

# 1960s



At the end of the 1960s Britain's toy exports were doing well, but the time had come for manufacturers to face issues that had largely been sidelined in the hope that things would return to the way they were before the war. Safety concerns were being addressed and by 1961 the British Standards Institute issued new safety regulations. To the dismay of some manufacturers, stringent guidelines were laid down including restrictions on celluloid, no sharp edges, no toxic dyes, secure fastenings in soft toys and detachable keys for wind-up toys. Further levels of control on celluloid and lead in paint were introduced by the government in 1966. Most toys would now be made principally from plastics.

Another debate that was going on at this time concerned the need for a more professional approach to the question of toy design. In a paper delivered to the Royal Society of Arts in November 1967, Edward Newmark, Director of James Galt and Co. Ltd., argued that the toy industry's knowledge of the work done by child psychologists on the importance of toys as educational aids had given the toy industry a social responsibility which it was only just starting to understand. Speaking about the thriving state of the toy industry in Britain at the time, he went on to say: 'Parallel to this growth has been an immense and radical change in ideas about toys, none of which has come from within the toy trade itself.'



again, an opportunity to establish a world-wide reputation for making properly thought out, professionally designed, beautiful modern toys that fulfil their true function of satisfying the play needs of children’.

Galt toys were designed on Modernist lines: simple, uncluttered and functional. Amongst them was an open-sided dolls’ house designed in such a way that it was possible for group play, making it ideal for schools and nurseries.

The house, designed by Roger Limbrick, won an Observer Design award in 1969. In the accompanying article, *Living with Design*, Sally Thompson states that The



Observer’s award was important because it was given to manufacturers with a history of consistently good quality, progressive toy design and not just for one item. An early flat pack, all the pieces had to be fitted together before the house could be used. It could also be packed and put away easily. This design is still being made by Galt today and other firms have also made houses based on similar principles.

The National Association of Toy Retailers launched the Toy of the Year Awards in 1965, with the first award going to

I refer, of course, to the work of psychologists and teachers over the past fifty years’. He discussed the importance of Froebel, Montessori and the rational educational theories of Richard and Maria Edgeworth, together with the work done by psychologists in the 1920s and 1930s with regard to toy design.

Newmark stressed that out of the movement’s research came ‘the knowledge which should have had an enormous and immediate impact on the toy trade, that toys are highly important tools for the development of children. But it had no such effect at all. The toy trade in general, with one or two honourable exceptions, completely ignored these new discoveries, and to a considerable extent still does so today’. He pointed out that toys were largely designed by people within the companies who were not necessarily the best equipped for the job, given the importance of design. He concluded by stating that ‘the combination of circumstances which has arisen today offers the British toy industry an opportunity which is unlikely to occur

**Pictures opposite page top to bottom**

- Hot Wheels cars made by Mattel, 1970s
- James Bond Aston Martin car made by Corgi, 1965
- Spirograph drawing kit made in France by Denys Fisher Toys Ltd., about 1963
- Batmobile made in Hong Kong by Mego Corp., 1974

**Above**

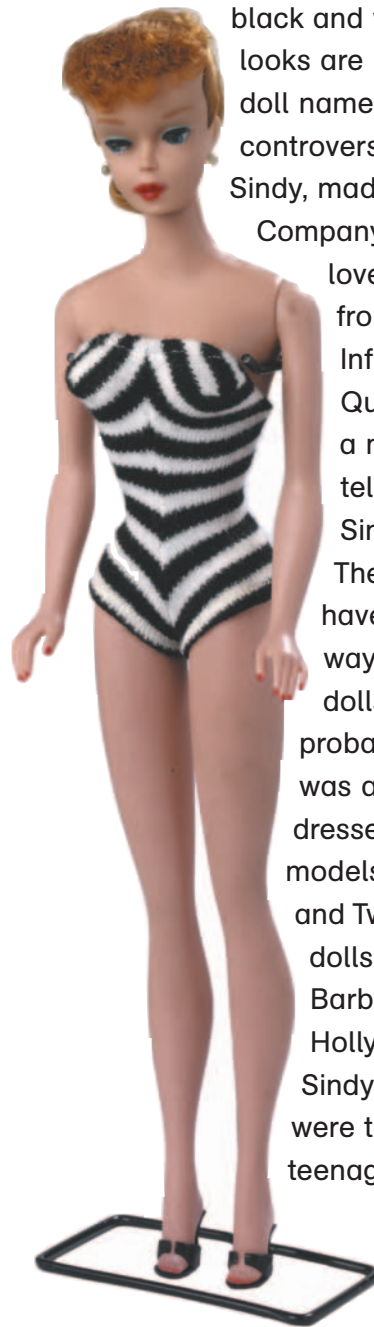
Etch-a-Sketch made in the US by the Ohio Art Company, 1960



Mettoy's James Bond Aston Martin car. Subsequent awards went to Action Man, Spirograph, Sindy and the Hot Wheels cars of which 16 different models were produced in 1968. This awards system was to prove a useful guide to assessing trends in toy popularity and continues to do so to the present day.

Two of the century's most iconic dolls first appeared in or just before the 1960s. The Barbie doll was first, launched by Mattel

in 1959 at the New York toy fair wearing a black and white striped bathing suit. Her looks are based on an earlier German doll named Lilli, a look that has proved controversial. The British version was Sindy, made in 1963 by the Pedigree Doll Company and marketed as 'the doll you love to dress', she took her look from the fashion world around her. Influenced by the style of Mary Quant and the Beatles, Sindy was a modern girl, starring in her own television commercial. Barbie and Sindy took the toyshops by storm. The teenage fashion doll could not have been more different in every way from the sturdy, if loveable, dolls of the 1950s and it was probably no coincidence that this was also the era of Mary Quant mini dresses modelled by super thin models Jean Shrimpton (early 1960s) and Twiggy (late 1960s). Fashion dolls have come and gone, but Barbie with her glamorous Hollywood film star looks and Sindy's 'English rose' type of beauty were the pioneers of the modern teenage doll.



The 1960s was also a good time for quirky new designs, with novel games and toys, such as Twister, Magic Roundabout, Etch-a-Sketch, the Trolls, the Gonks and Airfix's Betta Bilda attracting interest. Spirograph, an educational drawing toy, was designed by Denys Fisher, a British electronics engineer who invented it whilst researching a new design for bomb detonators for NATO. The aim of the toy, launched in England in 1965 and in 1967 in the US, was to encourage creativity in children.

A major marketing opportunity for the toy industry came about as a result of the wealth of science fiction features on television and in the cinema. The created worlds of superheroes and spies were fuelled partly by the exploits of celluloid and comic book heroes and also by the real and sensational achievements of the American and Russian space explorations that were taking place at the time.

A Russian cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, was the first man in space in 1961, followed by the first space walk in 1965, also by a Russian. Finally in 1969, the first Moon landing happened successfully with the Americans Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin being the first men to walk on the moon. One of the first toys inspired by space was Fireball XL5 in 1962. Dr Who first frightened the nation's children in 1963, (the longest running science fiction television show) whose deadly enemies were the Daleks. Stingray, Lost in Space and Batman followed in 1965. In 1966 came the unforgettable Thunderbirds, Star Trek and The Invaders. The Thunderbirds puppets were named after the first US astronauts in space - Scott, Virgil, Alan, Gordon and John. In 1967 Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons were launched and Joe 90 appeared in 1968. Thunderbirds eclipsed all its rivals and the variety of its sets and vehicles provided manufacturers with a wealth of marketing possibilities. There were Pelham puppets of the Tracy family, Dinky secured the die-cast rights to make the Thunderbirds, Lone Star made a rifle and a pistol and even a water pistol was available at most corner shops for a few pence. Dr Who and the Daleks also inspired the production of glove puppets and ray guns, tiny Dalek Rolykins and even a Dalek Oracle game. Palitoy made

a talking Dalek and Chad Valley a Give-A-Show projector for Daleks. Along with this huge invasion of extra-terrestrials came the added bonus of spy stories, double agents and the Cold War. The first four James Bond films were made between 1962 and 1965.

The 1960s was a time of change; television and cinema produced instant demand and the toy industry advertised and presented their products in attractive packages. The US, which already understood the mechanics of good marketing, was also playing a major part in the toy world. Globalisation had begun, but the difficulties that the toy industry was about to face in the next decade would prove a considerable challenge.



**Left**  
Barbie, made in the US by Mattel, 1960

**Above**  
Sindy, made in England by Pedigree, 1963