

Scale Auto

enthusiast

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**MODEL
Truck Lines**

Section Begins In This Issue

20 Pages for Model Truckers



Dodge Pickup Conversion • How To: Chrome Trim Application



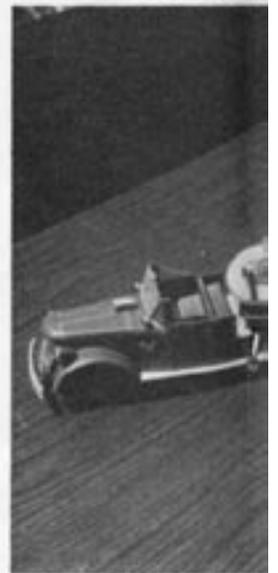
Tom holds a model of Los Angeles County Engine #31, a 1958 Crown triple combination pumper that Tom served 13 years on as a Captain.



One of Tom's most prized Ahrens Fox quint which served



Foam #1 is a 1974 Mack ME



The oldest model in Tom's aerial ladder. Built entirely

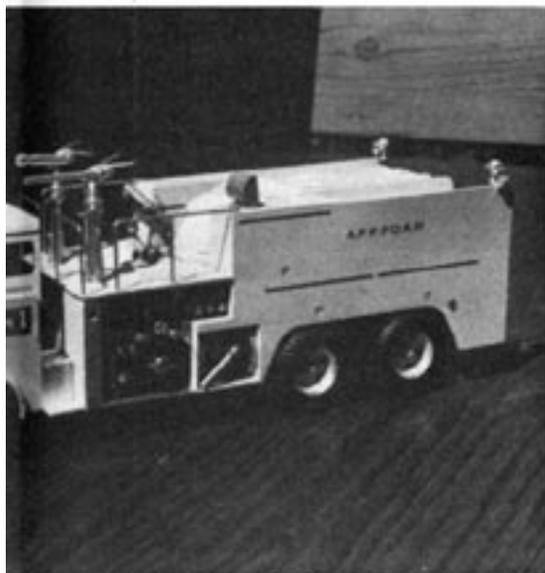
Master of the model fire rig

Tom Showers

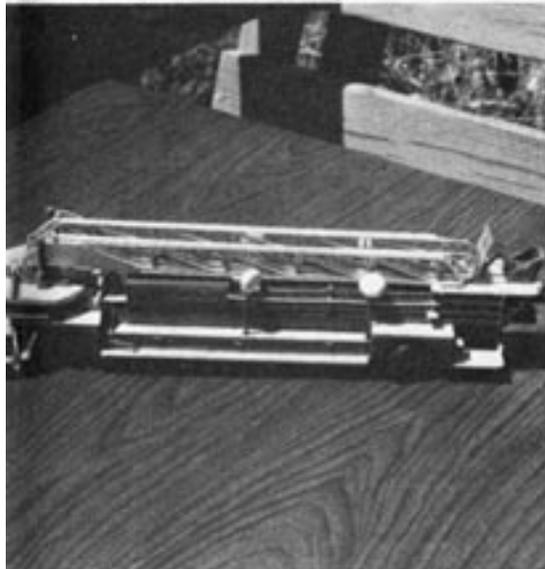
by ROBERT MILNES



ous models, which has won several awards — a 1937
served Fairview, N.Y.



MB with Australian built Presha body.



n's collection is this 1942 American LaFrance tilted 100'
ply of Balsa wood while Tom was in Hawaii in the 40's.

In the 60's we read of people traveling to the high mountains of Tibet, to seek out the Guru and sit at his feet to learn the secret of life from the perfect master.

After 41 years life has few secrets for me, but I have just returned from a pilgrimage to the mountains of northern California, where I sought out the Guru of model rig builders — Tom Showers — to sit at his feet and learn the secrets of 1/32 scale!

Tom is indeed the "perfect master" of the model fire rig and no palace in Tibet could hold more treasures than the Showers hillside home in Shelter Cove, California.

Shelter Cove is a spectacular six hour drive north of San Francisco through wine country, redwoods and mountains, and is the latest installment in Tom's long, varied and distinguished career in the fire service.

Tom's interest in the fire service started while growing up in San Diego where he would chase fire engines on his bicycle.

His career as a professional firefighter started in 1941 in Malakole, Hawaii, where he survived the Pearl Harbor attack while fighting fires for 76 hours straight. In a strange twist of events during the Japanese air attack, Tom's first model fire engine was destroyed when a bullet from a strafing fighter plane passed through the wall of the fire house and scored a direct hit on his Mack pumper.

The hobby of building model fire trucks had started as a way to pass the hours in the fire house and the first models — including the one destroyed in

the attack — were fairly crude in Tom's words, built entirely of Balsa wood. When Tom became Chief of the Malakole department, his models became training tools and would lay hose lines and hook up to fire hydrants.

After the war, he graduated to Bass wood and the rigs became more detailed. In the mid 60's he started to work in plastic and his models began to get the detail and polish that turned his modeling into an art form.

Today his work is almost entirely of plastic, with many parts molded of fiberglass resin and most chrome items turned on a lathe using aluminum stock.

From Malakole Tom transferred to the U.S. Army Air Corp and served as a fireman at Hickam Field. Surviving a couple of injuries sustained in the line of duty, he finished out the war years as an assistant chief of the McCook Air Force Base Fire Department in Nebraska.

After his discharge in 1945, Tom joined the Los Angeles County, California Fire Department, where he served 26 years, 21 as a Captain.

The last 18 years of Tom's L.A. County career were spent at Station #31, where he commanded an engine and rescue rig. The rescue rigs the county was then using were ill-suited for the job and cumbersome to handle, so Tom designed a new unit to fit the job. Those rigs have proven to be real work horses that are still in heavy use in L.A. County and became well known as Rescue 51 of the TV series 'EMERGENCY'.

You won't find a model of Rescue 51 in Tom's collection and he hasn't built





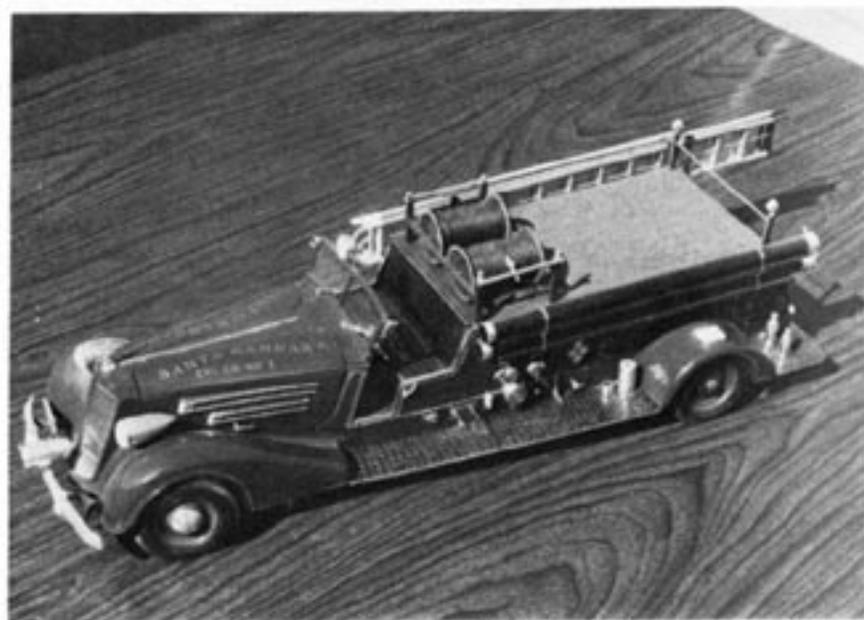
This Austrian 1977 Rosenbauer/Steyr pumper is opened to display a detailed interior.



Rigs at the ready in one of Luna Beach's stations.



Tom works on a model at his desk, the fire stations are displayed in a stack behind him.



The only non 1/32 scale model in his collection is this 1/16 scale beauty of a 1937 Packard pumper that served Santa Barbara, California. The Entex 37 Packard roadster kit was used as a basis for this model.

one. Despite its historical significance, he says it is "just a box — great for the job it does, but not much to inspire a model".

Because of extensive travel overseas, Tom became a fan of European fire apparatus design and was instrumental in bringing the rear-mounted aerial ladder truck and Storz hose coupling to America.

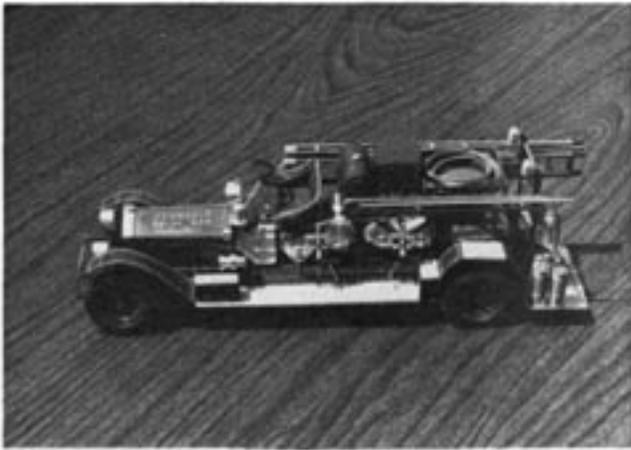
He has felt for a long time that American fire apparatus is built larger and heavier than necessary and he is working on designs combining European chassis and American style pump and hose bodies that will produce smaller, better handling rigs that will do the same job. One of these designs, a pumper using a British Bedford chassis, has been modeled and is in his collection.

These designs are not just flights of fancy — they are well thought out and based on sound principles that apparatus builders would be wise to take a close look at.

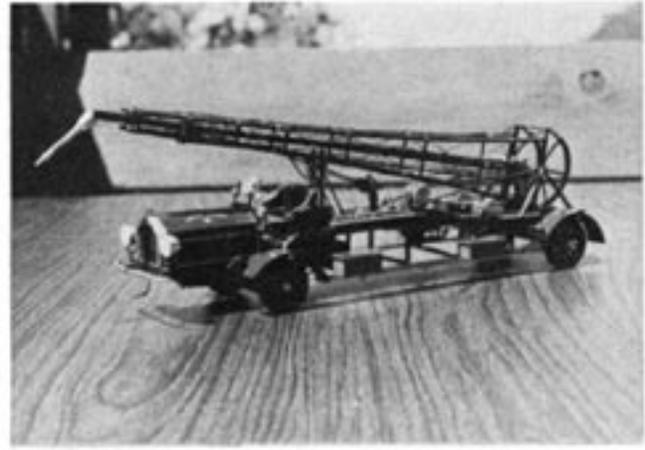
Retirement from Los Angeles County came in 1971 and he and his lovely wife Lise moved up to Shelter Cove to begin yet another career as Chief of their fire department, where he has taken a group of volunteers and turned them into a well trained fire fighting and rescue force, using four fire trucks that, like Tom, are in new careers after long service in other departments.

The same energy Tom has put into the fire service, has also gone into his hobby. He has been a prolific builder, producing 201 pumpers, 74 aerials and 25 special units for customers that include fellow modelers and fire buffs, fire departments, apparatus manufacturers, museums, colleges and even for use in court cases.

Although he builds in any scale, Tom prefers 1/32 and his personal collection is entirely 1/32, except for one 1/16 scale beauty. A fast dwindling supply of the old Aurora American LaFrance pumper kits has provided wheels, tires and many basic parts.



A 1925 American LaFrance chemical pumper.



1905 Gorter water tower, mounted on a 1915 American LaFrance chassis.

Over the years Tom has built up a file of blue prints, photos and books on apparatus so that no matter what project he takes on, he will have some information on it.

When possible, he starts a model using blue prints, either factory or self made, scales them down and starts with a frame, just like the manufacturer would. The cab comes next, followed by the truck body and finally, all the running equipment.

Painting is done with automotive lacquers, with enamel for the striping and lettering, which Tom does by hand — decals are not used.

Tom's own collection is divided into two sections, the first being a historical collection of 69 American rigs of various ages, types and manufacture, and 31 foreign fire trucks.

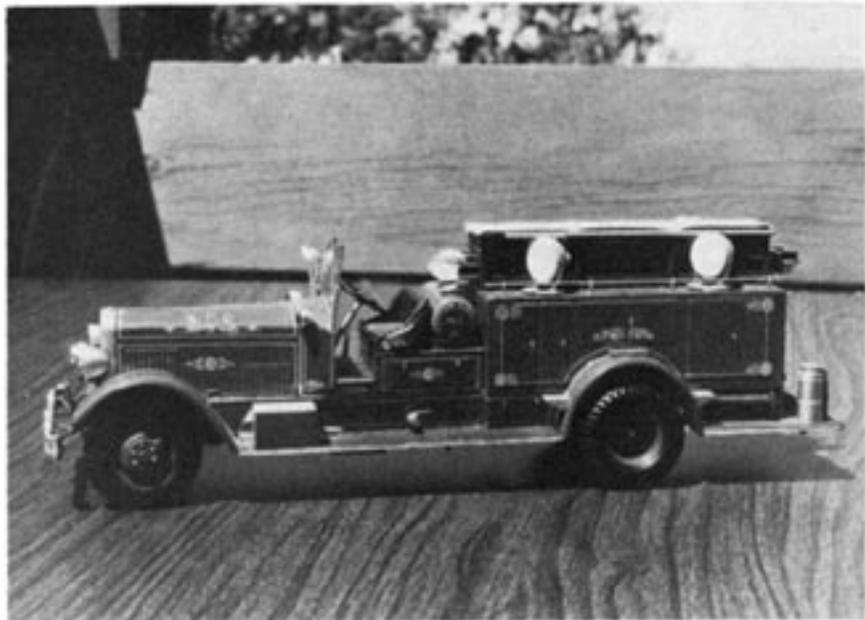
All of these are static models that are proudly lined up on the shelves of two huge display cases, a 1/32 scale history of the fire engine.

The second part of the collection is where Tom has advanced his hobby to the art form. It is a complete miniature fire department for the mythical city of Luna Beach, including 8 pumpers, 3 ladder trucks, 2 reserve pumpers, 1 hose tender, 2 foam units, 2 airport crash trucks, 2 fire boats, 3 medic ambulances, 2 support units, 5 fire stations and a drill tower.

Luna Beach is truly a model fire department — not just in scale — but in the planning behind it. A large map of Luna Beach has all the streets laid out, with residential and industrial areas, a waterfront, airport, freeways, schools, hospitals — in short, everything you would expect to see on a detailed map in a fire headquarters.

The city is broken into five fire districts, with each district containing a model fire station and the equipment necessary for the hazards in that district.

Each model fire rig serves a particular purpose and reflects Tom's ideas and innovations. Just as would be the case in a



1932 Seagrave Rescue Squad.



Luna Beach Rescue #1 is a 1974 Mack MB with everything opened to show the great detail.



A 1972 Ward LaFrance pumper, and a 1975 Pierce/International mini-pumper.

real department, apparatus is replaced as it ages or as the needs change. The replaced apparatus then goes into reserve service and the reserve rigs which are replaced are sold.

All the fire stations are landscaped, have operating lights and are fully furnished.

All the Luna Beach fire trucks have steerable wheels and ladders that operate. Compartment doors open; the compartments filled with all the equipment in scale. Many have removable cab tops to better display fully detailed cab interiors.

Luna Beach is a remarkable modeling accomplishment combining artistic ability, technical knowledge, and many years of experience in the fire service.

Another fascinating aspect of Tom's collection is how it changes over the years. Many of the models have had subtle or major changes, being totally or partially rebuilt or just repainted and re-lettered.

There are several model fire rig builders whose work is comparable on a one to one basis, but nobody will ever match the overall accomplishments of Tom Showers — he is the master of the model fire rig.



Luna Beach Truck #3 is a 1972 Crown quad with 100-foot aerial ladder.



A 1964 Dennis Pump/Escape of the London Fire Brigade.