

More than 3,500 toys in Topeka man's collection



Kathy Tvrdik

The wall of toys on display behind Don Tvrdik of Topeka, Kan., is just a small part of the toy collection he has amassed over the years.

Hot items include Star Wars, Barbie, Trolls

By Kathy Tvrdik
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If you attend flea markets, auctions, and visit antique malls you have probably noticed "toy mania".

The word toy dates from the 16th century. Webster defines a toy (toi) as 'an object, often a small representative of something familiar, as an animal, object, person, etc. for children to play with; plaything.'

This leaves the field wide open for the toy enthusiast, encompassing trains, marbles, dolls, space toys, battery operated toys, and many more.

Don Tvrdik of Topeka, Kan., is an avid collector whose wide range of interests is evident with showcases, shelves, and entire walls covered with an eclectic range of toys from the 1800s to the present.

There are trucks, action figures, automotive toys, robots, games, banks, airplanes and battery operated toys. He has a representative of all types of toys numbering more than 3,500 pieces.

"It all started when I moved my mother off the farm and found three generations of toys upstairs as though they were just picked off the store shelf," says Tvrdik. "Toy collecting has risen in popularity since I have started and seems to get more popular all the time."

A former driver of Chevrolet Corvettes, Don sold his cars and now boasts more than 1,000 cars in miniature. His Kansas license plate reads "TOY-MAN" and he is known to many people by that name.

Most of the old toys available are from the Industrial Revolution of the late 1800s. Because many are cast iron, it is imperative to have a reputable person help a novice since many have



been reproduced.

The Victorian toys from the Turn of the Century (approximately 1880-World War 1) were ornate, detailed and finely lithographed.

With experience, the coloring and "look" are readily recognizable, though many of these have been reproduced also.

Tin toys were mass-produced in the '20s and '30s. They were inexpensively made and usually driven by a single spring. Fortunately these toys are still found around today.

Plastic toys from the '40s and '50s are unique and desirable, including cars, trucks, figures, dolls, etc.

The '50s and '60s brought Japanese tin toys. Friction cars, cartoon character windups and battery operated toys originated and are a very popular item today.

Star Trek, Star Wars and other movies have inspired many toys and are very collectible. Age doesn't seem to affect the toy field as much as some of the other popular collectibles.

Many toys were played with to the point of destruction, so the representatives remaining are highly coveted.

With the incredible number of toys produced today, some are produced in a limited number and the price escalates immediately on the secondary market.

Toy collecting is rather trendy and the popularity of an item can change with the supply and demand. Tvrdik says "The items hot in the area now are Star Wars, Trolls, Barbie, Star Trek, and Hot Wheels. That can change tomorrow."

When asked what makes a toy desirable Tvrdik replied, "Condition is the most important. A toy that is mint-in-the-box is the most valuable."

Toys are usually graded on a scale of 1-10. There are many toy publications, organizations, shows, museums, and exclusive toy auctions. Price guides are published for specialized areas of the toy field.

For the new collector, research and study pays off. There is no substitute for experience, however, most toy people are very helpful. Look at the toys and classify them by what they're made of. Check for missing parts, rust, repair, or repainting.

Wind-up toys often don't work due to rust or over winding. It is possible to get them repaired.

Keep your toys from excessive sunlight, moisture, bugs and dust. Glass cases are the most popular for display.

Your collection can be catalogued and tagged. It is convenient to have a computerized list and photos for insurance purposes.

Tvrdik predicts the next hot item will be "Jurassic Park" toys. At any rate it seems like toy collectors will never run out of collectible items.

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