

# LEHIGH VALLEY MODELS

As a youth, Frank Titman loved to build model airplanes--the kind with tissue-paper-covered stick skeletons, powered by rubber bands. When they got so banged up they couldn't be repaired, he flew them off the roof of his house--after he set them afire! During those years his dad often took him to watch trains operating in his hometown of Allentown, PA, so he got hooked on railroading. Shortly after his discharge from the SeaBees where he served at Iwo Jima during World War II, he started modeling in HO scale. It was as large as he could go in the apartment he called home.

When a little more space became available, Frank reverted to American Flyer, although he was always trying to make everything look more realistic. The change to scale modeling was triggered by the purchase of a Rex dockside loco he detailed and tried to equip with American Flyer knuckle couplers. "Those big couplers" he mused, "ruined the overall appearance of the engine so I tried some Kadee HO knuckle couplers a friend had modified with longer gladhands to use with S scale." That did it! They looked so good and worked so well, even though there were virtually no products for it on the market, Frank became hooked on S scale! And the result? This past year his skills as a modeler were amply attested to in Great Model Railroads 2000.

Together with a couple of buddies, Frank developed a tin and wood scale model hopper car. They sold four kits. Then, as a club, they decided to raise funds selling S scale kits of models Frank designed and built. That was the start of Lehigh Valley Models. It was also almost the end of the business, as members of the club soon tired of spending all their time assembling kits; they wanted to build their layout and run the trains. Consequently, Frank took over the "manufacturing" aspect on his own and the business has been growing for more than 20 years.

Since then, the business has truly become a one-man-operation. Frank converts his ideas for a new structure (or whatever) into a completed model. When he's satisfied with it, he creates a kit for it, complete with very well illustrated instruction sheets which he also designs. He's skilled at drawing, a definite plus for the LVM kit-builder, for the instruction sheets have illustrations or pictures of any construction aspect which may be a bit complex. His garage serves as the manufacturing facility, the place where he cuts the needed wood stock for the kits. His train room/basement doubles as an assembly plant/warehouse for the business. Castings and printing (now photocopying) of instruction sheets are the only aspects of the kit-creating process not done on site. The castings are made by Bowser Manufacturing in Montoursville with patterns Frank himself creates.

"We believe that every model railroad must have scenery, buildings, and all the little details necessary to make it appear realistic. Lehigh Valley Models has produced a number of buildings and other railroad related details to help create that realism. You will find the instruction sheets for LVM products full of step by step drawings, and wherever possible, all parts are precut to size or length to make for easy assembly with the least amount of work. All items needed to complete the models are included with the exception of paint and glues." Those are the words on

the first page of the Lehigh Valley Models catalog that now lists nearly fifty items, each of which is individually pictured or illustrated.

You don't need to order a catalog to get an idea of just how realistic Lehigh Valley models are. Just grab a copy of *Great Model Railroads 2000* and check out the photos of Frank's Spiral Hill Railroad. Every item in the catalog, except an early version of a coaling tower, is on the railroad. LVM lineside structures, utility poles, coal breakers, numerous vehicles, a corrugated box company, row houses and, of course, a water tank are among the many available models visible in the magazine photos.

While you're looking at the photos, take time to read the article. It reveals much about Frank Titman and his approach to model railroading. It also explains why there are no "diesel specific" structures offered--he's allergic to diesels! Nonetheless, many of the items will be perfectly at home on a contemporary layout. Frank's railroad is fully scenicked which, unfortunately means there is no room for additional structures, no room for expansion, and that, coupled with his age (he's 79), is why the LVM line will not continue to grow. Not only has he decided not to add any new items, he is actually considering selling the business. It is unfortunate that he will no longer be creating new kits, but the hobby is certainly richer for what he has given it through his talents and his company. I'm not an S-scaler, but I certainly have grown in the hobby by my visit to his manufacturing site!

Frank may be contacted through Ed Kuser, contact info in *The Local*.