


# STRING TOGETHER A

# YO-YO COLLECTION



BY MARLYN IRVIN MARGULIS



**M**AYBE YOU CAN'T perform "around the world" or "walk the dog" tricks, but if you start a yo-yo collection, you can have the "world on a string."

The yo-yo is not just a plaything; it has also served as a stress reliever throughout recorded history. Although the yo-yo was probably first introduced in China, it was historically

**ABOVE:** Duncan's Spiderman, 1978; Wonder Woman, 1973, or Superman 1010, 1978; yo-yos by Marvel Comics. Valued at up to \$50 each with package. **LEFT:** Hy-Lo Yo-Yo was made of cast iron, ca. 1920, \$100-\$150.

recorded in early Greece. Vases with paintings depicting Greek youths playing with this ancient toy are on display in the National Museum of Athens, Greece. These thin, circular objects were generally metal, wooden, or painted clay discs (terra cotta).

Once the yo-yo caught on in popularity, the toy began to travel. A miniature box made in India, circa 1760, was decorated with a hand-painted rendering of a young girl playing with a yo-yo. During the next quarter century, these glass and ivory toys appeared in Europe, the Orient, France, England, and Scotland.

In France, yo-yos were not only used to

relieve stress during the “Reign of Terror” and French Revolution, but also as a valuable and fashionable toy for the nobility. At that time, the yo-yo was also referred to as “l'emigrette,” a French word that referred to leaving the country. In fact, a painting of future King Louis XVII displayed in 1789 depicted the four-year old palming his l'emigrette.

Sketches of soldiers made during the 1780s, including General Lafayette and his troops, show the men tossing their yo-yos. As yo-yo usage gained in popularity throughout France in the late 1700s, the toy became known as the “joujou de Normandie.” Some believe that this term may reflect possible roots for the modern American name of “yo-yo.” The yo-yo earned the title of “Prince of Wales” toy in 1791 when a picture appeared of the future George IV twirling his “bandalore,” as the French and English called the popular plaything. During the Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815, Napoleon and his troops were purported to “unwind” with their yo-yos before battle.

The long string of the yo-yo stretched to the United States in 1866 after a patent was issued for two Ohio gents for their invention—“an improved bandalore”—one that was rim weighted. The return wheel was manufactured the following year by Charles Kirchof, a German immigrant.

**RIGHT, top to bottom:** Bart Simpson “The Radical Yo-Yo,” plastic, 1990 made in China on display card, \$8 in mint condition; Plastic Ghostbusters yo-yo. Columbia Pictures, 1988, \$8.

An article published in the *Scientific American Supplement* in 1916 titled “Filipino Toys,” included a picture of what was called a yo-yo, a word some people defined as Filipino for “to return,” or “spring.” Pedro Flores, a Filipino immigrant, was the man who introduced the Filipino yo-yo to the United States in the 1920s. A yo-yo company bearing his name was established in California in 1928. Hand-carved Flores yo-yos were made from one piece of wood. These were the first toys that



**THE YO-YO EARNED THE TITLE OF “PRINCE OF WALES” TOY IN 1791 WHEN A PICTURE APPEARED OF THE FUTURE GEORGE IV TWIRLING HIS “BANDALORE,” AS THE FRENCH AND ENGLISH CALLED THE POPULAR PLAYTHING.**





TOP, left to right: Duncan "How to Yo-Yo" video (with more than 60 tricks), made by A. Flambeau Products Co., Bothell, WA, 1992, \$10; Smothers Brothers "Yo-Yo Man" instructional video and manual by Kodak, 1988, \$10; "The Little Book of Yo-Yos" by Professor Yo-Yo, (hardcover), \$4.95; Dick Smothers (wood) signed yo-yo; mint condition, \$20. BOTTOM: This plastic Festival Professional Model Football is imprinted with "Official League" on one side and contains a festival logo on the other, ca.1960s-70s, \$20-\$30.

could spin or "sleep" because the string looped around the axle. This forerunner to the modern yo-yo not only went up and down, but also could be used to perform endless tricks.

Donald F. Duncan, Sr., an American businessman, watched Flores perform his tricks in San Francisco. Eyeing the large group of people watching Flores' demonstration, Duncan realized the possibilities of the plaything. In 1929, he bought the rights to the toy for \$25,000, patented the name "yo-yo," and promoted it in the United States. (Duncan also invented the

*Eskimo Pie* and was the originator of the *Good Humor Ice Cream Truck*.)

Duncan hired 42 original demonstrators (one of them being Pedro Flores), to teach and demonstrate yo-yo "feats" and hold contests as a means of increasing sales throughout the United States and Western Europe. This enterprising businessman soon introduced the looped slip-string, an innovation that allowed the yo-yo to "sleep," so that more advanced tricks could be performed.

## TIPS FOR THE COLLECTOR

*Most old yo-yos are wooden, so check for the following:*

- No loose halves.
- No excessive scrapes on the outside diameter of each half.
- Clear impressions of the logo or clean, sharp graphics.
- Decals should be as whole as possible.
- If the yo-yo is jeweled, check for loose rhinestones, repainting or shoddy repair work.

*Tips courtesy Dave's Wonderful World of Yo-Yos <http://www.nmia.com/~whistler/wwwboard/faq-collectors.htm>.*





TOP, left: Duncan wood and jeweled Tournament Yo-Yo was coated with metallic paint; ca. 1950s-1960s; \$65-\$75. LEFT: Duncan Genuine Whistling tin Yo-Yo #88; second series, propeller whistler; ca. 1930, \$150-\$175. ABOVE: "No Jive" mandala yo-yo by Tom Kuhn; 1992, \$20.

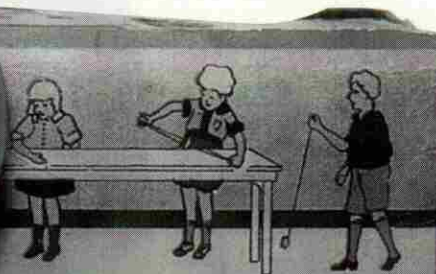
The *Duncan Company* relocated to Luck, Wisconsin in 1946. At that time, 3,600 yo-yos were produced per hour. Four years later, the company introduced the Electric Lighted yo-yo, marking the first such toy to

light up. During the late 1950s, *Duncan* released the Butterfly model yo-yo, a high-tech design that made it much easier to land on the string while executing complex tricks. Plastic yo-yos were first produced in 1960. The biggest yo-yo boom in history came in 1962, when *Duncan* sold a record

## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

- **Sleeper**—The sleeper is the first trick many beginners master because it lays the groundwork for many other tricks. Throw the yo-yo down sharply with the palm up. Once released, cease movement of the arm and hand so the yo-yo hangs in suspension. To get your yo-yo back, give the string a quick jerk.
- **Telephone Ring**—Gently lower your sleeping yo-yo to the floor so that it is barely touching the floor (preferably linoleum). The spinning yo-yo makes a ringing sound.
- **Walk the Dog**—Begin by throwing a "fast" sleeper. Gently lower the yo-yo to the floor and allow it to "walk for a short distance.
- **Around the World**—This trick starts with your arm swinging naturally at your side.

Point the back of your hand in the direction the yo-yo will travel. Snap your arm upward, releasing the yo-yo at the start of the swing. Allow the arm to continue its upward motion until it reaches a comfortable position in front of your body. The yo-yo will spin at the end of its string and make a full circle. After completing this circle, give the line a slight jerk to return the yo-yo to your hand.



Conestoga: 3 Ro-To-Spinner, *Conestoga Corp.*, Bethlehem, PA; this yo-yo was dubbed Ro-To-Bob and included box and top, yo-yo and zing-zong ca. 1930s; tin litho in box, \$200-\$250.



45 million yo-yos. Keeping up with demand, paying exorbitant television advertising fees, and the cost of overtime wages and materials were factors that caused the boom to begin to bust. An expensive lawsuit to protect the yo-yo trademark from competitors forced the Duncan family out of business in November 1965. *Flambeau Products*, manufacturer of *Duncan's* plastic models, bought the company and still owns it today.

The yo-yo's popularity has not waned. A yo-yo orbited the earth when astronauts put the toy through its paces in 1985 aboard the space shuttle *Discovery*, gaining the illustrious honor of being the first toy

LEFT: Duncan Shrieking Sonic Satellite yo-yo, made of wood, with card. Originally priced at \$1.00, ca. 1960s, \$60-\$70. BELOW: Wooden Forrester World's Fair yo-yo came in regular and undersized models, ca. 1960s, \$15-\$25.

**DUNCAN HIRED 42 ORIGINAL DEMONSTRATORS (ONE OF THEM BEING PEDRO FLORES), TO TEACH AND DEMONSTRATE YO-YO "FEATS" AND HOLD CONTESTS AS A MEANS OF INCREASING SALES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND WESTERN EUROPE.**

## ON THE WEB

- *Pedro Flores*—Excerpts on inventor Flores from *Lucky's Guide to Yo-Yo collecting* by Lucky Meisenheimer.
- *Yo-Yo History*—<http://www.yo-yo.com/history/index.html>.
- *Official Duncan Yo-Yo Web Site*:—<http://modena.intergate.ca/personal/bobb/yo.html>.



in space. The astronauts discovered that gravity is important when you are playing with a yo-yo!

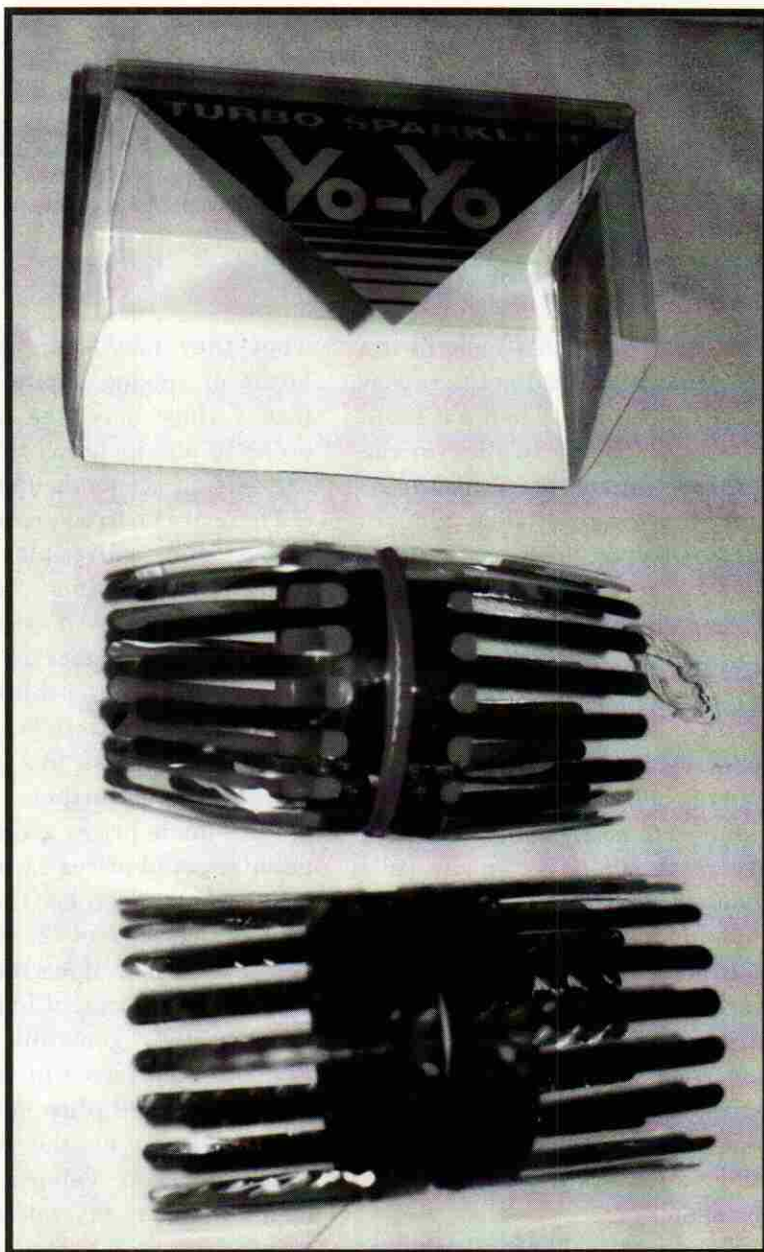
Try to collect yo-yos that have one or more of the following items of information on one or both of the yo-yo halves: 1) Yo-yo name. 2) Name of the manufacturer. 3) Year the yo-yo was made. 4) Serial number, and 5) Patent number.

When buying new yo-yos, look for clean, sharp graphics on each yo-yo half. Graphics colors should be rich and unfaded (in comparison to other yo-yos of the same type). Graphics should be centered on each of the halves and there should be no visible flaws on the yo-yo itself. The packaging should not be bent, opened, torn, or cracked, and finally, look for packages that do not have a store sticker or price sticker.

It is best not to repair a yo-yo, as any visible repair work will often decrease the value. However, if a wooden yo-yo half becomes unglued from the axle, you can glue it back together. The same is also true of jewels that fall out of jeweled yo-yos, such as *Duncan Jeweled Tournament* yo-yos or *Filipino Twirlers*. A very small amount of epoxy applied to both surfaces will prevent the jewel from falling out again.

The simplest and most economical way to store opened yo-yos or yo-yos in hard plastic packaging is in a hard-sided container, such as a plastic box with a tight fitting lid. Store the box away from heat, sunlight, and moisture. The box should be able to hold a dozen or so yo-yos. Many yo-yo collections are stored in foam that has cut out circles for each yo-yo. Foam is considered a short-term storage solution because it often deteriorates and breaks down over time. If you are really ambitious and are looking for an attractive, long-term storage solution, you can make a wooden container with approximately 24 1/2"x2"boxes for each yo-yo, then cover it with glass to keep dust out.

Yo-yos that are still in their cardboard packaging are a little more difficult to store. To keep the card flat, try storing them upright in a box. Or, a more costly method would be to buy comic bags and boards, put the yo-yo package inside it, and store it upright. Stores that are going out of business often sell inexpensive glass dis-



play cases or old watch display stands that you can use to house your collection.■

*Not sure where to find your yo-yos? Old yo-yos are listed on Internet auction sites. You can also try garage sales, swap meets, yo-yo championships contests, antique stores, and ads in yo-yo magazines and newsletters.*

*Photos by Marlyn Margulis, from the collection of Dr. Yolanda Mapp.*

**Turbo Sparkler yo-yo uses laser diffraction foil & aerodynamic fins to produce a brilliant show of color, sound and motion. DaMert Co., San Leandro, \$2.**

## LEARN MORE

*National Yo-Yo Museum inside Bird in Hand—320 Broadway, Chico, CA 95928. The museum sponsors a national Yo-Yo contest which will be held this year on Saturday, Oct. 6 from 9AM to 5PM at Downtown Plaza Park in Chico, California. For details, write to the museum or visit [Info@nationalyoyo.org](mailto:Info@nationalyoyo.org).*