

Great Christmas gifts

Yes – it's that time of year again. Time to worry about what to buy our nearest and dearest for Christmas. Bubble bath perhaps, or a flashing reindeer hat?

If you're looking to give something different, we've come up with presents, from balloon flights to magazine subscriptions.

On these two pages we look at presents for children. We checked lists and prices of predicted big sellers from Hamleys toy store and ToysRUs. The prices given are the best we found on the high street, unless otherwise stated. On p34 to p35 we look at gifts connected to hobbies, and on p36 to p37 we report on days out and charity gifts.

■ UP TO £20

Bilibo £15

2-7 years

This is a large plastic shell shaped like an overgrown fireman's helmet. The Bilibo had Which? staff flummoxed, but tiny tots seem to love running around with it on their heads, or climbing inside and rocking back and forward. Its rounded corners and tough construction means there's little chance of injury. Good for kids with an active imagination – though some Scrooges here wondered whether a cardboard box would be as good.



Stuck for what to buy your loved ones? Here we offer six pages of ideas for all ages from toddlers to great-uncle Tom

Tomy Cella Sticker Maker £15.99

5 years and over

This could be one for the budding young artist in your family. Turn the handle of the Cella Sticker Maker and out comes a homemade sticker. Your child can add their own pictures of friends, pets and family. Refills are a must (£5.99 each) as the cartridge supplied may not last beyond the Queen's speech. We found it was particularly good with pictures printed from a computer.



Moon Shoes

£19.99

7 years and over

Bouncing along on sandals attached to stilts may sound like a precarious thing to do. But these mini-trampolines promise hours of fun for hyperactive pre-teens. Sadly, they don't come ready assembled, so prepare for a few minutes of quiet swearing while you thread the rubber bands through the shoes.



■ UP TO £60

Zounds £29.97 online

4 years and over

If you're the proud parent of a child prodigy, then Zounds is the toy for you. You move the shapes around the picture board to create exciting rhythms and notes. This was a particular favourite in the Which? offices, which could mean it's suitable for adults, too – or that we need to grow up a bit.

BEST VALUE WINNER



Pixel Chix £30

2-6 years

Remember Tamagotchi, the virtual computer pet that needed constant attention? Pixel Chix is a similar idea. A pocket-sized screen shows a doll's house where a 'virtual girl' lives. You get



MEMBER BENEFIT

Christmas fun competition

Worth £900

Enjoy Christmas to the full with our great prize of Best Buys: a Panasonic DVD Recorder, a Samsung Digimax digital camera, and a case of Champagne. We are also giving away £175 worth of HMV vouchers and a Scalextric Lane Change Challenge Set. Turn to p78 for more details and full competition rules.

TO ENTER, SIMPLY ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

What feature of a digital camera will help you achieve a sharper picture in dim light?

(a)) Macro mode (b)) Image stabilisation (c)) PictBridge





to dress Pixel up and feed her in response to her annoying digital voice. There are five levels of play based on how well you look after her. Neglect her and she leaves home. If two children have sets, they can connect so the virtual girls meet.

Heelys from £59.99 5 years and over

If Moon Shoes sound alarming, how about trainers with wheels? On a smooth pavement, a skilled child can glide effortlessly. When playtime is over, you can remove the wheels.



£100 OR MORE Robosapien V2 £100 online 4 years and over

This two-foot walking and talking robot is the big brother of last year's Robosapien (which you can still buy for £50). Sci-fi-mad

children will love getting the Robosapien to respond to simple voice commands, recognise colours and track moving objects. Make sure you buy rechargeable batteries (D size) as it uses a lot of power. A Mini Robosapien V2 costs £12.99.



Scalextric Digital Ignition from £125

5 years and over

A childhood classic goes digital. For the first time, controllers are linked to a car, instead of a track lane. This means you can overtake each other in a changeover section. The oval track supplied with this version is disappointing, but the £165 version includes a figure-of-eight track which you can rearrange into



different layouts. That's great if you've room in the loft but a pain if it has to be dismantled after every race. The basic model has two cars but you can upgrade to six. Ordinary Scalextrics start at £50, but you can't change lanes.

Lego Mindstorms NXT £180

10 years and over

The price of this programmable robot could give you a mindstorm before you've got it out of the packaging. Like other Lego products, configuring the robot needs intricate assembly. This toy should keep the children busy into the new year.



Ideas for animal lovers, walkers
and those who love the arts

We all love the sight of big, expensive-looking presents tucked under the tree on Christmas Eve, but too often the gift loses its lure before new year. A year's membership of a group such as the National Trust or a subscription to a favourite magazine could give pleasure through to the next festive season.

A present that

A loved one's hobby could be the clue to a present they will treasure right through until next Christmas

On this page we look at some group memberships, while opposite we suggest some magazines you could go for if your friend is interested in football, wildlife or even the paranormal. Don't forget that Which? offers gift packages too, including membership deals covering computing, gardening or holidays (see November *Which?*, p65 for details).



Ramblers' Association £24

Waterproof jackets and rucksacks at the ready – here's a present ideal either for the outdoor type in your family or for someone who just wants to walk off the Christmas pud. The biggest walking association in Britain promotes walking and campaigns to improve public rights of way.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Quarterly magazine full of gear reviews and features, an annual handbook and details of local groups.

WORTH KNOWING Members get discounts at many outdoor stores. **CONTACT** 020 7339 8500/ www.ramblers.org.uk



National Trust/National Trust for Scotland £30.38/£27.75



The National Trust protects, among other things, country parks, gardens, and battle sites in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Free entry to more than 300 historic houses and gardens, a members' handbook which has details of all these places and a thrice-yearly magazine.

WORTH KNOWING Join the English group online via direct debit and you get a year's membership for the cost of nine months. At £30.38, this saves £10.12



KEY

Outdoor type



Animal lover



Culture vulture



History buff



on the usual £40.50 fee. Joining the Scottish group costs £37 but pay by direct debit and you save 25 per cent.

CONTACT 0870 458 4000

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/
www.nts.org.uk

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) £31

One of Britain's oldest wildlife protection societies, the RSPB also campaigns on issues such as airport expansion and climate change.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Quarterly magazine full of wildlife articles and photography, entry to more than 100 reserves and either a bird feeder or the RSPB handbook of British birds.

WORTH KNOWING The welcome pack is posted a few days before the start date you requested, so start membership by early/mid-December to receive it in time for the big day.

CONTACT 01767 680551/
www.rspb.org.uk



WWF £36

WWF, formerly the World Wildlife Fund, has expanded its remit from protecting wildlife to ensuring a safe future for 'people, species and their habitats' and addressing global threats

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Welcome pack and the latest newsletter.

WORTH KNOWING You can join on a monthly basis from £3 a month. Buy an adopt a tiger or orang-utan package from John Lewis and you also get a year's membership of WWF. **CONTACT** 01483 426444 or www.wwf.org.uk



English Heritage £38

It's one of the government's advisers on historic sites and helped fund the conservation of winning properties in the BBC series *Restoration*.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Quarterly magazine and half-price entry to its 400 attractions. **WORTH KNOWING** Life membership for a couple is £980. **CONTACT** 0870 333 1181 www.english-heritage.org.uk



Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) £36



To give or not to give? That is the question.

The RSC, based in Stratford-upon-Avon, regularly performs in London and Newcastle.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Ticket offers, priority booking, 10 per cent off in gift shops and restaurants.

WORTH KNOWING Free newsletter **CONTACT** 01789 403444/
www.rsc.org.uk



The Art Fund £40

The fund gives grants to UK museums and galleries to buy works and restore their collections.

MEMBERSHIP INCLUDES Free entry to 200 UK art collections, plus offers on art holidays and tours and free *Art Quarterly* magazine.

WORTH KNOWING Half-price entry to top exhibitions. **CONTACT** 0870 848 2003 www.artfund.org



OUR FAVOURITE

will last for a year

A year's good reading

Buy a friend a subscription to their favourite magazine and every time it drops through the door they'll (hopefully) think of you

Know someone who's interested in football, wildlife or the paranormal? A magazine that caters for their interest could be an ideal gift.

We compared the cost of buying single issues with taking out an annual subscription – either through the magazine itself or a subscription service such as WH Smith or Magazine Group. We found that annual subscriptions save up to 40 per cent on the cover price. The biggest saving was for *The Economist*, where subscribing saves £94.50 on single issues. It varies between magazines whether it's cheaper to buy direct or via a subscription service. We show the best prices we could find. All are online. Allow a month between ordering and getting the first issue.

The Ecologist £18.95 (paperless)

Cover price saving £11

One for the green god in the family. Nothing is safe from its probing eye – not even a humble bacon sarnie, which it found contained 12-20 chemicals to improve taste.



WORTH KNOWING A paperless subscription (the magazine sent as computer files) is cheaper. Paperless and paper subscriptions include a free Ecologist T-shirt.

PUBLISHED 10 issues a year

CONTACT www.theecologist.co.uk

CHEAPEST Online paperless subscription and paper version by direct debit (£24) – both via The Ecologist website.

BBC Wildlife £29

Cover price saving £11.30

If you know someone who was glued to the BBC's *Springwatch* and *Autumnwatch* series, they'll love this. The photography alone is worth the price.

WORTH KNOWING You get a free (13th) issue if you pay by direct debit.

PUBLISHED 13 issues a year

CONTACT www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com

CHEAPEST WHSmith/

Magazine Group

OUR FAVOURITE

The Oldie £30

Cover price saving

£5.40

'Everyone buys it eventually', says *The Oldie*'s strapline. If you've a family member nearing retirement they'll revel in off-beat features, such as one about a man who runs the Electricity Pylon Appreciation Society.

WORTH KNOWING

Pay by direct debit and get 14 issues for the price of 12. Pay via The Oldie website for a free book.

PUBLISHED 12 issues a year

CONTACT www.theoldie.co.uk

CHEAPEST Oldie/WH Smith/Magazine Group

Four Four Two £33.30

Cover price saving £9.90

Footie fans young and old will like the mix of current features and archive stuff from the glory days of 1966. There are lots of interviews, too – including Wayne Rooney and England coach Steve McClaren in November's issue – and all the punditry you can shake a sheepskin jacket at.

WORTH KNOWING Six issues cost £19.30.

PUBLISHED 12 issues a year

CONTACT www.fourfourtwo.com

CHEAPEST Four Four Two



Fortean Times £35.10

Cover price saving £10.50

For the visionary in your family. This covers the paranormal and the just plain weird. The name comes from Charles Fort – an author sceptical of scientific explanations. November's issue was a Star Trek special, with features including 'How to Speak Klingon'.

WORTH KNOWING

Subscription includes a free CD.

PUBLISHED 12 issues a year

CONTACT www.forteanimes.com

CHEAPEST Fortean Times/WH Smith/Magazine Group



The Economist £75

Cover price saving £94.50

Complex subjects explained in a concise, easy-to-read style. With correspondents all over the world, you get an interesting perspective on international events.

WORTH KNOWING Gift

subscription for students is £65.

PUBLISHED 51 issues a year

CONTACT www.economist.com

CHEAPEST The Economist website



New Scientist £82

Cover price saving £55.70

This populist science mag has news, features and commentary and also invites you to answer readers' bizarre questions.

WORTH KNOWING Buy 13 issues for £20.50. Don't buy from the magazine's website – 51 issues costs £123.

PUBLISHED 51 issues a year

CONTACT www.newscientist.com

CHEAPEST WH Smith/Magazine Group



Contacts

WH Smith 0870 950 6515; www.whsmith.co.uk

Magazine Group 0870 442 9513

www.magazine-group.co.uk

Days to remember

Why weigh down your loved ones with possessions that they may or may not want, when you could give them an experience they will treasure for the rest of their lives?

Know someone with a secret desire to try gliding or ballooning or just to be pampered for a day? There's probably a gift package to suit them.

We've conducted a survey of more than 1,770 *Which?* members and found they were wary of these packages. However there are some good deals to be had. Booking direct or with a gift specialist can save you up to a third on high-street prices.



Hot air ballooning £125.99

A hot air balloon flight will tend to include a flight of 30 to 60 minutes (depending on the weather) in a basket you share with others. On the day you get a safety briefing and help set up the balloon so allow 3 to 4 hours in total. You get a gift pack including Champagne, a personalised voucher and message card, personal accident cover plus cancellation indemnity. A flight (any day)

Contacts

Activity Superstore

www.activitysuperstore.com

Balloon flights British Association of Balloon Operators; www.babo.org.uk

Buyagift www.buyagift.co.uk

Debenhams www.debenhams.com

Driving www.ferraridiving.com
www.driversdreamdays.co.uk

Flying www.premierflighttraining.co.uk

Spa www.spaseekers.com

bought from high-street shops such as WH Smith or Boots costs £179.99. Booking direct with an operator (see 'Contacts', below) can save up to 30 per cent, although prices vary hugely across the country. A midweek voucher to fly from Coventry, Northampton, Rugby or Stratford is £125.99. In the Lake District it's £195.

BUY AT www.babo.org.uk

Flying £91.06

A 25 to 30-minute flight with WH Smith Gift Experiences costs £99. However, a 45-minute flight with a Norfolk flying school costs £91.06. See www.todayspilot.co.uk for flying schools across the country.

SEE www.premierflighttraining.co.uk

Supercars £235

If your idea of thrills is more land-based, Virgin Experiences, bought through high-street shops such as WH Smith, offers a Supercars drive for £279 in a Ferrari or Porsche. Little information is given on the number of laps you do. A drive booked through www.ferraridiving.com costs £235. For this, you get a briefing on circuit driving, three demonstration laps with an instructor in a hot hatch, three laps driving a Subaru WRX STI, three laps driving a Ferrari 360, and three in a Ferrari 550.

BUY AT www.ferraridiving.com

Track driving £129.99

Debenhams has a racing experience called Driving Dreams at £199. You spend two and a half to three hours at the venue. Booking through www.driversdreamdays.co.uk costs £129.99. You are taken round a 1.5km race circuit for demonstration laps by an instructor



A FREE FLYING LESSON

David Clayton 65, semi-retired railway manager

David bought himself an introductory flying lesson through saving up supermarket loyalty points. He bought the £149 flight through Buyagift with Tesco Clubcard vouchers. David needed only £38 of vouchers to fund the flight because, with the vouchers, you need only about a quarter of the nominal price of the event you are interested in. The one-hour lesson with St George Flight Training School at Tees Valley Airport (near Darlington) would cost £125 booked direct.

'Obviously this was a very good deal for me,' says David who said the school was friendly and efficient. 'All in all, it was a good experience and I'd certainly be happy to try more of the experiences offered by Buyagift,' he says. 'The flight went well: on time, good instruction and some hands-on experience.' See www.buyagift.co.uk for more.



and also get ten laps solo in a Formula Ford racing car.

BUY AT www.driversdreamdays.co.uk

Spa £99.95

A WH Smith Gifts Experience pamper day for two is £99.99 and gives a half-hour facial or massage plus access to facilities at a LivingWell Health & Fitness club. Book through www.spaseekers.com and choose from an independent club such as the Spread Eagle Hotel, Midhurst, Sussex. This



costs £99.95 for a spa for one including a half hour back, neck and shoulder massage, facial and manicure or pedicure.

BUY AT www.spaseekers.com

Charity Gift Tokens £10 to £100+ admin fee of £1.50

Order a voucher from Charity Gift Tokens, give them to a friend or relative, and they write their chosen charity on the back and return it to a Freepost address. Charity Gift Tokens pays the face value of the voucher to the named charity. Vouchers arrive within two days of ordering online – a good panic buy.

BUY AT www.charitygifttokens.org.uk

Carbon offsets from £10

Using fossil fuels such as oil, gas or coal to heat homes, take a flight or drive the car, produces the greenhouse gas, CO₂. Offsetting means paying someone to reduce CO₂ in the atmosphere by the same amount your activities add, to 'balance' the CO₂ your activities add. Climate Care claims to offset emissions by funding projects such as restoring forests – the trees helping to absorb CO₂. Neutralising three short-haul flights and one long haul is £30, while 4,000 miles of car travel costs £10.

BUY AT www.climatecare.org

Adopt an animal £29.95 a year

Adopt an animal such as a tiger or an orang-utan and you get a certificate, photo of the animal, an information sheet and quarterly updates. The scheme is run by WWF.

BUY AT www.johnlewis.co.uk
www.buyagift.co.uk
www.animaladoption.ekkleisia.co.uk
www.wwf.org.uk

Give a goat £14 (for a goat)

If someone got your goat last Christmas this is a way to return the favour. Don't worry, though – they won't get a bleating goat at their door, just some paperwork to confirm it's gone to a good cause in a developing nation. This year's 'must-have' gift is

A good cause

Charity gifts were the surprise hit of last Christmas and could well be a sure winner for this festive season



an ox – a snip at £251. Throw in a plough for £108. Gifts are sorted according to price, from £6 to £3,660 (most expensive is a grinding mill, if you were wondering).

BUY AT www.oxfam.org.uk/
www.greatgifts.org

Sponsor a tree from £20

Sponsoring a tree overseas will cost about £20, for which you get a certificate with details of the species and location. Sustainable gift company Tree2mydoor lists conservation projects such as restoring rainforests in Brazil and monkey puzzle forests in southern Chile.

Another option is to buy a tree to give a friend in this country – a silver birch sapling (20 to 40cm high) costs £24.50 plus postage and packaging. You can also pay for a tree to be planted in the UK through the company Carbon Neutral.

BUY AT www.tree2mydoor.com
www.carbonneutral.com

Save a patch of habitat

£25 saves an acre of rainforest

Buy vulnerable wildlife habitat through the World Land Trust, and help protect it. The charity, whose patrons include wildlife expert and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, conserves tropical forests in Ecuador and Brazil, elephant corridors in India and reef and mangrove forests across the Philippines and India. Under the gift option your loved one gets a certificate

which says where 'their' acre is, and they also receive a twice-yearly newsletter.

BUY AT www.worldlandtrust.org

Adopt an animal at a zoo £40+

If your loved one would like to visit the animal they've adopted, check at their nearest zoo to find available animals. Stick insects and elephants are among the options. Adopting a penguin at Twycross Zoo (Warwickshire) costs from £40. £80 gets you two admission vouchers and an adoption plaque with your name on the sponsors' board.

BUY AT www.banhamzoo.co.uk
www.twycrosszoo.com
www.zsl.org/shop/
london-zoo-adoptions
www.zsl.org/shop/whipsnade-adoptions

Sponsor a child from £216

You can specify the country, age and gender of the child, or use the 'Where the need is greatest' option. You'll get a welcome pack, annual progress reports and be told of birthdays.

BUY AT www.worldvision.org.uk or
www.plan-international.org

