



A Christmas present from Canada Post...the new 29-cent special discount stamp issued for the holiday season is now on sale. The stamps are to be used

on specialty coded envelopes available in stores now. The stamps for the 1986 Christmas season were launched in Toronto and postal employee Billy Woods helped out as Santa.

Choosing good toys isn't child's play

Choosing good toys is far from child's play, say consumer experts.

The wind-up, ride-on, assembly-required world of toys that so delights children, often confounds their parents with the sheer number of products available.

"Some stores offer acres of toys from which to choose," says Pat Weldon of the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations (MCCR). "But it is possible to pick out the best playthings by comparing a few important factors and doing a bit of research before buying."

One popular source of information, The Toy Report, will be released in October as part of national Consumer Week. Produced annually by the Canadian Toy Testing Council, the report rates more than 1,400 playthings. The 1987 edition is being published with the help of the Consumers' Association of Canada (CAC) and will be available on newsstands across the country.

Each toy featured is assessed in terms of safety, play value and durability, says Julie Creighton, an executive on the council. The new report also includes a "best bet" list and other hints for toy-hunters.

To get the most from The Toy Report and similar studies, consumers should use the information they provide as a reference when comparison shopping. Don't pick a toy based solely on a good rating. Be sure the product is suitable for your child, Ms. Weldon.

Children often ask for particular toys just because they are connected with popular television programs. Ms. Creighton explains. Based on a character's animated exploits, children's expectations of a toy can be unrealistic. For example, plastic figures may not even be bendable or a cuddly-looking creature could turn out to be heavy or unappealing to the touch.

"We think parents should talk a lot more with the child," she says. "Don't be negative about the toy in question, but try to find out if the child's expectations are going to be fulfilled. Often, the best thing is to go into the toy store and ask to see the toy out of its box."

Visits to a few toy stores can settle many concerns and questions for child and parent alike. Plan to make the trip well in advance of Christmas - before hopes and dreams have settled on particular products. Look at all the toys available, inspecting likely purchases carefully for safety, ease of use and durability - this is where ratings can help. Is the item appropriate for the age and abilities of the child? Is it intended to be an actual plaything or is its purpose purely decorative? Sales staff may be able to answer questions or offer advice about particular products.



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