

GADGET GIFT GUIDE

TALKING HEAD

Transformers Optimus Prime Voice Changing Helmet
Typically £30, or £25 from www.johnlewis.com

Slip on this helmet and you'll be able to speak like the robotic Optimus Prime from the film *Transformers*, thanks to an internal, battery-powered microphone and processing circuit. The helmet also plays quotes from Prime and the cool sound effect that accompanies the Transformers as they change shape. Get in quick because it's going to be snapped up.



INTELLIGENT INSECT

Flytech Remote Control Dragonfly
Typically £40, or £30 from www.play.com

Tiny remote-control helicopters were a much-loved stocking filler last Christmas, and this Dragonfly promises even more liveliy this time around. It's made by the clever people behind the popular RoboBugs dancing robot, and it is said to be the first ever entomobot — an aircraft that flies by flapping its wings. The Dragonfly's sturdy carbon fibre body means it should survive an encounter with the occasional obstacle as it whizzes round the living room at up to 18mph on Christmas Day. A mere 10min charged in the recharger apparently delivers another 10min of wing time, which isn't bad. Ideal for worming the dog or an annoying great-uncle.



SONIC BOOM

Goldring GX200 headphones
Typically £50, or £39 from www.ebuyer.com

The earbuds that are routinely supplied with most MP3 players rarely do justice to their sound output. However, the audio quality of these excellent-value GX200s will ring the bell of any genuine music lover. The Goldrings are an in-ear design, which has the twin advantage of isolating the wearer from background noise and maximizing bass response. In fact they provide a surprisingly rich bass, as well as an unexpected subtlety of aural pleasure that exceeds all expectations at this modest price. The Goldrings are sold in a choice of six colours, and although their 30 cord felt a bit short and tangled easily, the clever lanyard design is still eminently practical. All in all, these headphones are a steal.



MOVIE MAGIC

Creation Station movie-making kit
Typically £100, from www.freemove.com

This kit will occupy aspiring film directors throughout Christmas. It comprises a webcam with a built-in microphone and tripod. There is also some easy-to-use video-editing software, plus a green screen that lets you film a subject then add any background. It records video onto a computer and once your masterpiece is made, it's child's play to upload it onto YouTube. The basic nature of the equipment means you won't be creating *The Lord of the Rings* (yet) but it's an inexpensive introduction to the magic of movie special effects and will keep teen film buffs amused well into the new year.



KIT CAR

Knight Rider remote-controlled car
Typically £30, or £25 from www.argos.co.uk

Back in the 1980s there was no cooler ride than KITT, the black Pontiac Trans-Am driven by David Hasselhoff in the Knight Rider television series. It was almost indestructible, could reach 300mph and, best of all, talked to its driver. This 34cm-long radio-controlled version won't fly through the air with ease, but like the real thing it has a row of sequentially operating red LEDs on its hood — a pretent version of KITT's all-important search. And when you hit a button on the transmitter, that familiar robotic voice issues forth. One 9V and four AA batteries come included, but you'll have to shop elsewhere for a leather jacket, tight jeans and a dodgy chest tie.



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@ Best of Test Bench

Still seeking inspiration for a gift for that special person? Try these direct links to the best of InGear's rigorous group tests from the past few months. With everything from Bluetooth headsets to virtual surround systems, we can help you find the perfect present for everyone on your list.

Bluetooth headsets

tinyurl.com/2z9fem

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Road bikes

tinyurl.com/2evg7i

Spare-room TVs

tinyurl.com/2y9edf

Virtual surround

tinyurl.com/yj9f9g

The must-haves of

Every year there's a "Tracy Island" (as in the Thunderbirds toy that sold out almost overnight). In the run-up to Christmas it becomes a must-have with children, and anxious parents spend days trying to track one down. It may already be too late to find some popular items. Retailers we approached said the following items are vanishing fast:

Nintendo Wii, £179

The games console has been in short supply for months and the maker has now said demand may well outstrip supply. The website www.wii-consoles.co.uk tells where the console was last in stock, but it's a long shot and units are selling on eBay for up to £500

HomerSapien, £70

The dancing RoboBop robot was the daddy of robotic toys, and this new version, rick, decked out to look and speak like Homer



ROBOT ROCK

Gibson Robot guitar
Typically £1,400, see www.gibson.com/robotguitar for dealers

Always that music itself is a lavish present for budding guitar heroes, particularly the tone deal ones. Gibson says this is the world's first guitar with robotic technology. Using a specially designed robotic, it measures the tuning of each string, then relays that information to a patented machine heads on the neck, which then ensure the string is at the right tension. Guitarists can also preset a number of different states of tune, which can be accessed at the push of the control knob. The Robot guitar is modelled on the classic Les Paul design and has a blue silverburst finish. A lithium rechargeable battery powers the mechanism and Gibson claims that a 30min charge gives about 200 retunes. It goes on sale in Friday.

PLUG-IN BABY

Vox ampLigs
Typically £30, see
www.voxamps.co.uk for dealers

This palm-sized guitar amp is the solution for those adding to a cheap-out a few late-night power chords without waking the neighbours. Plug it into your guitar, connect a pair of headphones to it and you can hear what you're playing without making a racket. There are three modes, each with a variety of sounds, including heavy metal-style distortion. The guitar purports to imitate a vintage Vox valve amplifier. This is a tall order, but an brief test it made a convincing sound. You can also plug an MP3 player into the Vox and play along to the tunes. The maker says two AAA batteries provide up to 15hr of power. Rock on.



WE WILL DOCK YOU

Roht Audio Music Cocoon MC4
Typically £299, or £260 from www.amazon.co.uk

This classily sleek Music Cocoon combines the convenience of an iPod dock with the warm sound of a valve amplifier. Roht's still, its unusual design will brighten any music buff's home. You can park your iPod in its cradle and connect two further audio devices at the rear, then switch between them with the remote control. Once paired with suitable speakers (not supplied) such as a pair of Wharfedale Diamond 9s for about £100, the Roht created a smooth sound that flattened the iPod's inherent harshness. The Cocoon is pricey, but if you want the best mains-powered dock, here it is.

BEDSIDE COMPANION

Pure Chronos II DAB/FM clock radio
Typically £70, or £58 from www.amazon.co.uk

This bedside clock radio boasts a host of useful features such as four independent alarms that can be set to go off at different times on weekends and weekdays. The Chronos II is a DAB radio as well as a conventional one, which makes it far easier to tune than a FM/AM model. The trim dimensions will nest snugly on a bedside table and its subtle colouring (white or silver) will blend into your background decor. This, the updated version, features an improved LCD display that automatically dims to save power. Granted, the radio's compact size means volume is limited but the Pure excels at its primary purpose.



2007

Simple, should be just as popular. Indeed, Harveys suggests you get your skates on, or you'll be the one saying "D'oh".

Xbox 360 Core, £180
It's not just the Wii that's selling like hot cakes. Game, one of the country's biggest console retailers, revealed it is totally out of Xbox 360 Core consoles, the cheapest version of the Xbox 360. Anyone for Pac-Man?

ItEDdy, £60

This teddy bear has a media-playing device in its stomach that lets kids play educational games and sing along to music. It has sold out several times at Argos, and the retailer says stocks may not last the festive rush.



GAMES



Mass Effect ★★★★★
Xbox 360, £45. Age 12+

In this space-age spectacular you put on the figure-hugging spacesuit of Commander Shepard to embark on an action-packed sci-fi adventure. Your first task is to decide on your character's look, gender and background — and this is not merely window dressing. Choose, say, an engineering rather than a military career, and the challenging combat scenes will play differently. The plot is complex, with puzzles to solve and conspiracies to unravel that are as crucial as blasting aliens. Battle scenes demand precise shooting and strategic thinking, however, because even using the wrong weapon leads to a quick demise. Plus you have a pair of soldiers to deploy in battles. Animation is strikingly realistic and the music is stirring. The controls are not wholly infallible but this deeply engaging game is from another dimension. **David Phelan**



Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock ★★★★★
Most consoles, £30-£50. Age 12+

The idea of Guitar Hero is to prod buttons on a plastic guitar prop (which costs an extra £20) and rock along to classic songs in a series of gigs. This is the third proper helping of this game, and it looks far slicker than its predecessors, especially the background footage during concerts. The game's cartoon-style storyline is a fine slice of rock nonsense. You play a succession of gigs; the first few are lighthearted, but the action soon heats up. There are new end-of-level set-piece challenges, and you can play the whole game against a friend as a head-to-head. An epic song list includes Guns N' Roses' 'Welcome to the Jungle' and When You Were Young by The Killers. Best of all is the new wireless Les Paul-style amp — so you can rock without all you keep off the coffee table. **Stuart Andrews**