

New toys and names keep licensing perking

NEW YORK — An interesting mix of new toys has inundated the market for licensed children's apparel in the past year.

Popples and My Pet Monster from American Greetings, Pound Puppies, a creation of Tonka Toys, and Pillow People, which originates from Spring Performance Industries, have all appeared on numerous clothing items for children.

Along with the resurgence of cartoon characters such as Dennis the Menace, Betty Boop, the cast of Looney Tunes and the Disney characters, these new products have helped the licens-

Children's Wear

ing industry do a booming business in all areas of children's sportswear, sleepwear, underwear, T-shirts and swimwear.

The Popples teddy bear that can be shaped into a ball was introduced in mid-1986 and has been licensed to several manufacturers including Famous Raincoats, Rossmor swimwear and Avon gloves. Although he would not give volume figures, Mike Nightingale, vice president of sales and marketing at Wundies, a major manufacturer of licensed sleepwear and underwear for children, claims that Popples and Wrinkles, a new toy dog, are eliciting a "multi-million dollar business" for his company.

Nightingale emphasized that Wundies' strategy in selecting new licenses includes: Researching the track record of both the toy manufacturer and the licensor of the product, if the two companies are different, and making sure the toy has wide availability and visibility by advertising.

At Licensing Co. of America, Karen Lucas, director of women's and children's apparel, and Kathy Ordan, director of marketing, said that Pillow People have created a great deal of excitement since their inception a few months ago.

"Pillow People are a new and original concept developed by a psychologist," explained Lucas. "The characters are named after fears that are prevalent in children's lives and they are large and soft. They have animated faces that help to calm and soothe young children."

Pillow People can be seen on blanket sleepers by Obion, accessories by Just for Kids and S. Goldberg slippers. Ordan noted

that retail sales of Pillow People apparel for 1986 reached \$20 million and said there are commitments from retailers for over that amount so far this year.

Pound Puppies, a toy developed by Tonka, has racked up strong sales for various licenses. Bates Nitewear, Union Underwear, Swell-wear and Pyramid are a few of the licenses that have invested in the product. American Greetings, the licensor for My Pet Monster, noted that a few manufacturers, including Ben Cooper and Wormser sportswear and playwear, have acquired the rights to market the logo.

The rebirth of cartoon characters has surprised more than a few manufacturers in the licensing field.

Ron Mandler, vice president of sales at Bates Nitewear, cited the return and encouraging success of licensed characters such as Dennis the Menace, a popular figure of the Fifties, on night-shirts and pajamas. Mandler pointed out, however, that not all nostalgic properties undergo a triumphant rebirth — he described the Howdy Doody licensing arrangement as a failure. "It didn't have enough punch behind it. Howdy Doody has had his day," he exclaimed.

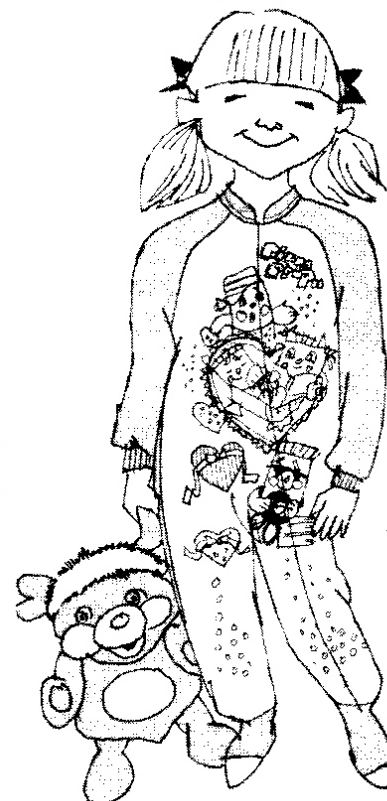
At LCA, Ordan noted that there has been "a trend toward cute and lovable items as well as classic and nostalgic properties." The Looney Tunes cast of characters, which were favorites in the Forties and Fifties, did "tremendous volume" for LCA in 1986. "Parents recognize the older cartoon characters such as Betty Boop, and although children are not familiar with these cartoon creations, they have been updated and now have definite appeal in the children's market," added Lucas.

One area that many manufacturers continue to be wary of is character licenses taken from movies. The financial sting of failure has often been felt by those who invested heavily in what seemed to be opportune ventures. Manufacturers who invested in the E.T. wave of three years ago discovered that their efforts in marketing E.T. products were untimely, as the enterprise proved to be a major disappointment.

Ordan said, "Over the

years, movies have not been extremely great for licensing companies." Mandler agreed that "movie companies do not handle licensing deals well." Nightingale explained, "E.T. was too fadish, as are other movie characters. It, in particular, didn't have any longevity and it certainly wasn't planned correctly."

Looking to the future, manufacturers will most likely continue backing cartoon characters including newer ones such as Ca-



Obion's infant-to-14 Pillow People polyester blanket sleeper and the Popples teddy bear

by KICHISABURO OGAWA

thy, Garfield and Heathcliff, original toys from major toy companies and also corporate licenses such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola, which are considered hot.

As Nightingale pointed out, "Knowing what customers are looking for, timing the product and having a feel for what's important now and will be important two years from now is fundamental to being on top in this business."

— ANDREA THOMPSON