

Bionic Man loses title

Armstrong leads in toy race

By LYNN ORR

Stretch Armstrong is the front runner, but Lionel Power Passers are closing the gap while Cher has lost steam compared to the wire.

Last year's winner, the Bionic Man, lacks the oomph for a repeat performance and the expected favorite, Kenner's Star Trek, is still in the shadows. The annual race will be the hottest selling Christmas toy, and while the winner will be determined until Dec. 25, early returns indicate Stretch may pull off the big win.

The picture may change in the next couple of weeks, said Bob Jones, toy buyer at Murray's Toy Hardware in Plymouth Rd. All of a sudden a couple of items will be very hot and I won't be able to get them.

Toy buying is obviously an unpredictable business, but television hits and advertising can heavily influence Christmas toys. Santa and we all know Santa has to come through with the big toys. Filling Christmas wishes can be a feat for both the parents and the toy buyer of department stores.

LAST YEAR, stores could get enough Bionic gear to fill those Christmas stockings and a lot of elves got the blame for the absence of the Steve Austin doll under the tree. The store even had a sign: We don't have Bionic anything—aprimarily displayed in the toy department to discourage needless requests for information. Parents wanting the number one item on Santa's list.

The toy manufacturer looks at advertising programs, but they also look at their Christmas sales. Jones explained. The ad may be running every Saturday morning, during commercials, but the stores are not able to get the items especially immediately before Christmas because of the seven-day delivery lag.

The Cher doll was a big item in October, but the manufacturer pulled the television advertisement and demand dropped accordingly, said Jones. This year Jones is noticing relatively balanced sales so far with only two or three items in great demand.

If you need the Lionel Power Passers you'd better get it quick, advised Hal Graham, Kenner's area supervisor for toys and sporting goods.

But even with the boom business, the first entries are doing in the race for 1976. In fact, both Jones and Graham are seeing a solid market share.

GI Joe's always a good seller, as well as preschool dolls and accessories, he said.

PEOPLE SEEM to be getting back to the staple games like Monopoly, Life and Battleship, said Jones. Then Bionics, G.I. Joe, the Jaws game and Mousetrap are other good sellers at Murray's in Bedford despite numerous articles extolling the virtues of educational toys, the extra expense seems to prevent large sales in this area.

Science kits and chemistry sets have gone down in sales, declared Jones. Craft items like marbles, sand art and crystal sets, however, are good sellers this year. There's a lot of play hours in these types of items, said Jones. Although dolls have always been big sellers, the introduction of small dolls resembling television figures, like Star Trek Space 1999 and Star Wars and Dutch dolls have made an extensive hit in the market. The small dolls are called "dolls as small as the manufacturer have produced of movie stars. At one local store they seem to be selling well, but Jones doesn't see them as a big seller.

The people look at them but they don't buy them, he said. He didn't purchase a large volume anticipating the consumer reaction.

Sporting goods pull a lot of the Christmas market. This year is no exception so far, and the big sellers are the standbys, according to Graham. Ice skates, roller skates, air hockey games, rifles, bowling equipment and camping gear are maintaining a solid market share.

SLEEPING BAGS and down-filled parkas are other good sellers, said Graham. Skate boards are also selling well despite the weather.

Television sports games, although an expensive item, are doing exceptionally well, according to one local manager, along with pinball machines.

The next few weeks will determine the biggest sellers from Santa's workshop, and it looks as if parents better prepare to see a lot of child-injured youngsters attempting to mimic a stretchy, rubbery fellow who doesn't talk, walk, eat, drink, or have the advantage of being anatomically correct.



Carrying a big stick on the ice rink might be what Scott Davidson has in mind as he eyes the latest in hockey gear.

Rail ends hazard near Tuck Road

By HOWARD RONTAL

So many cars piled into the guard rail where eastbound Grand River meets westbound Grand River in front of Roger's Ice Chevrolet last April and May that the salesman used to make bets on whether another car would crash overnight.

Eight cars hit the guard rail in that two month period, 25 cars from Jan. 1973 to the present time.

The wheels of city, state, and county but, however, were set in motion last July and what seems to be the solution almost has been completely carried out.

Two large signs erected last August tell motorists that eastbound Grand River veers to the right and splits away from westbound Grand River in front of the Glandigens restaurant.

The signs are necessary because a two lane spur, a remnant of the time when east and west bound Grand River ran adjacent to each other, gives business down to the Grand River Drive-In, east bound access.

A series of three groups of signs on the spur itself, east of Tuck Road, warn motorists to slow down and anticipate the spur's end.

When the Michigan State Highway Dept. clears away the paper work, the dead end sign will get a wreath of flashing lights which will dramatize the warning.

Grand River from Middlebelt to Eight Mile is the second most accident-prone road in Farmington Hills, according to the Traffic Improvement Association computer print-out. The lack of adequate signing on the spur and leading to it contributed significantly to the area's high accident rate.

MOST OF THE 25 accidents on the spur occurred at night, many around 2 a.m. Eleven drivers had been drinking.

Few Farmington area residents were involved in the accidents. The drivers were from places like Novi, Walled Lake, Detroit, and Aurora, Ohio. They claimed in police reports to be unfamiliar with the area.

"Watching signs and went into the guard rail," said one police report. "Did not see stop sign or realize road ended," read another. "Unfamiliar with surroundings and couldn't stop because of rain," read a third.

"Why people are all of a sudden running off the road, I don't have any idea," said Paul Riley, district traffic engineer for the Southfield office of the state highway department in reference to the spate of eight accidents last spring.

Riley believes that a change in highway sign regulations may have precipitated the accident increases at the guard rail which began early in 1973. There were no accidents of this kind in all of 1974.

Prior to 1975, a large arrow stood at the end of the eastbound Grand River spur. The arrow was mounted on a wooden lattice background and pointed toward the road's outlet into westbound Grand River.

"The lattice was taken down because a change in the national (traffic sign) manual said we couldn't place supplemental background for our signing," said Riley.

WITH THE INCREASE in accidents in 1975, the department authorized installation of an oversized, yellow reflectorized arrow sign in place of the old, smaller arrow sign. The work did little good, however, as cars continued to pile up into the guard rail which stood directly in front of the sign.

"We hadn't had problems there before the lattice was removed," said Riley.

The eastbound Grand River spur is now marked by a succession of small signs on each side of the road. The first pair of signs reads, "Dead End." The second, "Stop Ahead," and the third pair show arrows curved sharply to the left. There are stop signs where the street crosses into westbound Grand River.

The most expensive signs were put up as far as a half a mile west of the high accident area to move cars direct into the main part of eastbound Grand River and reduce unnecessary traffic on the spur.



Santa Claus is at Livonia Mall

Santa is at your mall from 10-8:30 daily and 11-6 Sundays. Santa will visit with the children in the Story Book in front of Crowley's.

Instant photos are available.

Story Queen Marion Tournaud tells the children stories daily from 3:00-4:00, near Santa's Story Book

Livonia Mall is your mall.
LIVONIA MALL
7 Mile at Middlebelt
Christmas Hours: Daily 'til 9:30 - Sunday 11-6



Belinda Kruger can barely get her arms around this lovable lion, but he'd certainly fit under the Christmas tree. (Staff photos by Art Emanuel)



While it looks unsightly, this forest of signs is necessary if local highway departments are going to keep cars from skidding into the guard rail at the intersection of eastbound Grand River and westbound Grand River. The "Dead End" sign will eventually get a ring of flashing lights.

Consumer carelessness hikes next year's prices

Copied with a system of shoppers and keeping the floor clean despite snow and mud tracked in by customers are only two of the additional problems faced by stores during the holiday season.

A major problem for many stores is the fight against consumer vandalism—the opening and damaging of packages before purchase.

It's individuals who people do to the merchandise, said one local department store manager. This is the worst

year yet. The adults tear the packages open and let the kids play with things.

When packages are opened and left on the shelves the store has to try and put things together, or if damaged, sell it at discount or throw it away.

I think some people intentionally tear things up looking for the after-Christmas sales, the manager explained.

His store has hired a holiday employee simply to work a telephone machine, rewrapping ripped packages that aren't missing anything.

If these people would quit destroying things, I can guarantee you the merchandise would be cheaper next year, the manager maintained.

Another local shop spokesman said a store doesn't experience the problem, but he has plenty of extra help to keep an eye on the customers for two reasons.

We try to help the customers find what they want, so the kids don't get bored and the customer is satisfied, he said.

CB thief strikes OCC parking lot

A CB radio valued at \$120 was taken from a red 1976 Ford Pinto owned by John Tolbert, 14, of West Bloomfield, while it was parked at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus.