



The diorama base is 20 by 32 inches. The Z-scale train set was made by Marklin of Germany.

Lovely Day in a Country Garden

The Toy Soldier Museum's Jim Hillestad shares his train of thought about a marketing experience

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD

The scenario: *It's a bucolic Sunday in Dorset, England. Grandfather Levellyn Smith has taken responsibility for entertaining the grandchildren while his daughter and her husband enjoy a bit of blissful relaxation.*

Mr. Smith has carved out of his ample estate a charming world for the grandchildren. The thoughtfully designed area is home to a miniature railroad,

which he proudly operates to the children's delight (and his own).

The inspiration for this diorama, a departure from my usual military scenes with toy figures, goes back 25 years. I took a booth as a vendor at a local model train show. I was excited by the opportunity to introduce

miniature figures to complement train layouts — and to “set the world on fire” with the idea.

Well, it probably comes as no surprise to many that my efforts went unrewarded.

A careful and sober analysis after the fact revealed to me that the



Grandfather is in his glory as he shows off his engineering skills with the train transformer.



Old Tom, the gamekeeper and gardener, enjoys a quiet nip in the garden of the miniature railroad.



Every garden needs a water feature!

show's attendees were there to buy toy trains, not toy soldiers.

In any case, my table was next to a vendor who sold large-scale trains designed for outdoor gardens. Having nothing else to do during my three

fruitless hours at the show but watch his large trains go round and round, I reflected on the axiom that "there has to be a pony in here somewhere."

So, with a stroke of creative flexibility, I embarked on making a

garden layout scaled to 54-mm toy soldiers. The figures are a mixed bag, including some painted castings.

Though it hasn't set the world on fire in a marketing sense, it was fun to do. And yes, the train is operational! ■



The squire's grandsons have their own pastime in the garden.



Parents enjoy a moment of relaxation and peace surrounded by nature's bounty, shared with the family dog.



ABOUT THE WRITER

James H. Hillestad is a military historian and proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum in Cresco, Pa., USA.