

HM Visits

Jeff Troy

Horizon Hobby Champaign, Illinois

In August, I was on my way home from a vintage go-kart race in Quincy, Missouri, when I realized that my route would take me only an hour away from Champaign, Illinois. What a bonus! A quick cell tap to Steven Goodreau at Horizon had me all set for a visit on the following day, and as it turned out, visiting Horizon Hobby was one of my more pleasant experiences in the hobby industry. I've known a lot of Horizon people for many years, and while my afternoon tour primarily centered around the business aspects of the company, this friendly group always maintains a professionally casual atmosphere that makes visitors, as well as their own employees, feel very much at home.

Steve Goodreau is my regular contact at Horizon. He handles most of the company's publicity and media needs, so he's the right guy for a magazine editor — he's also a great and longtime friend. "Goody" led me around the offices, introducing me to old friends and the people whose faces were new to me.

My first sit-down was with Horizon president, Mike Gillette. Mike has a very comfortable way of running the operation. He's friendly and relaxed, yet the consummate professional in every way. Mike has a very positive outlook on the state of the hobby industry today, and the role that Horizon Hobby plays within it.

"This is the first time the industry has seen increased traffic at the low end. The products offered today are more compelling and more user friendly than they've ever been. The Blade CX, CP and CP Pro,



President Mike Gillette welcomes HM to Horizon.

Firebirds, Aerobirds and E-flite models and accessories are all affordable, with tremendous success rates for beginners. Horizon is growing because we distribute the kind of products that dealers and consumers want.

"Service is important, too, and that's another Horizon Hobby benchmark. We consistently try to provide Horizon's storefront dealers — our partners in the industry — with the best possible service, like great product, great pricing, easy ordering and same-day shipping whenever possible. We bond with our partners, and make every effort to contribute toward their success."

I asked Mike Gillette what he thought to be the industry's greatest areas of growth. "There's huge growth in railroad, particularly in HO," he replied. "Plastics are steady with good volume, and there's lots of new product moving in RC. We're truly gratified that so many partners have chosen to work with Horizon, and place their trust in us."

When Mike and I had finished speaking, I was introduced to Horizon marketing director, Dolan Klein, a really busy guy with a keen eye for industry shifts.

"We believe that Horizon is drawing new customers into certain areas of the hobby. We're increasing crossover in different hobby categories, which is especially noticeable at shows. We have a great group of R&D people who speak to modelers all the time. They respond to consumer demand with advanced-technology products that are timely, innovative and easy to use.



Juli Greene, Ginger Brennan and Lisa Pierce are part of Horizon's sales group. Karen Allison is marketing manager. Robin Kilver and Wanda Crosier help create Horizon's marketing and media pages.



Expansive warehouse services Horizon's dealer partners quickly and efficiently. Department motto says it all.

"New releases from Team Losi, like the 8IGHT, are very exciting, and give dealers more choices," said Dolan. "The new FS One flight simulator is coming soon. That system has incredible graphics and physics that will open up all kinds of new possibilities to users. E-flite continues to grow by leaps and bounds, and Spektrum technology is taking radio control systems to an all-new level."

Dolan Klein and I spoke at length about several new-technology releases that Horizon has in store for you in the very near future, and although I am sworn to secrecy, I am free to tell you that many of these new offerings go quite a few steps beyond being "merely" revolutionary.

Steve Goodreau and I took a break for lunch, and started to draft a tentative review schedule for some of the amazing new releases that Dolan Klein has me so excited to show you. There's going to be a lot of this new technology product on display in the Horizon exhibit at iHobby Expo this month, and you'll also be seeing a lot of it in the pages of *Hobby Merchandiser*.

Driving back to Horizon, I was able to get a good look at the new addition being added to the shipping and receiving building. This new expansion reflects the com-



Warehouse expansion will boost customer service.



Joe Reinhart, Joe Chrisman and Shane Stonecipher head the talented Horizon product service crew. Kimberly Young, Peter Ruedi and Shane Wilson are key members of the Horizon Hobby sales management team.



pany's steady growth, and once I was inside the building, it was easy to understand why Horizon continues to grow.

The warehouse layout is service oriented. The inventory is extensive, and the people who handle the operation are beyond efficient; they *care* about what they do. I met quite a few of the warehouse staffers, including Elizabeth Williams and Denise Berkert, who pick and

pack the components that go into every single JR radio system that leaves the building. I saw dealer orders of every description being picked, packed and shipped, and could truly appreciate the smooth efficiency of Horizon's warehouse.

Back in the offices, Steve and I toured the various departments — marketing, sales and executive, and I was

happy to be able to spend a few minutes with another longtime friend, Rick Stephens, one of Horizon Hobby's founders. Rick is always pleasant, and I believe it's because he has a lot to be proud of. He and his company make every effort to keep Horizon's dealer partners successful, with quality, honesty and integrity.

It's hard for me to imagine anyone running a contemporary hobby shop without being a Horizon partner, but if you'd like to know more about it, why not give the people at Horizon



Senior media manager Steven Goodreau with Horizon Hobby founder Rick Stephens.

Hobby a call? The friendly and dedicated Horizon staff is ready and waiting to serve you at 800-535-5551. **HM**