

Beyblades and Flair take top honours

BANDAI, FLAIR, HASBRO, HORNBY, LEAPFROG, MOOKIE, RE:CREATION, UPSTARTS! AND VIVID all won awards on the toy industry's big night – with Beyblades crowned Toy Of The Year for the second year running. The US giant Hasbro took the biggest prize of all after notching up 11 consecutive months as the top selling toy last year, from December 2002 to October 2003.

But it was also a particularly good year for British-based toy firms, with two category wins for Vivid Imaginations, plus victories for Hornby, Upstarts!, Mookie and Re:Creation – with Cheam-based Flair Leisure Products being crowned Company of the Year. Bandai of Japan also picked up two prizes, whilst US manufacturer LeapFrog – which has revolutionised the electronic learning sector – won Pre-School Toy of the Year for the third year running.

Toy of the Year: Beyblades (Hasbro)

Best selling toy from December 2002 to October 2003, the Basic Beyblade Assortment has been equal to Furby in its astonishing longevity and success.

But it is not going to stop just now. After the new launchers, Hasbro is getting ready for V Force – new magnetic Beyblades. And there's plenty more too.

With over £37m of sales at retail in the UK to the end of November (source: NPD EPoS – Total year 2003), the property has been going from strength to strength as new high tech products come onto the market.

And the Beyblades phenomenon certainly looks set to spin on throughout 2004.

The Winners

Toy of the Year: Beyblades (Hasbro)

Company of the Year: Flair

Collectable Toy of the Year Lord of the Rings Vivid

Innovative Toy of the Year Live Steam Train Hornby

Craze of the Year Yu-Gi-Oh Upstarts!

Outdoor Toy of the Year Swingball Mookie

Electronic Game of the Year Bop It Extreme Hasbro

Pre-School Toy of the Year LeapPad LeapFrog

Creative Toy of the Year Badge It Bandai

Boys Toy of the Year Turtles Vivid

Girls Toy of the Year Bratz Bandai

Board Game of the Year Cranium Re:Creation

Kids' Favourite Toy Shop

National Winner: Hamleys

Regional Winners:

Wales

Winner: Toys R Us Cardiff

Runner-up: The Entertainer Cardiff

Runner-up: Toyzone Bridgend

South West

Winner: Marcello's Toymaster Poole

Runner-up: Toyzone Portsmouth

Runner-up: Just For Kidz Southampton

South East

Winner: Hamleys Fouberts Place

Runner-up: Toys R Us Old Kent Road

Runner-up: Papillon Whitton

North

Winner: Lambs Toy Shop Darlington

Runner-up: Toys R Us Manchester

Runner-up: Toymaster (Greens) Harrogate

Midlands

Winner: Arbon & Watts Melton Mowbray

Runner-up: Dominoes Leicester

Runner-up: Toys R Us Nottingham

East Anglia

Winner: Moons Toymaster Newmarket

Runner-up: Roys of Wroxham Wroxham

Runner-up: Toymaster Kingdom Colchester

COMMENTARY

BOARD GAME OF THE YEAR: CRANIUM (RE:CREATION)

First launched in the US, Cranium won the Toy of the Year Award there a year ago. The game is now on sale in many European countries and has had a great start in the UK. It has taken top spot in the Adult Board Game category in 2003 with sales in excess of £1.2m (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking – Total Year 2003) thanks to a storming December. The game concept is clearly innovative, unpredictable and fun: Are you still using only 10 percent of your brain? Cranium could challenge you as well, if you dare.

GIRLS TOY OF THE YEAR: BRATZ (BANDAI)

From Spain to France, from the UK to the US, the Bratz have taken the girls market by storm – the funky range of Fashion Dolls followed by Mini Dolls, styling heads and more. It's a true toy brand becoming a lifestyle licence. Bratz are well set to stay top of mind for a few years. With over £22m worth of sales since its UK launch, (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking up to December 2003) Bratz are now the fifth biggest toy property.

PRE-SCHOOL TOY OF THE YEAR: LEAPPAD (LEAPFROG)

In less than four years, LeapFrog has become one of the Top 15 toy companies in the UK. Number two in 2002, only beaten by the Beyblades Basic Assortment, the LeapPad also ranked second best-selling toy in revenue for 2003, with over £9.3m worth of sales for the year. With all the books sold on the back of it, success is guaranteed for many more years to come. And watch out for the LittleTouch and Leapster brand extensions this year.

CREATIVE TOY OF THE YEAR:

BADGE IT! (BANDAI)

Unique in its genre and on the fringe of fashion, Badge It! is a really good idea which captivated little boys and girls to become the best selling creative toy of 2003.

Since its official launch at Toy Fair 2003, it has been responsible for retail sales of more than £2.2m (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking – Total Year), which is at least twice as much as its nearest competitor.

Additional sales come from the refill pack.

Even better news for Bandai is that NPD data shows that - up to November - one in five Badge It! units had generated a refill sale.

BOYS TOY OF THE YEAR:

TURTLES (VIVID)

On top of Lord of the Rings, Spiderman and Hulk, Vivid Imaginations had an amazing year within Action Figures in 2003.

The Ninja Turtles returned after a long absence and kids again fell in love with Donatello and his friends – backed by broadcasting on terrestrial and satellite TV.

Fighting for the top spot with Action Man and Power Rangers, Turtles would only be beaten at the end of the year by stock shortages.

It is raining awards on Vivid these days, and the company's hopes for Turtles in 2004 are even bigger - with huge TV commitment throughout 2004 for the brand.

COMPANY OF THE YEAR: FLAIR

In less than five years, Flair has become one of the biggest manufacturers in the UK.

This has been achieved thanks to a good team and a rigorous choice of classic brands with strong consumer values.

Flair increased its sales by over 18% in 2003 (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking Service – Total Year 2003) and was the only toy firm to rank in the Sunday Times Fast Track 100 list of the fastest growing unquoted companies.

Play Doh and Sylvania Families were extremely successful in 2003, along with Angelina Ballerina.

2004 promises more development as Flair has signed an agreement to distribute the Funtastic range in the UK (Funtastic being the market leader in Australia).

COLLECTABLE TOY OF THE YEAR: LORD OF THE RINGS (VIVID)

Appealing to teenagers and adults alike, the third LOTR movie tie-in took over 6% of the Action Figure sector in 2003 – more than doubling its sales from the previous year.

In a market that is quite depressed, this is highly commendable and confirms the potential of the UK collector market.

INNOVATIVE TOY OF THE YEAR: LIVE STEAM (HORNBY)

When Hornby launched the first ever 'OO' Gauge Live Steam, the Mallard sets were immediately sold out.

For £500 you got the real thing with heater, pumping pistons and whistles - running for 20 minutes with only one filling of water. And again it proves that there is a good market for the adult and the collector.

OUTDOOR TOY OF THE YEAR:

SWINGBALL (MOOKIE)

Hundreds of thousands of kids were told to 'Get The Real One' in Mookie's excellent advertising – and Swingball duly grew from strength to strength last year.

The brand was extended, including Junior version, soccer version and licensed versions. Mookie increased in the Outdoor category by a staggering 45% in 2003.

But what's even more amazing is that the Original Swingball more than doubled, with over 130,000 units sold, while remaining the best-selling Outdoor toy every single month from April to August (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking – to November 2003).

ELECTRONIC GAME OF THE

YEAR: BOP IT EXTREME

(HASBRO)

The new improved version of Bop It Extreme gave sales a twist and a push in 2003 with an increase of 75% versus 2002, with over £4.3m worth of sales (source: NPD EPoS Retail Tracking – Total Year 2003).

The best-selling game for the year and ranking in the Top 10 Total Toys in retail revenue, Bop it Extreme is a fun game you can now play against your friend, head-to-head. Hasbro has managed to spin the concept, modernising it to create an all time favourite.

CRAZE OF THE YEAR: YU-GI-OH

(UPSTARTS!)

Yu Gi Oh was an international success in 2003 and Upstarts! did a great job selling the trading cards. With sales worth more than £13m, their success confirmed the ever-green appeal of Manga properties.

For more information about NPD's toy market research services,
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