



Jim Kellow

# Railroad Modelers

## A Modeler's View: Modelers and retailers should stand together

### **Why should modelers matter to you?**

Modelers are repeat customers, great word-of-mouth advertisers, and influencers for a hobby shop. And, of course, potential knowledgeable employees. Most of all, I believe they are the heart of any hobby. What's a hobby without model builders? A collection! What's a hobby shop without modelers? A toy store! That's just my definition when I think of a hobby shop.

I have been a modeler, who loves building models, airplanes, autos and trucks, people, structures, landscapes, etc., but particularly model railroads all my life – which is a long time!

I am the seventh person to have obtained all 11 NMRA Achievement Program Awards, including Master Model Railroader #202.

Here are some photos of my modeling.



*Scratch-built station on my JN&P RR*

I am honored to be the Ambassador to Model Railroaders for the Association of Professional Model Makers.

I believe the model railroad hobbyist of today is learning skills, techniques and disciplines that could lead to them having a career as a professional model maker. I also support the Walthers Initiative to give scholarships to model railroader graduating seniors who pursue STEM programs in college. I would hope the National Retail Hobby Stores Association would consider such a program for all hobbyists. I believe both efforts will help attract younger people to the art and craft of model building which is good for all hobbies.

For the last four years, I have written the "New Tracks" series in The S Scale Resource and The O Scale Resource online magazines about the importance of mentoring for learning model building. A year

ago, I started a twice-weekly Zoom show on this subject. My articles and my Zoom show profile small (Mom & Pop) manufacturers and individual modelers who may be able to help mentor less-skilled modelers. Mentoring keeps the modeling skills alive that I believe are at the heart of all hobbies.

Several months ago, I stumbled (it's a long story) across a hobby shop in California that brought back wonderful distant memories of my local hobby shop. I must confess that I have not been to a hobby shop in quite a while. But talking to this owner made me question why I stopped.

As a result, I started a segment on my Zoom show called "Let's Go to the Hobby Shop" to find out what today's hobby shops are all about. I asked viewers to recommend hobby shops they would encourage other modelers to visit. I

have featured two hobby shops on my shows, and three more are scheduled.

I also called Rob Gherman, NRHSA Executive Director, and asked if NRHSA members were interested in being on my show. I explained to Rob that I would like to discuss with hobby shop owners how modelers can help them become more successful and better meet the needs of modelers.

After talking with some hobby shop owners, it seems to me that they and modelers are in somewhat similar situations. From what I have heard, it seems the hobby shop is at the mercy of the manufacturer and

distributor and often appears to be caught in the middle between them and their customers.

Manufacturers face problems with product delivery, finding employees, supply chain issues and higher prices, to name a few. These issues affect hobby shop product availability, customer satisfaction and enthusiasm.

Other issues that impact both hobby shops and modelers are internet sales, finding out about new product releases in time to order them and a lack of distributor stock. Also, if my local hobby shop is out of a product, but other hobby shops have it, how do I find and order it from the other shop? A hobby shop recently solved this problem for me and definitely gained a new customer. Yes, it was the California shop that re-ignited my interest. The owner went way out of her way to get

what I needed from other shops. It was fantastic service that earned my loyalty and support.

Well, where does this leave the hobby shop owner and the modeler? In simple terms, why have a local hobby shop? Combine the problems of getting products and information with lower internet prices or direct purchases from manufacturers, and what reason do I have to visit a hobby shop?

Simple, extra service to help solve my modeling problems such as mentoring, educational experiences, excellent individualized service and a place to meet friends. What I believe and

hear modelers say is they want their hobby shop to stock the basics for their hobby and help them locate and order the other items they need. They also want clinics and mentoring to help them build better models and a place to meet other modelers.

My definition of a mentor is a trusted counselor or guide. But, I also think it can be a crutch for modelers who lack confidence in their modeling abilities. A hobby shop could be a focal point for mentoring in a community.

The two hobby shops I have had on my shows are working with their local NMRA Divisions to provide these types of mentoring and educational activities and have knowledgeable employees who are a great help to customers. They definitely cater to modelers.

I think having an HMA representative is great as I am a non-profit member of that association. As one manufacturer told me: "From a

manufacturer's perspective, I would say that prices continue to rise. Containers from China cost three times what they did some time ago. Modelers wonder why things cost what they do, and many are on a fixed income. The manufacturers are very aware of this, but they can't give it away. They have costs as well and must protect their ability to employ workers and deliver products."

These are critical issues for all modelers and the reason why I joined the HMA. I can be part of the discussion.

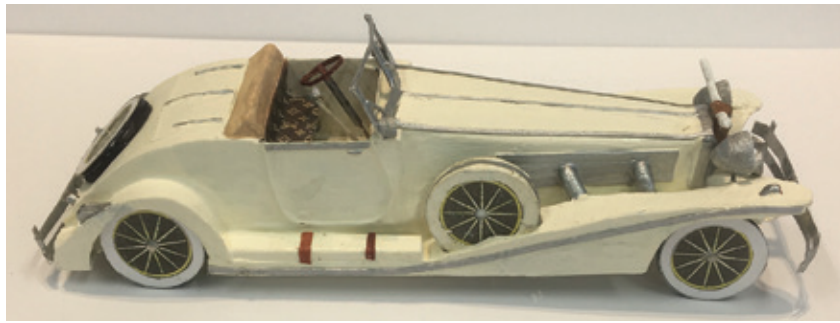
However, it seems to me that local hobby shops also have problems that directly impact

modelers and vice versa, but modelers are not allowed to be members of NRHSA. Wouldn't your association be stronger with the voices of all hobby shop owners, manufacturers and modelers? I believe this might get modelers more involved with your stores. If you decide to allow modelers to be members of your association, please let me know so I can join.

I look forward to meeting and talking with all of you. Again, I welcome you to be a guest on one of my Zoom shows or just log in and be a viewer. Thanks for reading this far. It's time for me to do some modeling. **HM**

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