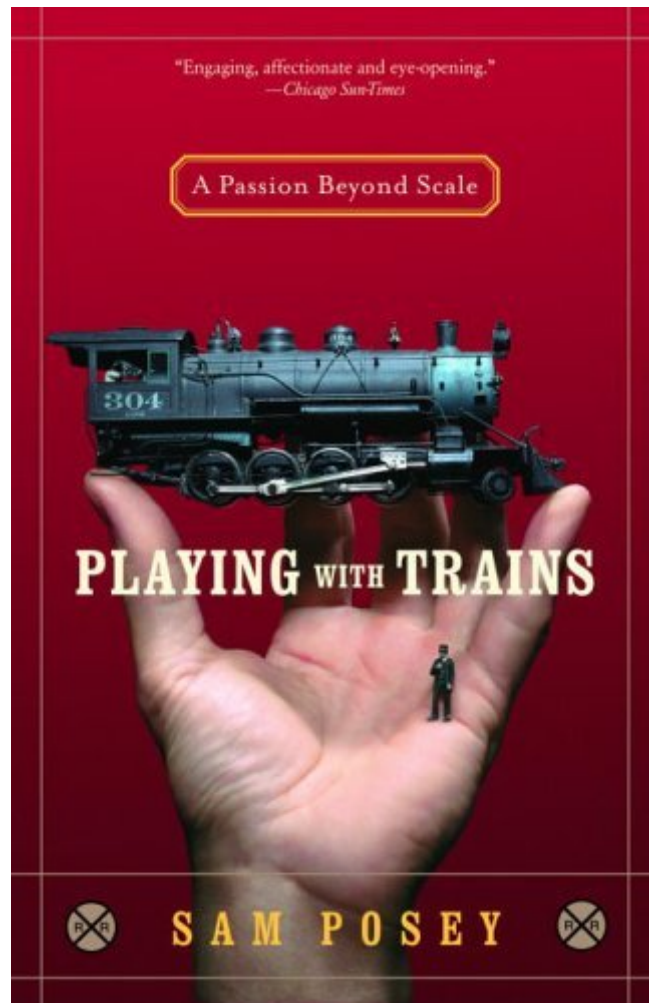


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Playing With Trains: A Passion Beyond Scale



Synopsis

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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Customer Reviews

This book is a gem and a page-turner. It is a lot of fun but it is also deep, a masterpiece in fact. When a child takes off in an airplane for the first time, he may react very strongly to the optical illusion, as the plane climbs out, that houses, trees, cars, and people are shrinking into miniatures. At first the child may be made uneasy by this shrinkage but, with the pro forma voice of adult reassurance (no, they are not really shrinking, we are just moving further away) the illusion of tiny houses, barns, trees, people -- whole cities in miniature -- becomes a source of quickening delight. This is why people love scale models. A big part of what the brain does, all day every day, its main job perhaps, is to judge size and scale. A human brain moving through the world constantly seeks clues, references, that will tell it whether an object, a tree or a building, say, is 1) tiny or 2) far away. The size of a building can be quickly determined -- the eye counts the number of stories. But a tree -- mature trees of every size, from five feet tall to a hundred feet tall -- may have identically the same shape and structure. To help the brain judge a tree's size and distance, the eye hunts for a size reference of some kind, maybe a woman or a dog standing under the tree. If it finds there instead, under the tree, a huge package of cigarettes, or a huge human hand -- signaling that the tree is in fact tiny -- the brain laughs out loud. It delights in miniatures: exact scale models. And the brain is repelled by departures from perfect scale. Lionel trains of the 1950s, for example, were supplied with a non-scale track -- three rails instead of two.

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