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Pop's Toys

FROM THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—Toy makers, ever aware of of pop's fascination with junior's Christmas presents, are making a bigger and more direct play for gray-templed customers.

Ideal Toy Corp. this Christmas has introduced a \$10 scale model kit of the liner S.S. United States and aimed at grown-up hobbyists. "It's a model any executive would be glad to have grace his desk," says Ben Michtom, Ideal president.

A. C. Gilbert Co., one of the nation's biggest toy makers, has revived its undersize but realistic "HO" gauge electric trains, the size most popular with adult model railroaders. For years, of course, fathers have been playing with less complex toy trains on Christmas night long after children have been banished to bed.

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Games doubtlessly reveal the greatest toy maker pitch to grown-ups. "We won't accept a game that doesn't have appeal to both adults and children," states L. W. Anderson, vice president of Selchow & Richter, the game manufacturer whose Scrabble is still the top-selling game. And the adult-slanted games are getting tougher; word games such as Scrabble demand considerably more mental maneuvering than the dice-determined backgammon that was a national game fad in the 1920s.

Adult toy buying has become so brisk that R. H. Macy, big New York department store, this year set up an adult game section entirely apart from the youngsters' toy department. Some typical offerings: Stock Market, a \$3.98 game claimed to be based on judgments required in buying and selling stocks; a \$6.98 photo-electric football game requiring armchair quarterbacking; battery-powered pin ball machines that light up when balls drop into scoring sections.

There's no way of telling how many of the more than \$1.2 billion toys that will be bought this year will be mainly grown-up entertainment. The Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A., a trade group, reports that items with considerable adult appeal—trains, games, some sporting goods and the like—represent a more than \$150 million retail sales volume. The great lure of adult buyers for toy makers is that grown-ups, once they're interested in a game or hobby, spend more on their pastime than any child.

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The model railroad field probably best illustrates the scope of adult buying of "toys." The three major toy train makers, Lionel Corp., Gilbert and Louis Marx, plus many smaller outfits, sell about \$65 million worth of trains annually. Larry Cowan, Lionel president, estimates that more than 36 million of this total represents sales to an adult buying primarily for his own pleasure.

The adult who wants a miniature train highbaling in his basement or spare bedroom usually shells out about \$75 for a beginning outfit—25 feet of track, an engine with three or four cars and a switch or transformer—says Mr. Cowan. Train makers figure that the confirmed model railroad spends another \$50 to \$75 a year for additional equipment.

Adult train fanciers seldom are satisfied with just toy trains. They want rolling stock that duplicates, in miniature, the engines, tenders, box cars and gondolas of operating railroads. That demand partly explains the recent upsurge of interest in the highly-detailed "Ho" equipment. In addition, retailers have been promoting such trains heavily because "HO" items so far haven't been subject to price cutting that hit Lionel and Gilbert trains made more expressly for children.

According to toy makers, some fairly obvious psychology prompts adults purchasing items labeled as "playthings."