

His Kids Love Their Backyard Train

With five children of his own, five foster children, and his wife's home-based daycare, Van Johnson knew the 30-ft. long wood train he built in his back yard would get a lot of use.

The Waterloo, Neb. man spent five days building the 6-ft. tall train which is made from treated lumber and sits stationary on a wooden track.

"The kids couldn't wait for me to finish so they played on each car as it was completed," he says. "I used plans from the Winfield collection online (www.thewinfieldcollection.com) as a guide, and the project was fun to do."

Johnson paid \$32.95 for the patterns to all four cars (engine, old fashioned coal car, tanker and caboose), but the plans for each car are also available separately.

The whole thing cost about \$2,100, not counting labor.

Children can start at the nose of the engine and climb through each successive car, all the way to the back of the caboose, Johnson says. There are benches located inside the coal car and the caboose.

"I've had it over a year and the kids play on it just as much today as they did when I first made it, so they're not bored," he says.

"I've been really impressed with how much they like it. I enjoy working with wood so I had been looking for something a little different that you don't see everyday."

Johnson says it took one day to make the track, which sits on a river rock base and each car took another day.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Van Johnson, 3607 N. 267th Plaza, Waterloo, Neb. 68069 (ph 402 359-2706, email: shipping227@aol.com).



It took Van Johnson just 5 days to build this 6-ft. high, 30-ft. long wooden stationary train from plans he bought online.

World's Smallest Chickens

Tony and Carol Greaves run a miniature horse business on their farm near Buda, Texas. Last year they decided to add a dainty new attraction to their operation by acquiring some of the world's smallest chickens.

The tiny Malaysian Serama chickens were new to the U.S. in 2002, when Jerry Schexnayder of Vacherie, La. imported 110 hens and 30 roosters. The Greaves obtained their breeding stock through him and currently have about 300 birds.

Seramas originated from Kelantan in Malaysia and were the result of selective cross breeding between a variety of bantam breeds. They have a chesty, proud stance and, when standing upright, their height is between 6 and 10-in., measured from the ground to the top of the comb.

The first competitive show ever held took place in Malaysia in 1990 and was judged by Serama expert Wee Yean Een, who is con-

sidered by many to be the founder of the breed.

Because of their small size and friendliness, Seramas are suitable for keeping even in urban areas. They make very little noise and can be kept in the house if desired. They lay small beige eggs.

The birds come in many colors and are categorized by size into A, B, and C classes. Class A roosters, the smallest class, must weigh less than 12 1/2 oz. and be no more than 7 1/2-in. in height.

"We sell young birds in pairs only, and prices range from \$150 to \$300 per pair, depending on type and size," Greaves says. "Shipping is \$40 for up to two pair. We do not ship chicks."

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Malaysian Serama Bantams, Tony and Carol Greaves, 2460 FM 2001, Buda, Texas. 78610 (ph 512 295-4575; email: [LtlAmerica](mailto:LtlAmerica@aol.com)



Because they're only 6 to 10-in. tall and very sociable, Malaysian Serama chickens make ideal pets, say the Greaves.

@aol.com; website: www.littleamerica.com or www.seramacouncilofnorthamerica.com/.

Small Town Boasts World's Largest Dodge Dealer

The town of Kellogg, Idaho, is full to the brim of cars, trucks, and sport-utility vehicles. Almost every lot in town is overflowing with them. That's because the small community of just 2,800 people is home to Dave Smith Motors, the largest Dodge truck dealer in the world.

The dealership generally has about 1,200 new and about 400 used vehicles in inventory at 12 different lots around town.

Besides Dodge trucks, it's also the seventh largest GM dealer in the world, and proudly emphasizes its "No Hassle Buying" policy. This is borne out by the fact that they have one of the highest rankings available for customer satisfaction.

The dealership sells more than 400 vehicles a month, and over \$600,000 worth of accessories. In all, it's a \$330 million business, annually.

Thanks to its customer satisfaction guarantee, one-price selling, and multiple dealerships under one roof, the dealership has grown in leaps and bounds since the early 1980's. This, despite the fact that the entire county population totals just 14,000 people.

Ken Smith, 42, is head of the family operation. His dad Dave, who passed away in 1994, started the business in 1965.

The dealership is unique in that it sells the complete GM line (Chevy, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Buick, Cadillac, GMC), as well as Chrysler, Jeep and Dodge, all under the same roof. Sales over the internet are another reason for the dealership's success.

"I believe we're the largest accessory dealer in the country," Smith says. "We first decided to build up our accessory business in the 1980s, after noticing that we were selling a lot of trucks but somebody else was accessorizing them. We knew there was good money to be made in accessories and that they also help to sell trucks because the buyer that drives a truck or car fitted with \$8,000 to \$10,000 in accessories makes a statement, prompting others ask where they bought the truck."

While Ken is president, CEO and majority stock holder, his brother, sister, and other family members are all involved in the business.

The nearest cities of any size are Missoula to the east with 100,000 people and Spokane to the west with 200,000 people. The dealership attracts the majority of its customers from throughout the northwest, including Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, but also make sales into practically every other state.

A big part of the success is thanks to one of Ken's brother's computer programming skills because technology plays a large role in this business's overall efficiency. They developed their own extensive computerized pricing system, allowing their salespeople the ability to give customers an immediate, automated price. Also, thanks to the computer software they developed, staff are able to monitor their own and colleagues' sales figures, providing incentive to outdo each other. A special phone system allows call monitor-



Overhead view of Kellogg, Idaho. Dealership keeps 1,600 cars in inventory, parked in lots all over town.

ing, so management can make sure staff are properly handling their clients.

Another angle the Smith family has used to their advantage is that the Kellogg area is a tourist destination. They urge clients to come for a holiday when purchasing their vehicle.

"With the money you'll save on your vehicle purchase, take the whole family on vacation," they say.

The company offers a free shuttle service to buyers flying into the Spokane airport, and with a ski area just a couple blocks from the dealership where the world's longest gondola takes passenger four miles up, an 80 mile mountain biking trail that runs a block from the dealership, and concerts of-

fered by the community, it's not hard to find takers.

Each potential car buyer at Smith's gets a copy of the vehicle invoice that the dealership receives directly from the factory. They handle negotiations in a very up front, transparent way, pointing out that they will get their share of the profits, thanks to a three per cent kickback from General Motors and Chrysler for every car sold. Salespeople get 20 percent of the kickback amount, or a minimum of \$150 per vehicle sold.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Dave Smith Motors, 210 North Division, Kellogg, Idaho 83837 (ph 800 635-8000 or 208 784-1208; fax 208 784-4571; website: <http://www.usautosales.com>).