

Babes in Toyland

The quest for the perfect pet toy

by ARNA COHEN

I am a cat-toy-oholic. My house is bursting at the seams with jingle balls, sparkle balls, straw balls, foam balls, wand toys, rope toys, crinkle toys, and every size and shape of catnip toy. Are my cats grateful? No. They go mad for wadded paper, milk jug rings, and a fleece mouse that lost its ears, tail, and whiskers long before these three were born.

Yet I can't stay out of the toy aisle. I'm always on the lookout for something new, something to keep them from prowling the kitchen counters in search of mischief. I once spent \$25 on a battery-operated contraption meant to trick kitties into thinking they were chasing a mouse. Two of my cats ignored it; the third sat on it.

There's no support group for me, but I'm far from alone. According to the latest American Pet Products Association survey, 62 percent of dog owners and 52 percent of cat owners purchase an average of three pet toys a year; women are the most frequent suckers—er, shoppers.

This holiday season, I and millions of likeminded people will be searching for the perfect gifts for our fur kids. To make this easier, my colleagues and I scoured the market for playthings we thought showed promise. HSUS staff pets tested our picks for stimulation, durability, and safety, and reviewed the best of the batch. Suggested retail prices are indicated, but we found these toys for less at various online merchants. (Disclaimer: Testers were not remunerated for their participation, aside from treats obtained in the testing process.)

As for my three impossible-to-shop-for felines, this year they're getting the gift of me. I've noticed that their interest in a toy goes from 0 to 60 if I involve myself in the play process. So, kitties, I promise that I will make time every day to throw the milk jug ring, drag the string, wiggle my toes under the blanket, and kick the crumpled paper ball, if you promise to at least sniff this adorable hot pink catnip sachet shaped like a makeup compact that I just happened to see at PetSmart.



Captivate Your Kitty

1 Moody Pet Fling-ama-String Your cat never tires of fishing pole-type toys, but your arm is exhausted from waving them around. Enter Fling-ama-String: Hang it from a doorknob, turn it on, and take a nap. A conveyor belt tosses out the string and reels it back in ad infinitum. (\$29.99)

Joe: *It was a little scary at first, but my kitty housemates and I watched for a long time. Our mom says it's like parking the kids in front of the TV to keep them out of the way.*

Bosley: *I was thrilled with this device. I played with it from all angles: standing up, reclining, sideways, frontways, upside down.*

Vinny: *Not only did I grab the string, I pulled out the conveyor belt and chewed on it. I pride myself on being creative.*



Joe (8 months) is adored by Catherine Hess, web editor. Bosley (10) is personal assistant to Michael Sharp, publications assistant managing editor. Vinny (2) appreciates life with James Hettinger, *Animal Sheltering Magazine* associate editor.



2 iPad Apps: Game for Cats, Paint for Cats, and Fun & Games for Cats Cats chase a red dot or virtual mice and other creatures on the screen. In the painting games, wherever kitty touches the screen, color blobs appear. (free–\$1.99)

Margo: *I loved chasing the squeaky mouse. But when I tried to touch the screen, Monster bopped me on the head!*

Monster: *My artistic soul struggled with my inner hunter. I felt compelled to pounce on the mouse in Paint for Cats, but the magnificent creations that resulted took my breath away.*

Margo (11) and Monster (10) try the patience of Arna Cohen, publications associate editor.



3 Hagen Catit Design Senses Play Circuit

This ball-in-track toy can be snapped together in different configurations. It really appealed to the youngsters in our tester group; older kitties had more of a “been there, done that” attitude. (\$21.99)



JENNY

Jenny: *Yippee! Woohoo! Ride ‘em, cowboy! Loved. It.*

Pepper: *I didn’t care for the question-mark configuration (too ambiguous), but I was all over the circle.*

Jenny (2) is the furchild of Nancy Peterson, cat programs manager. Pepper (2) entertains the family of Karen E. Lange, publications senior writer.

4 Ba-Da-Beam Rotating Laser Toy

Few cats can resist a laser toy, the next best thing to chasing a fly. This free-standing toy rotates the laser automatically on the wall or floor while you lounge on the couch. Some of our testers preferred to have their pawrents move it manually. (\$15.99)



GEORGIA

Willow: *As a born chaser, I was initially intrigued, but furrankly, I’d like a little more variation in the pattern. I’m a smart cookie, and I need more challenge. I was interested in the humming noise.*

Georgia and Mario: *We’re 18. Watching Willow make a fool of herself was fun enough for us.*

Myst, Felix, and Patton: *We turn our noses up at most toys, but this one had us climbing the walls!*

Willow (2), Georgia (18), and Mario (18) mix it up with Grace Markarian, online communications senior director, and Mike Markarian, chief program and policy officer. Myst (12), Felix (4), and Patton (12) keep web content editor Sarah Kowalski on her toes.

Make Your Hound Happy

5 Bionic Bone If your dog can destroy chew toys at lightning speed, this is the bone for you. Lightweight, nontoxic, vanilla-scented, food-grade material still looked almost new after passing through the jaws of some intense chewers, including Boone the Destroyer. Washable and recyclable, Bionic rubber toys come in a variety of designs and sizes, and they float in water. (\$14.99)

Boone: *I love this toy so much. Where I go, it goes, even to bed at night. Mom stuffs it with treats to keep me occupied so I won’t destroy the house.*



BOONE

Diva: *Impressive! I’m a hard chewer, but I couldn’t put a dent in it.*

Coonhound mix Boone (3) resides with Jennifer Clegg, Stop Puppy Mills Campaign research coordinator. Pit bull mix Diva (2) dwells with Heather Bialy, shelter services director.

6 Nina Ottosson Dog Spinny interactive game

The thinking dog’s toy, this puzzle makes your dog work for treats hidden in compartments beneath a rotating lid. If yours is a food maniac (and what dog isn’t?), he’ll quickly learn to spin the lid to uncover the treats. Despite packaging claims, our cat testers weren’t very interested. (\$39.99)

Sandy: *Four paws up! I want one!*

Pugsley: *Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Get out of my way, Cocoa!*

Cocoa: *Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Forget you, Pugsley!*

Pomeranian Sandy (5) shares her space with membership services representatives Chris and Cheryl Rhodes. Pugs Cocoa (7) and Pugsley (10) live with Lisa Basile, human resources senior manager.



SANDY

Your Pet



7



8



9

7 Kong Wobbler The heavy-duty plastic toy dispenses treats as it wobbles, rolls, and spins at the touch of a paw. Tough enough for the roughest player, the constant motion and rewards provide physical and mental stimulation. A good solution for feeding dogs who inhale their food. Weighted base keeps it upright and prevents it from lodging under furniture; top and bottom unscrew for easy cleaning and kibble-loading. (\$15.99 – small; \$20.99 – large)

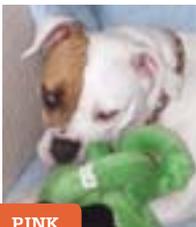
Mika: *Yeah, I'm rough, I'm tough, I don't give up easy. I've met my match in this Kong!*

Rottweiler mix Mika (8) is the boss of Julie Falconer, publications senior editor.



MIKA

8 Loopies Sound Chip frog toy Killing the squeaker in a toy is most dogs' mission in life. But once it's dead, so is your dog's interest. With six squeakers and multiple appendages, this plush toy fascinated our testers for days while incurring minimal stuffing depletion. Available in other animal designs. (\$14.98)



PINK

Pink: *Six squeakers in one toy—dog heaven! Mom says "ribbit, ribbit," and I run and find it.*

American bulldog Pink (2) entertains Michelle Cascio, Animal Rescue Team emergency placement partners program manager.

Stimulate Your Small Critter

9 Hagen Living World Teach N Treat This hide-and-seek treat game stimulates your small pet with three levels of difficulty. Designed for rabbits, chinchillas, guinea pigs, and rats, it was a big hit with all of our testers. (\$22.99)

Buster: *Awesome!*

Jasper: *I'm so smart! I found every treat every time!*

Lisbon: *I'm so smarter! I let Jasper do all the finding, then ate the treats.*

Michael: *No treat left unturned! I even took the knobs to decorate my nest.*

Buster the rabbit (5) chews the scenery with Marcie Berry, Humane Society International online campaigner. Guinea pigs Jasper (4) and Lisbon (6) get busy with Shevaun Brannigan, former publications production and marketing manager. Michael the rat (2) gets his daily love from Karla Koerbernick, Humane Society International online campaigner.



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