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Toys!

What Every Kiddy Understands . . .

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NEW YORK — (NEA) — Can it be that the kiddies don't really understand the national purpose?

A survey of the U.S. toy industry leaders, now in production for the Christmas rush, reveals that our kids couldn't care less about space travel, orbits, capsule or man on the moon.

What they want this year, of all things, are:

Automation — labor-saving toys that take the drudgery out of play.

And war equipment — but none of your nuclear nonsense. Just simple, old-fashioned, reassuring rifles, hand grenades, cannon and machine guns.

Of all the consumer product industries in this country, the toy business is probably the most sensitive to what its market wants. Most of the \$1 billion worth of toys sold annually in the U. S. are purchased on direct request by the children.

And so, after three years of gaily packaged, fun-filled space stations, launching pads and astronaut garb the toy people have had to concede a qualified defeat.

There are, of course, still plenty of space science kits and build-yourself models with a distinct moonglow about them.

"But," points out a production engineer for one of the largest toy companies, "generally speaking most of these packages are for the older kid who has just finished playing with toys and has not yet started playing with girls."

What the younger children want instead, to judge by the

floor models in toy showrooms, is a familiar animal like a dinosaur, baby or dog that does something — anything — all by itself.

One company, for example, is increasing its line of items like its frogs that catch a ball and throw it back, prehistoric monsters who fight back, walk-along dogs who can climb stairs.

No toy firm this year dares show up without a battery-operated, motor-driven array of playthings. Of the items selected by the Toy Guidance Council as meeting the criteria of good, educational, healthful, safe toy this year, 35 per cent are battery-run and another 10 per cent are mechanized.

Expected to make a big showing this Christmas, for example, are an electric can opener (you can put the can together again); a doll that laughs when you tickle it; a whole line of toy power tools; a digital computer; a sports car that runs on a solar beam; an electronic gun that shoots a light at an electric eye.

Part of the reason, according to the Toy Guidance people, is kids' natural attraction to movement.

The rest of the reason, according to one engineer at the Ideal Toy Co., is the development by the Japanese of a miniature electric motor that sells for about 25 cents, opening the way for an inexpensive breakthrough into automated childhood.

This trend has had its effect on the archetype of the mechanized toy — the model electric train which, unchanged by time, has continued to run on the same track through the same grade crossings, stations and freight loading platforms.

"The kids want the train to do more," says a spokesman for the A. C. Gilbert Co. "So we've had to design a whole set of games that can be played with the trains—buffalo hunts, freight forwarding, etc."