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**C**HRISTMAS has come from China this year. When the Emma Maersk docked in Felixstowe last month the quarter-mile-long vessel brought the biggest single delivery of Christmas goods ever. Of the 11,000 containers on board, 3,000 were destined for Britain bringing about 1,886,000 Christmas decorations, 1,350,000 boxes of crackers and 12,800 MP3 players among thousands of other gifts including train sets, computer equipment, fairy lights and even mince pies.

All were manufactured in the Far East, suggesting that the days of the traditional Christmas, buying only goods from this country, have long gone. I wanted to see if this theory was true and, as my eight-year-old daughter Merrily was completing her list for Santa as the Emma Maersk was dropping anchor, now seemed the time to buy British.

As soon as I saw Merrily's list, I realised this was going to be difficult. She wanted: one Nintendo game console, two games to play on it, three Bratz dolls, an iPod Nano music player and the board game of the TV show Deal Or No Deal.

Not a single item on her list is made in the UK. In fact everything apart from the game's console — Nintendo's factory is in Germany — is manufactured in the Far East.

I need alternatives so I head straight for that bastion of all that is British, Marks & Spencer. Only it's not. From crockery to clothing, jewellery to toys, more often than not Made In China is printed on the packaging.

I call Drumond Park, the company which imports the game Deal Or No Deal from China, and learn that the firm makes the games Articulate, Chain Reaction and Absolute Balderdash at its factory in Kettering. I order them all at £25 each.

Waterstone's has just launched a children's gift-finding service. Living in Warrington, I go to the Waterstone's in Manchester's Arndale Centre and ask Catherine Howarth, the shop's gift finder, to pick some books for Merrily with the proviso they are UK-printed titles.

Most are, she says, and suggests Horrid Henry's Christmas Cracker, The Day Our Teacher Went Batty and Sinky Finger's House Of Fun.

I scour the internet for other gift ideas suitable for an eight-year-old. I find a £59 bread-making kit from The Village Bakery in Cumbria, and an Emma Bridgewater dollies' tea set made in Stoke-on-Trent, which cost £49.50.

I also order a personalised calendar for £14.95 from Getting Personal in Cheshire, which features Merrily's name on every page — but I'm still searching for something with that wow factor.

I discover a company called Merrythought, which makes rocking horses in Ironbridge, Shropshire. They're not cheap and I spend £500 one. It is expensive, but Merrily will adore it, as will her six-month-old sister Bridie once she's old enough to play on it.

Within a week of placing my order, Merrythought goes bust. Our rocking horse was one of the last toys to leave the factory before the firm succumbed to Far East competition. Forty-seven people have lost their jobs.

So what about that most traditional of presents, a doll's house. The internet leads me to John Wilson, a carpenter who agrees to take on the commission, working to a budget of £150.

In all, I have spent £880 on Merrily — more than twice what her wish list would have cost — but at least all her gifts are British.

**B**BRITISH-made presents for our baby Bridie — some wooden toys and a few books — should be easy. But while every toyshop I try has building blocks, wooden trains and jack-in-the-boxes, they are all from China.

'Do you carry any toys manufactured in the UK?' I ask the Early Learning Centre. 'They're all made in Hong Kong,' a press officer tells me. No joy either in Toys R Us or Mothercare.

Again, I turn to the internet for inspiration. Eventually I find a beautiful rag-doll, handmade by a woman from Box Tree Baby in Yorkshire, but at £31.50 it is three times the cost of its imported counterpart.

I try Andrew Hinks in Norfolk, who makes jack-in-the-boxes. But when I call he says he stopped making them last year because he couldn't compete with cheaper versions imported from the Far East.

As we speak he is unpacking a box of dolls to sell on to toyshops. 'They



by Rachel Halliwell

arrived from China today,' he says. 'I have become part of the problem.'

I haven't been able to find any baby books in the shops. As they have pop-ups and flaps, they are put together in the Far East where labour is cheaper. But Bridie must have one for her first Christmas, so I keep looking.

Eventually I find an internet firm called It's Your Story that makes personalised children's storybooks and I e-mail over details about Bridie. They post out a delightful book — our little girl as a superhero. It costs £17.50, but is highly original and better than anything I have seen in the shops.

And you don't get much more patriotic than a pair of £16 leather Union Jack booties, handmade in Wales.

**M**Y CYCLING-mad husband Carl, 42, had hoped for a place at a Portuguese training camp to prepare for next year's racing season. He also wanted a mobile phone with an MP3 player, and the new Jamie Oliver cookbook, which, surely, must be printed here.

Obviously, the trip is a non-starter. And when Motorola bought the last British mobile phone manufacturer, Sendo, last year, production moved from Birmingham to Singapore. Even the cookbook is printed in Italy.

I am determined to find him something to do with cycling, but what? Virtually all bicycles and accessories are made in the Far East. In desperation I call Carlton Reid, the editor of the cycling website BikeBlz, who steers me in the right direction. 'Lights,' he says. 'Hope Technology in Lancashire make the best in the world in and there it is, an entirely British product.'

Hope is a British success story, employing 65 people and exporting to 42 countries. But the lights cost £195 — more than most people would spend on a bike — while a set of hubs (the bits that go in the middle of the wheel) sets me back another £170.

But what about the mobile phone? After five days' bidding on eBay I buy a Sendo phone — one of the last the firm produced in Britain — for £62. It even has an MP3 player. Vodafone is the sole remaining UK network operator, so I pop one of their SIM cards in and there it is, an entirely British product.

I am the easiest to buy for. My favourite cosmetics store is Lush and the Manchester shop manager assures me that every item in there was hand-made in Dorset.

Silhouette International, a beauty company in Cheshire, makes its own anti-ageing creams, so I order two pots. And my husband could not begrudge me a £14.50 jar of organic chocolates from internet firm Natural Collection, who are based in Sunderland.

Finally, I buy a new handbag — but it can't be a Fendi or a Birkin. Mine comes from Chapman Bags of Cumbria, a company once famous for its fishing bags, but which was forced to diversify to survive in a market dominated by cheap imports. At £110 it is substantially cheaper than a designer bag, but it looks great and will probably last considerably longer.

Apart from the gifts, I need to buy all the decorations and food for the big day from Britain as well. I buy a Scots Pine from Sue Riley of Ivy Cottage Farm, in Wilmslow, which costs £25, is 6ft tall and looks magnificent.

But its branches are very dark and I don't have any fairy lights. I have called 20 lighting websites, and every department store and garden centre