular stalks holding him up. The shoulders and rear assembly

have been moved and resculpted correctly—because he is now walking, the original "standing/at ease" muscles would now be at work, powering the legs to propel the horse.

And to make certain that their work was correct, the remake artist in all likelihood consulted a photograph, or a number of photographs showing different angles, of a real horse in the pose Nine Across was being remade to, so that he would be physically and conformationally sound.

Nearly every artist has his own painting style, but every quality paint job includes certain crucial elements, and Nine Across' paint job has them all. His repainter first gave him a base coat of gesso to create a surface that the following paint would adhere to and not slip or chip off easily. Then Nine Across was painted, in his repainter's personal style, as a realistic color, with no unintentional color blotches (such as touched-up spots that don't match the original paint color) or thick brush-stroke marks marring the paint job. And every visible surface was painted (no need to paint the bottoms of grounded feet!), leaving no spots on the body that the artist's brush missed. And when the paint job was complete, the artist sprayed or applied fixative to Nine Across to seal and protect the finish.

There are a handful of different ways to hair a model horse, all of which look good if done neatly. Nine Across' mane and tail were carefully attached, with no glue matted elsewhere in the hair, or glue dripped down his face, neck or legs. The mane and tail have been trimmed and arranged in the proper length and style for his breed, and the amounts of hair are neither too thick and fluffy nor too wispy and see-through. And the hair-job is neat and consistent, not just hanks of flyaway hair stuck on at intervals that would give a "hoof-in-the-light-socket" or "exploding tail" appearance!

Nine Across' eyes, nostrils, and hooves have been glossed with nail polish to give a lifelike, "showring-ready" look. His artist was careful not to drip the nail polish on any other parts of the horse, too.

And just as importantly, Nine Across looks like a fine example of the breed and sex he was created to be. Nine Across is, by the most widely used definition, certainly "Live Show Quality."

If a model has any problems that would prevent it from fitting this concept of "live show quality," chances are it may not even be photo show quality. Even though a photo judge usually sees only one side of a model, and photographic angles can hide flaws, the model just won't be competitive if workmanship problems are visible. After all, a photo-show judge can look at your model's photo for a much longer period of time than a live-show judge