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Playing with Trains: A Passion Beyond Scale

Sam Posey

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Why do grown men play with trains? Is it a primal attachment to childhood, nostalgia for the lost age of rail travel, or the stuff of flat-out obsession? In this delightful and unprecedented book, Grand Prix legend Sam Posey tracks those who share his “passion beyond scale” and discovers a wonderfully strange and vital culture.

Posey’s first layout, wired by his mother in the years just after the Second World War, was, as he writes in his Introduction, “a miniature universe which I could operate on my own. Speed and control: I was fascinated by both, as well as by the way they were inextricably bound together.” Eventually, when Posey’s son was born, he was convinced that building him a basement layout would be the highest expression of fatherhood. Sixteen years and thousands of hours later, this project, “the outgrowth of chance meetings, unexpected friendships, mistakes, illness, latent ambitions, and sheer luck” was completed. But for Posey, the creation of his HO-scale masterpiece based on the historic Colorado Midland, was just the beginning.

In *Playing with Trains*, Sam Posey ventures well beyond the borders of his layout in northwestern Connecticut, to find out what makes the top modelers tick. He expects to find men “engaged in a genial hobby, happy to spend a few hours a week escaping the pressures of contemporary life.” Instead he uncovers a world of extremes–extreme commitment, extreme passion, and extreme differences of approach. For instance, Malcolm Furlow, holed up on his ranch in the wilderness of New Mexico, insists that model railroading is defined by scenery and artistic self-expression. On the other hand, Tony Koester, a New Jersey modeler, believes his “mission” is to replicate, with fanatical precision and authenticity, the way a real railroad operates. Going to extremes himself, Posey actually “test drives” a real steam engine in Strasburg, Pennsylvania, in an attempt to understand the great machines that inspired the models and connect us to a time when “the railroad was inventing America.” Timeless and original, *Playing with Trains* reveals a classic, questing American world.

From the Hardcover edition.

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