



Plush gifts come bearing love

THERE YOU are, wandering among seemingly endless shelves of high-tech toys, trying to decide what Christmas gifts to buy your 5-year-old son.

Did he say he wants that gizmo that lets him pretend he's blowing up a major metropolitan area? Or was it one of those adolescent turtles with martial art skills?

You sigh, until you spot a Raggedy Ann doll on a distant shelf.

Ambling over to the stuffed animal and doll section like a refugee, you take comfort in the warm, fuzzy memories that wash over you as you pick up Raggedy Ann. When you see hundreds of the world's most adorable plastic eyes looking at you, you are inspired: Why not a stuffed toy or doll for the boy?

In spite of what youngsters dazzled by high tech will tell you to the contrary, stuffed critters and dolls are still highly popular gifts among children.

And they're not just fun and lovable. According to Parents magazine, toys such as teddy bears and dolls help a child grow because they offer children "a license for fantasy play beyond the room, the block, even the neighborhood — children practice with their dolls many of the arts and skills of living."

While there are perennial favorites that never seem to go out of style — your basic teddy bear, Barbie, Raggedy Ann and Andy and so on — each year seems to bring a wave of new versions of old classics and totally new characters. And the public absolutely loves them.

IN THE EARLY PART of this century, President Teddy Roosevelt trapped a female bear but refused to shoot it and orphan the cub. The press went crazy over the story, and next thing you know there were stuffed "Teddy bears" selling like hotcakes.

That basic little bear has gone through some changes over the years and has, in fact, spawned an ever-changing zoo of stuffed animals that walk, talk, flip — or just sit there with smiles that could melt a heart of stone.

These plush critters range in size from just right for Christmas stockings to, well, huge. There are pandas and polar bears, grizzlies and sun bears, and some even come in a tantalizing variety of personas.

For example, some of the more popular stuffed bears in recent years have come from the North American Bear Co., whose whimsical collection of characters such as Bearly Temple, Bearilyn Monroe, Rembeardt and Albeart Einstein has kept adults and children alike mixing chuckles with their cuddles.

Another maker of popular stuffed toys, Dakin, doesn't stop at bears. The Dakin lineup includes plenty of other cuddly critters, some of them from favorite comic strips such as "Bloom County" and "Garfield." The "Garfield Stuck-on-You" stuffed animal, which sticks to windows, is popping up everywhere.

Check out the new Goro Gorilla, which comes in three sizes and two colors, and other stuck-on-you characters.

Other stuffed stuff sure to please the little ones are ever-popular dinosaurs, TV characters such as ALF and Pee-wee Herman and that lovable, loony Roger Rabbit.

Or, if you want something really different, give the kids "Once Upon a Pillow." These clever items are comfortable sleep pillows that open up into fully illustrated, six-page, soft storybooks.

The cloth pages are printed with full-color illustrations with big, easy-to-read storybook type. Also from this company are "Pillow People" and "Moody Babies," respectively adult and baby pillow-type figures that make slumber squeezeably fun.

STILL STANDING THERE hugging Raggedy Ann? Guess what? She's 70 years old! She and her brother bounced into American family tradition from a 1918 storybook. Illustrator Johnny Gruelle created Raggedy Andy from an old rag doll, adding red yarn hair and bright shoe-button eyes. Raggedy Andy was America's first boy's doll.

To celebrate Raggedy Ann's "birthday," new storybooks have been released from Random House. There are also Raggedy Ann and Andy jigsaw puzzles by Milton Bradley, Flambro figurines, Parco cookies, nightshirts, greeting cards and more.

The constant popularity of Raggedy Ann and Andy, say many retailers, is typical of the traditional doll's enduring quality. Traditionally dolls like the Raggedy siblings are becoming popular.

So are collectible cuties in costumes from other countries.

Top-selling dolls at F.A.O. Schwarz include storybook characters from Madame Alexander and the French-made beauties by Kroll. Dolls by Gotz are tops, so are the lifelike models by Himstedt, which are sculpted from photos of real children.

Some kids, however, prefer high tech and gadgets to tradition. These youngsters will probably want the dolls they see on Saturday morning television, an array of dolls that ranges from Barbie to her arch-rival, Maxi.

Mattel's Talking Baby Heather, who actually "grows" from a 6-month-old-baby to a toddler is another favorite.



Quality coloring books, records, calendars and storybooks fire a child's imagination all year-round. Stuff them in a stocking or wrap them up for under the tree.

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