



**ABOVE:** The carnival diorama measures 5 feet by 30 inches. A paper backdrop of woods encloses the scene and creates depth.

# The Country Carnival

James H. Hillestad re-creates all the colorful sights, raucous sounds and great fun of a carnival midway in miniature

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

Sometimes toy figure collectors need a change of scenery from battle dioramas and military parades. Scenes of everyday life are just the ticket.

So it was for me with the “Big Top Circus” (TS&MF issue 165) and “Zoological Paradise” (issue 168). Now, inspired by an annual volunteer firefighters’ town fair in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains, here is “The Country Carnival.”

## DREAM COMES TRUE

Visitors to my Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA, frequently ask, “How long does it take to make a diorama?”

The answer is that it takes surprisingly less time than you might think. But it takes a lot more time in preparation and planning than you could imagine.

In this midway diorama, for example, the carnival Ferris wheel was handcrafted by Chris Marks 25 years ago. The hot air

balloon was made in Atlanta by William Speer 20 years ago.

When I collected them, in each case I knew I had found a unique piece. I was confident that the day would come when they would take their places in a display. Dreams are made of such!

## BEING THERE

The arcade stalls were made by LeMax. The perimeter fencing and stadium lights were produced by Department 56. The carousel, gala musicians and the beer stall came from John Eden Studios.

The 54-mm figures were the work of a number of makers, including Trophy Miniatures of Wales Ltd., John Lesinski, STE, Sarum Soldiers and Col. Stan Stanton of Charleston, S.C.

When designing a diorama, it helps to visualize that you are there. Not as a spectator, but as a participant.

Smell the popcorn, hear the bells and music and voices, and share the oohs and aahs of little children. It’s all part of the fun!

Actual and figurative electricity add to the scene. The trees are festooned with twinkling lights. Miniature light bulbs decorate the carousel and the Ferris wheel. The latter attraction was named after American George Washington Gale Ferris Jr., who designed and built the original version for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

To top it all off, a tape player belts out raucous carnival music.

The whole show re-creates a great time at “The Country Carnival.” ■

## about the writer

James H. Hillestad is the proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum and shop in Cresco, Pa., USA.



**ABOVE:** Trophy produced a number of the wheeled vehicles used in the diorama. This pony cart was first made in 1992.

**LEFT:** Merry-go-round made by John Eden.

**BELOW:** The ever-popular food stand was made from a Corgi railway car.



**ABOVE:** A "Quack Attack!" shooting gallery offers people a chance to test their skill and win a prize.



**RIGHT:** The colorful entrance to the carnival grounds lures in the public.

**BELOW:** The ring toss might look easy, but in most games of this nature the ring must land completely flat to circle the mouth and neck of the bottle.



# Creating a diorama



**ABOVE:** Proving one's strength by making a bell ring has always been a favorite attraction at carnivals.



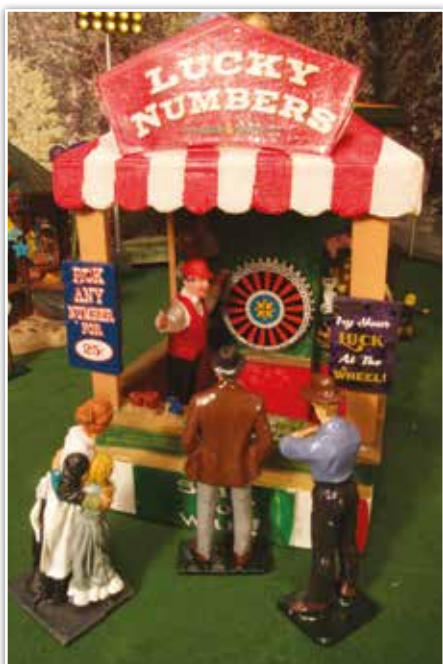
**RIGHT:** The stage on which the musicians perform was made by John Gittins of JG Miniatures. The fencing was produced by Department 56.



**ABOVE LEFT:** Clowns made by John Lesinski and painted by Jim Hillestad perform on a platform with bunting stitched from red, white, and blue ribbon.

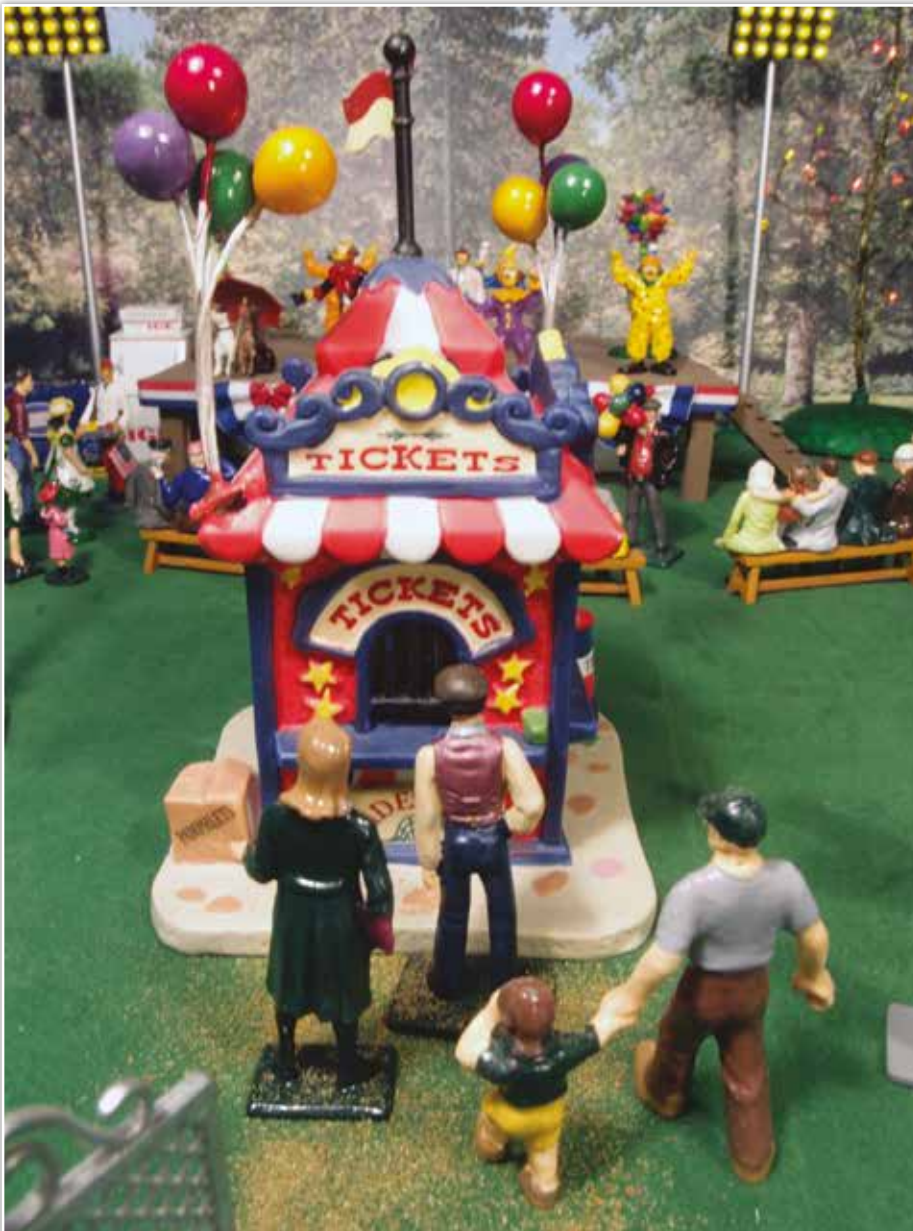
**ABOVE:** The writer recounts, "I first saw this balloon, made by Bill Speer, at a show in Chicago in 1994. At the time, I had no idea how I would use it, but knew I had to have it!"

**FAR LEFT:** "Lucky Numbers" wheel of fortune booth by LeMax.



**LEFT & BELOW:** Chris Marks created the model of a Ferris wheel, a staple at carnivals and amusement parks.





**ABOVE:** Knock down the cans and win a stuffed animal.

**LEFT:** Children of all ages line up at the ticket booth.



**ABOVE:** A carnival-goer contemplates asking a question of a fortune-telling automaton.

**LEFT:** "Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades!" This set of horseshoe players was made by Steve Tufano in 1994.

**BELOW:** Pony ride produced by Trophy. It looks like a donkey might be on duty.

