

32 Ultimate toys and gadgets

Drones have taken off as the "it" gift for both adults and children this festive season.

They're small, noisy, and they'll be buzzing around this Christmas.

No, not the kids. We're talking about drones, the hot gift this summer.

Drones fly the fine line between toy and gadget. So which are they?

"They're whatever you want them to be," says Israel Pangilinan, state director at Sydney-based wholesaler and online retailer Aus Electronics Direct.

"If you're using them for filming, it's a gadget. The majority of our drones are for leisure, so they're toys. But it's up to you."

Drones have been around for a few years, but recently they've really taken off (pardon the pun).

It's common to see them being flown at parks or soaring over rivers. In New Zealand a company is trialling their use to deliver pizzas.

Recently, a team in Victoria sent a drone to pick up a sausage on a roll from Bunnings and deliver it to a friend, however Australia's Civil Aviation Safety Authority is investigating as there are regulations about where drones can be used.

Last year drones really broke into the mainstream, Pangilinan says. "We've all seen one, some of us have used one and now everybody wants one."

The origin of drones can be traced to military use and, later, civilians using remote-control devices. They were niche

Heard the buzz?



Whether you're a beginner, intermediate or expert, there's a drone for you. Photo: Paul Rovere

buys for serious hobbyists. Today, drones are available at price points that make them hard to resist.

"You're looking at as low as \$20 for a very basic model," says Pangilinan. "Those are

perfect for first-timers learning how to fly."

Whether you're beginner, intermediate or expert, there's a drone for you, with features and price-tag to match.

"A lot of people think that all drones have

the same features," Pangilinan says. "Just having a camera can double the price of a drone."

Come Boxing Day, trees in parks would once be full of stranded drones – victims of short tempers and lack of skill. That has changed, says Pangilinan.

"People are taking more care with their drones, and the technology itself is improving. Many of the new models have one-button take-off and landing, and the safety gets better with each new wave."

Start with something simple, Pangilinan advises: "You don't jump into a Ferrari as your first car. Start slow, and upgrade as your skills improve."

Kids adept at Playstation or Xbox have a natural advantage: "The hand-eye coordination kids have from playing games makes flying drones easy for them. Plus it gets them outside."

Once you've mastered (or totalled) a beginner-level drone, Aus Electronics Direct has a range of more advanced models, as well as other cool gadgets.

"A lot of people just want a simple camera drone, and we've got that," he says. "But if you're looking for the full-featured models, we've got those as well."

Aus Electronics Direct has produced videos demonstrating safe drone use, and the models it sells come with a booklet outlining aviation laws and guidelines that drone users are obliged to obey.

Most drone users do play by the rules, although the Victorian sausage sizzle delivery attempt potentially breached a number of regulations and may lead to a \$9000 fine.

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