

FART MACHINE GET'S A VOICE

...and they are saying, What a Gas

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Machine
Age
by
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(Illustration: Limbert Fabian)

What a Gas

Novelty Items Go High-Tech

Late one night in Del Ray Beach, Florida, 56-year-old textile magnate Fred Jarow awoke with a vision. "I was laughing so hard, but I didn't know why," he says. Then it came to him. Something futuristic. For the whole family. A sound. In the distance. A remote . . . control . . . whoopee cushion. Now, seven years later, Jarow is creating a big stink, so to speak, with his invention, the Fart Machine: the latest entry in the technological evolution of novelties.

Jarow's device, a sleek, black, FCC-compliant unit which contains computerized recordings of various toots, earns a mention in the annals of pop culture history as one of the first gags to utilize a microchip. The novelty business has long been a bastion for techno-weenies and mischievous chemists, but never one for prurient digerati.

S.S. Adams Co., a nearly century-old company in Neptune, New Jersey, has limited itself to shrewd mechanical gadgets. Many of these—the joy buzzer, the jumping snake—are still designed around the spool-and-wire premise: pressing a button, say, or opening a can causes the wire-bound object to unwind, surprise, shimmy, and shake. S.S. Adams's vice president, Chris Adams, the founder's grandson, says that keeping gags relatively low-tech has always been cost-effective. Most of the science used at the company is a matter of home-brewed synthetics, such as those used in what Adams calls the "grossology" products. "We make all our fake vomit here," he explains.