

John Sipple

Sipple on Trains

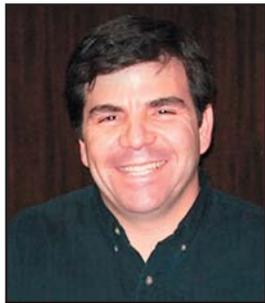
Meet Silvergate Distributors

New company makes its debut as an international distributor, manufacturer and importer.



My introduction to Silvergate Distributors came recently, when I took the G-scale Piko “Taurus” locomotive out of its packaging and began to examine it. This is a model of Siemens’ premiere, all-purpose electric locomotive, found on railways all over Europe. I was immediately struck by the quality of the modeling, the attention to detail and the strict adherence to the prototype.

This was my first experience with a Piko product, and since it is representative of their entire line, I was very impressed. Yet, Piko products have not been widely available here in North America. Some will say it’s because this is a European prototype, and you can’t sell Euro in North America, but I strongly disagree. LGB sold as much Euro as American



Silvergate Distributors President Tony Castellano.

prototype before LGB of America dissolved. The real impediment to past penetration has been ineffective distribution.

Many lines are produced here and abroad that suffer from unenthusiastic import, export and distribution efforts. Happily for European railroading fans in America, Silvergate Distributors has been founded

to bridge this gap, giving hobby shops access to top-quality and high-desirability products. Due to the lovely Taurus that ran so well on my outdoor layout, I began with Piko, then looked carefully into the rest of the Silvergate stable.



Silvergate Distributors’ sales and marketing vice president is Mark Rocha.

So what’s in the Silvergate lineup? Brawa (pronounced Brava) is there, a company representing adorable Swiss narrow gauge that can be a real preference on American garden railways. Noch is there, too, and that company is well known for its detailed figures, trees and scenery for all scales of model railroading, including dioramas and other scenicking items. For G gauge figures and scenic accessories, Silvergate is distributing Just Plain Folk, and to supply reliable analog power for G, HO and On30 trains, they carry the Bridgewater line.

Silvergate is also importing and distributing scale vehicles, including EMEK, known for their beautifully detailed 1/25-scale Volvos and other products, all produced in Finland. MotorArt is well known and highly respected for their 1/87-, 1/50-, 1/43-, 1/64- and 1/18-scale die-cast vehicles, construction equipment and military models. They also offer the MotorKids toy series. Schuco creates beautiful vehicles and agricultural equipment, both in HO and 1/43 scales.



Jonathan Meador is vice president of development.

Rather than limiting themselves to the distribution marketplace, Silvergate has also entered the manufacturing arena, beginning with Hillman RailClamps, a highly respected product they have moved to their new company facility in San Diego. The upshot of this acquisition is that hobby shop dealers are now able to buy from them in any quantity to meet the needs of their customers. Silvergate is also in the process of beginning the manufacture of Alpha Force Models, a different sort of product line.

So who are the people behind Silvergate Distributors and where do they come from? Essentially, the key players

are a finely tuned team that once operated as part of LGB of America until that company's demise, something that was not their doing. LGB is now owned and operated by Märklin out of Germany, but is developing its manufacture in Hungary. Product flow is restricted right

now, but Silvergate is very much interested in becoming the North American LGB distributor. They certainly have the experience to handle it, and they also have a selection of leftover LGB stock items available to dealers now.

Silvergate was founded by former employees of LGB of America. Tony Castellano is the new company's president, Mark Rocha is the vice president of sales and marketing, and Jonothan Meador is the vice president of development. The dynamic trio joined by an all-star team of model and importing experts, and they have established their base of operations in San Diego, California.

The more I became drawn into the process of reviewing the G-scale Taurus, I more I came to realize how some European companies — even those such as Piko with first-class product — have been terribly under-represented in North America. The Europeans produce many excellent models that Americans just never get the chance to see. Wide-range hobby shops have discovered and carry a small but significant vein of European prototype, but these stores need a distributor to reliably deliver this type of merchandise. Silvergate has stepped into that role.



This is the fabulous Piko 1:22.5 rendition of Siemens' 8500 horsepower electric locomotive, exclusively distributed in the United States by Silvergate Distributors.

When LGB of America folded, North America was left without representation. Worse, the company in Germany also shuttered its shop. Märklin is working on production, but the output has mainly gone to European dealers.

When the Märklin LGB line graces our shores again, experienced people will handle its distribution. From my perspective, Silvergate appears to be a likely steward for LGB's interests here in North America, although that is hardly official right now.

Meanwhile, I have this very lovely G-scale locomotive in my hands, and it represents high sales potential on this side of the water. The Piko Taurus is one in a lineup of other popular European prototypes in the Piko roster. With this model alone, they have impressed me with their quality and devotion to accuracy — small wonder that Silvergate chose to import and distribute this fine line.

I'm excited by the addition to our industry made by Silvergate Distributors. As importers, they have selected a smart opening lineup, and can be expected to grow it in several different directions. As distributors, their principals draw from years of experience with one of the most fabled lines of railroad models. As manufacturers, they have shown perspicacity in selecting Hillman's Rail Clamps for their initial offering, a product prepared for growth, especially when tied to effective distribution. For hobby dealers and hobbyists, things just got a lot better. **HM**



Employing a double-ended locomotive is more important when operators are using only one and don't have locomotive turning facilities. The model's pantographs actually raise and lower mechanically, although they are non-functioning and not electrically connected.