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Children build on as Lego turns 50 today



On track: Ross Crawford.

Photo: *Andrew de la Rue*

Daniella Miletic

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ROSS Crawford feels his parents got it right when they gave him his first Lego set for Christmas in 1969, when he was five years old. "I remember I got into it straight away and built a train," he said.

Almost four decades later, Mr Crawford's devotion to the plastic bricks has grown, as have his projects. He spends, on average, about an hour a day working on his Lego projects, as well as about \$5000 a year.

His greatest Lego achievement so far is his four metre-long, one-metre high replica of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Five years ago he built it out of 11,000 pieces of Lego, costing about \$5000.

Working from photographs, it took him more than a year and took up two bedrooms and the hallway of his Chadstone home. "There weren't any plans easily available, so I used pictures and information from books to build it," he said.

The 43-year-old member of the Melbourne Lego Club dismantled the bridge because he needed the pieces to build other things, only to rebuild it last year at the request of the Museum of Sydney, who wanted it for an exhibition.

It is now on display at the Ipswich Gallery in Queensland.

Mr Crawford, a computer analyst, said he was taking a break from big projects. "I am working on a few small projects — I don't really know what they are going to turn out to be," he said.

Like many Lego fanatics, Mr Crawford will quietly celebrate today, because it marks the 50th anniversary of when the original Lego brick was patented in Copenhagen by Godtfred Christiansen, the son of carpenter Ole Kirk Christiansen. The patent for the eight-stud brick, which has since expired, included plastic tubes inside the bricks so it could grip from above and below.

Since then, the company has expanded to include theme parks and products like Lego Star Wars games to lure the modern child who is more interested in PlayStation and iPod than old-fashioned toys.

Today, Lego's bestsellers include its Star Wars, Lego City and Bionicle ranges. But the traditional eight-stud brick, said Lego's Australian marketing manager, Caroline Squire, is still the foundation of the business.

"(The brick) is a product that's never changed from the moment it was conceived in 1958. The bricks that were sold then are still compatible with the bricks we sell in 2008," she said.

"And, I think, for a product, in light of the way things have changed in the past 50 years to still be in the marketplace ... still be a huge hit with kids and adults alike, is a massive achievement."

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