"I FOUND THAT QUITE A FEW OF MY CUSTOMERS ACTUALLY BUY THE DECALS WITH NO INTENTION OR USING THEM."

PF: Your instruction sheets are sometimes very elaborate and seem to offer many details and modifications to improve the model beyond the average builder.

Groves: True, but the fact that I can't draw well means I use photos of my completed models for the instructions. And since I'm under a deadline for the product, I don't always incorporate some of my own suggestions and will go great lengths backward in modeling to get the model and photo finished.

PF: What are some of the problems associated with the actual production of your decals?

Groves: Let's hope you have about ten hours of tape here. What a sore spot. The number one problem, which seems to have really started since the oil embargo of the winter of '73-'74, is that American business in general doesn't want to stockpile inventory or take on large orders. It's difficult, no matter how much money you are willing to pay, to get anything done by an artist or printer, and have it done right and on time. Taking photos or drawings, along with the model to the artist is where it starts. Depending upon the complexity and the artist himself, you're looking at $250 to $500 for artwork alone. You'll find it hard finding an artist that will take the time to do it right. You may then spend three to six months waiting for that artwork. Then you may have two or three little mistakes that you are even willing to pay to have corrected, but the artist's ego is hurt, and he is mad and doesn't understand the exactness that we expect in model building today. He is liable not to want to do any other projects and you're back again looking for an artist for the next project.

Fortunately, I now have an artist I am satisfied with.

Once you take your artwork to a printer, you'll find that very few printers will do what we call a water slide decal. The paper used is manufactured and meant to be kept at 67% humidity. They can print mylar or sticker type decals without this worry. Industry standard on silk screen registration is 3/16 of an inch. A good model decal has to have color separations of two to three thousandths of an inch. The printer I use near the Burbank airport is run by a man & wife team, and care about what they do. They have a high speed press, but run it at idle speed. They'll adjust the machine if they see a sheet coming out a little off. A lot of printers will tell you that the job will be ready in two to three weeks. Three months later you're still waiting for it. At one time, I had different decal projects at five different printers, and every one of them had the photo ready artwork for at least three and a half months. And every one of those printers promised the projects in two to three weeks. Then you may run into the financial problem of the five projects all being shipped to you at once, and you're suddenly faced with $20,000 in bills. And of course these same printers who took three months now want their money in fifteen days.

Those who draw their directions will of course have the instruction sheets ready. But I use a photo of the model built using the decals, so I will tell you in the instructions if something is wrong with the decal printing or fit.

Another big problem with ATP decals is that modelers rarely think about, which is the legal issue of the subject being printed. For some reason railroad decals can be done easily because of some technical ruling that you are dealing with "history," while airlines are different, and you need their permission to use their schemes. The airlines are mainly interested in two issues, which are that you do their symbols and colors and things correctly, and that you are responsible for misuse of such decals. Misuse means embarrassing the airline by use of their logo or name on something not appropriate. Airline departments within their company sometimes act as separate companies. An airline legal department can get very hot at you for use of their copyrighted logo although you have written permission from their advertising department to use it. If I don't have some sort of written contract with an airline, I probably won't print their livery.

PF: What sort of projects are you planning in the future?

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