

It's all about toys

By Lara Bradley
THE SUDBURY STAR

Who could have predicted that sappy Strawberry Shortcake, the yummy-jam-smelling doll, would have made a

back? And the Teenage Ninja Turtles?

may have thought you'd seen it of those pizza-loving, ninja d-out amphibians.

they're back and flying off elves, without the aid of stars or the cunning of the Pie Man.

, like clothes, seem to follow cycles. There are the stan-like the suit and the little dress. Then come the flashespan, such as leg warmers and noes.

aps the good news is no one s battled its way to the top of n to reign supreme over mas shoppers this year,

gh retro toys are finding a n many a parent's heart.

r all, it's much easier to buy nunchkin the toys you played s a child.

e settled on a list, it's best to ed with as much information sible about your toy picks.

alls, crammed with shoppers ng carts and strollers, aren't ve to making major deci-

er reading the fine print on ck of toy packages.

ears, Rolanda Debassige tried pper which Hot Wheels cars with the latest track.

daughter wants Strawberry ke's Big House and my son, eels," she explained

Hot Wheels

Wheels are perennial ites for kids, said staff mem-nice Tremblay. For the under-

t, shoppers always seem to settle on the Little Tykes elcore products, which fea-

rm or garage-type scenarios ed with chubby figurines.

t's new on the block? Well, for s, moms, dads and grandpa-

re snapping up the Four-in-ppy Rocky Rider, she said. is having trouble keeping that

stock.

manifestations of Dora the er are doing well as presents h boys and girls, Tremblay

Caillou has also pulled up his this year, with lots of new figures and big dolls. Both are

on popular cartoon characters. ents looking for educational re gravitating towards the

Pad technology, geared to help en learn how to read.

"Christmas shopping started earlier this year," Tremblay noted. "It started closer to mid-October."

At Wal-Mart, Nicole Dubois, the toy department manager, pulled several Crawl and Slide Arcade (\$49.94) boxes off the top shelves, placing them on lower ones. She's constantly restocking the toy made for mobile infants. A grandmother, trolling the aisle, snatched one up immediately.

In terms of tiny trendy toys — the kind that always seem to find their way to the schoolyard — it's the Mighty Beans that are going like magic ones. The beans are the size of extra-large multivitamins. One package features beans that look like Marvel superheroes.

"Kids race with them, down stairs," Dubois explained. "There's a weight at the bottom of them."

In the action figure aisles, it's the Incredible Hulk and the Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles who are leaving their hooks quickly.

"There's the Strawberry Shortcake dolls and My Little Pony. Polly Pocket's still big," Dubois said.

"The Dora dolls — we can't order them anymore."

Across from the New Sudbury Centre, Top Notch Toys is also doing brisk business.

"We're a specialty toy store," said owner Dean Aelick. "Things that are on TV, you're not going to find here."

Often a customer will suggest he order an item. That's how Aelick found out about Eskimold (\$24.99). Pack the mold with snow and you're on your way to piecing together an Igloo. It also comes with a snow scraper to trim the interlocking snow bricks.

"It's really cool," he said. "It's

been featured in Better Homes and Gardens."

From low-tech snow toys to the latest high-tech device, Aelick's store had a wide variety.

"The other big thing is the Plasma Car," he said.

The Plasma Car (\$99) was rated among the top toys of this year by Today's Parent. It's not foot-driven nor battery-operated. The car gains speed from the driver turning the steering wheel back and forth. Sturdily built, it can take up to 250 pounds.

Thomas

Thomas the Tank Engine paraphernalia is one brand that just keeps chugging every year. The trains, tracks and other items fill an entire wall of the store.

"We don't even have to advertise the Thomas products," Aelick said.

Groovy Girls and their groovy accessories have been going strong for about four years. This year, the company came out with a Cabanarama line as well as new pets, including Smitten Kittens.

Older folk are picking up many of Aelick's retro toys, including the original Slinky Dog (\$19). And a popular building set of days gone past is back in a slightly modified form.

"Remember how you used to cut your finger screwing in those Meccano Toys?" Aelick asked.

Well, now the company has rounded the edges and included allen keys. There's also chunkier plastic Meccano for younger kids.

"It's really hard to know what to buy them," said grandmother Annette Rieux, holding a miniature air hockey table. "My grandson wants a telescope, but I don't know. He's only eight."



SAFETY FIRST

Don't forget safety when you're shopping for toys. Here are some tips from SafeChild.net:

■ **Check age labels.** Just because your child enjoys, understands or can play with a toy doesn't mean it's safe for him or her. Age labels are safety, not developmental, ratings.

■ **Beware of choking.** Rattles, balls, blocks and other small parts should be at least 4.5 cm in diameter. If the item can fit inside a toilet paper roll, it's too small.

■ **Examine the toy.** Look for sturdy construction, such as tightly secured eyes and noses and well-sewn seams on stuffed animals and dolls. Avoid toys with sharp edges and points.

■ **Avoid known hazards.** Discard plastic wrappings on toys immediately. And never let your child play with uninflated balloons or balloon parts.

■ **Check for recalls.** Log on to SafeChild.net to check the status of toys your child has, and then check back regularly for updates.

Some toys are a little different

Nafekh Technologies Inc. has created the Canadian Legends line of toys. It launched its Sir John A. Macdonald doll at a Liberal leadership convention in Toronto in November, despite the fact Canada's first prime minister was a Tory.

Next up is Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The 15-cm Sir John A. figurine comes with a colourful booklet telling the story of Canada's first prime minister and antique-looking accessories, such as an end table, books and tiny 19th-century reading glasses. The company has received suggestions that he should bear a wine glass as well (Sir John A. was known to tip back a few in his time).

MissDela, a baby doll named for former president Nelson Mandela, is a hit in South Africa this Christmas. The doll is a dream come true for a white South African woman who years ago wanted to create an African doll to replace the Caucasian-featured black and brown toys then available in stores.

"I wanted a truly African doll," said Judith Oosthuizen. The 41-cm dolls are retailing for R100 (15 cents each).

Israeli customs officials have confiscated a cargo of 450 singing, dancing Osama Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein dolls. The battery-powered figurines — 400 Osamas and 50 Saddams — were discovered