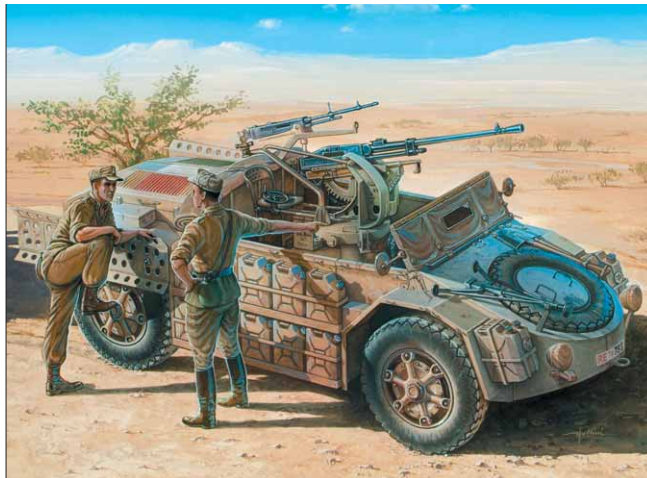


MRC Partners With Italeri S.p.A.

Hobby Merchandiser has the exclusive interview with MRC's Bob Lewen.



Alliances between hobby manufacturers and distributors have come and gone, often strengthening the expansion of the industry and providing easier product access to the consumer. Recently, two firmly established companies in the hobby industry, Model Rectifier Corporation (MRC) of Edison, New Jersey, and Italeri S.p.A., of Italy, joined forces in an effort to re-energize the plastic modeling hobby in the USA. *HM* contacted MRC marketing director Bob Lewen, who was kind enough to discuss the new manufacturing and USA distribution partnership.

JT: There's been a lot of industry gossip in the plastics world about Italeri, mostly about their products and the availability of the complete lineup here in America. Before I ask you about your new relationship with Italeri, can you touch on some of the history for me?

BL: My pleasure. Italeri was founded in the early 1960's. The two company principles, G.P. Parmeggiani and G. Malservisi, were skilled military modelers who weren't happy with the level of detail and manufacturing proficiency available to the average European modeler. They felt that what they were looking for as hobbyists didn't exist, so they decided to produce it themselves.

The two searched for and found with detail modelers throughout Italy, modelers who shared a similar passion to their own, not just in military hardware but in other facets of plastic modeling, as well. They connected with artists, machinists, production designers and toolmakers who could produce the kind of products demanded by the modeling public. Ultimately, Italeri became a world leader in the modeling sector.

JT: They seem to have a very extensive product line, a few hundred SKU's, as I recall. Are they designing in Italy and manufacturing in the Far East?

BL: Surprisingly not. The entire manufacturing process is carried out with the most modern CAD/CAM computer systems in a 107,000-square-foot factory in Italy, right down to the injection molding and packaging of the final product.

JT: How did MRC get involved?

BL: We had been approached by Italeri and asked to consider becoming their exclusive USA importer and distributor. These major decisions are never taken lightly, and certainly weren't by Italeri or MRC. The Italeri decision to move from The Testor Corporation to MRC was a business and marketing decision, based on our successes with similar import lines and other specialty product lines. MRC is the exclusive distributor for some of the world's most respected hobby products, as well as the creators and manufacturers of our own prominent MRC lines. We have a most successful track record.



Bob Lewen, marketing director for MRC.

JT: You touched on a curious subject, similar product lines. Are you at all concerned about product overlap between Italeri and your other plastic imports?

BL: No. Not at all. MRC has been providing innovative, diversified, quality products to the hobbyist for 60 years. I'm not trying to blow my own horn, but some of the most innovative hobby products, technical achievements and patents in the

hobby industry originated within our MRC "Skunkworks," and continue to originate here today. Our new partnership and agreements with Italeri will help strengthen our leadership role in the vast plastic modeling side of the industry. As for overlap, I really don't foresee any problems. Like our Academy model kits, Italeri plastic kits have their own culture of modeling — the subtle nuances that give the modeler an additional high-in-quality modeling option. One company's version of a subject may not be available from the other.

It's consumer economics and the basis of the American way. Give the customer choice, quality, a fair price and the best service, and you'll have a returning customer.

One great thing about our Italeri partnership is the high number of new products that we are able to offer. Their huge array of kits and built-ups encompasses everything from air and ground war machines, boats and ships to motorcycles, war gaming figures and historical figures. Many of these have taken center-stage at international events, museums worldwide, and certainly in prestigious individual collections.

JT: It's obvious that you will be going all out to grow the Italeri business in the United States. Are you planning anything special in the way of advertising and marketing?

BL: Special? Yes. Absolutely. I'm personally excited that Italeri has entrusted their USA marketing efforts to MRC, and I have every confidence in our future success. We enjoy a leadership role in many areas of the hobby industry, and I'm happy that the top brass here at MRC has the vision and foresight to have their finger on the pulse of the industry and the needs of modeling consumers. Strong leadership has enabled the MRC team to get the word out where it's needed in a timely fashion, with high impact advertising and coordinated marketing techniques.

At MRC, we're fortunate to have a full team of people who speak the hobbyist's language, a very important thing in today's competitive world, and an essential part of our overall strategy. Just look at our long-term success with Academy Plastics, and our shared ability to create extraordinarily detailed, museum quality and award-winning models. I'm proud of the work we've done with Academy. We started with a strong, quality product line and worked hard, and we're firmly determined to be just as successful with Italeri.

Here's why I like your word *special*. We'll be pumping out more consumer advertising, targeting the individual modeler with product information and setting our sights on the collector of built-up models, not just kits. Italeri has many items, like their F-1 motorcycles, in both kit and built-up form. The importance of immediate product availability and adequate fill rates can't be overemphasized, so that's high on the list. We're determined to be able to give the modeler exactly what he wants and when he wants it, but it can't be done if the customer doesn't know what's available to him. We will provide a greater number of consumer-based catalogs than ever before, increased Web awareness, independent product reviews and much more.

We're not leaving out *Hobby Merchandiser's* readers, either, distributors or independent hobby shops. Raising



Extensive Italeri WWII military lineup includes many bestselling subjects like this B-25 Mitchell bomber.

Italeri's product visibility within the hobby trade is also high on our do-list. Before long, you can expect to see posters, press releases, product release notifications, new product samples for magazine reviews and more.

I welcome this new MRC challenge and the promises that it brings. Our previous achievements have given us the impetus and determination to continue to expand our leadership role in plastic modeling. Within the last year and a half, our Easy Model line of 1/72-scale factory-built WWII models went from a mere 42 airplanes to more

than 100 airplanes and ground armor. The prices are low, but most of all, our advertising and marketing technique is very effective. Last year, we began an exclusive partnership with Tristar, who offer detailed lines of WWII 1/35-scale armor and figures. As good as their models are, the company wanted a stronger presence in the USA. Based on their knowledge of MRC and our knowledge of the market, I'm happy to say that Tristar is now another one of our success stories.

JT: As the new American distributor, will you be bringing the entire Italeri product line into the States?

BL: Almost. We won't be importing their Harley-Davidson motorcycles, although Italeri has acquired Protar, so we will have their complete line of multi-scale F-1 and other famous motorcycles. We received our first container loads of product in August, and some 50 of these SKU's are new. The bulk of the enormous product line is still shipping, although a lot is already in-house. Our plastics distributors have been given pricing, and I'm happy to say that ordering is brisk. We've managed to hold existing prices for most items, and substantially reducing others. I guess that would surely apply as "special" marketing.

I've seen some beautiful Italeri models in the pipeline. There's a new PT Boat on the way, and that's just one of the new and distinctive Italeri models we've been getting calls about. We'll be showing many of the new Italeri models in Rosemont at iHobby Expo later this month, and we're looking forward to another good year in 2007.

JT: Any closing thoughts, Bob?

BL: Just to say thanks for giving me this opportunity to inform the folks behind the counters in the shops about Italeri. Putting it simply, our intention is to give the dealer and plastic modeler the easiest access to Italeri ever. See you at iHobby.

JT: You, too, ace. I'll see you and the crew in Rosemont. Give my best wishes for success to Frank, Akiko, Don and Debra, Jeff, Tim, Carol and all my friends "in back." **HM**