

Technology Changing the Face of the Hobby:

Part II: What's Coming

As we saw in the last issue, what recent technology has already wrought within the hobby is nothing short of amazing—cleaner, fancier, more graphic-intense bulletins and newsletters, E-mail, scanners, uploading, downloading, electronic cataloging, and the list goes on—it's wonderful! But, that's what's *already* happening. What about the near future?—What's *coming*?

I expect there will be a variety of new gizmos and processes that will become available that will allow the individual collector to pursue his or her collecting interests more rapidly, more efficiently, and (hopefully) more cheaply. Writable CD disks, for example are just beginning to come down to an affordable level for the average person—and one CD holds as much information as 400 3.5" disks! There will be any number of such innovations, to be sure. The question is—*What does the future have in store for the hobby?*

Watch the *bulletins* and what the clubs *do* with the bulletins! That's where the main thrust of technological change in the hobby will continue to be seen—and that's a critical point, because the bulletins are the single most important item to clubs, with respect to bringing in and keeping members. Most club members are out of the local area, and in some cases, even out of the country. They're never going to attend meetings, bring anything in for show and tell, etc. They signed up for the bulletin—and what the bulletin brings them: information, auctions, a place to advertise, new collecting ideas. Without a bulletin, a club is doomed (or blessed, depending on your point of view) to remain a small social gathering of local collectors.

It's only a matter of time (Swami Prero believes) before bulletins become wholly electronic. One way or another, future hobbyists will one day be receiving the bulletins via computer instead of the postal service. This would be incredibly faster and far less expensive (no printing and postal costs!). If the collector still wants a hard copy, it will be printed out at *his* end rather than at the club's end. There are two basic ways to do this.

The club editor could simply E-mail the bulletin directly to club members. This won't work now, though, because, even if all club members were on E-mail, it simply takes too long to upload and download a bulletin filled with graphics, and people don't want their computers tied up for long periods. When I E-mail the Bulletin to President Linda Clavette to proofread, for example, I send it to her without the pictures. Still, it's a possibility for the future.

What I *do* see as a near reality is the second approach—the bulletin being posted on the club's web site so that members can read and/or print it out at their leisure (in color!). This would be even more efficient and easier than E-mailing it to everyone. Out of necessity, it seems to me, that it would have to be accessed by a password, with only current members having the password. Of course, you may be saying to yourself that all of this is just silly fantasizing—what about all of the members that don't have web access at all (and, right now, that's still most collectors)? Well, that's why it's a *near* reality. A few more years and a newer generation will have moved in, a generation that has grown up with computers and the Internet, and then the demographics will have changed in the opposite direction—only a few diehards will be off the web. So, how near is such a possibility? Well, Sierra-Diablo Matchcover Club started discussing it last December and is already working on putting up its monthly auctions on its web site.