



PORTLAND MARKET REPORT

December update

Santa was pleased with the work he had carried out at Grotto Central. Like most sensible people, he was doing his bit for the environment – solar panels, wind turbines, even a biomass heater. Living where he did, he could see first-hand the impact of climate change. Only the summer before, another large chunk of ice had come adrift and this was particularly annoying because it was an area of the pole that Santa had been using to train his rookie reindeers in take-off and landing.

Mrs Claus was a full convert to the environmental cause and she thought her husband's action was mere tokenism. In fact, she wanted the world rid of petrol full-stop, but Santa was not so sure and his basic knowledge of chemistry told him that the world was a great deal more reliant on fossil fuels than most people knew. Little was he to know that, that winter, his theory would be put to the test.

It all started at the beginning of October, when he picked up the morning copy of the North Pole Herald and read the headline "All refineries shut-down – no petroleum products for 3 months". Initially Santa was not too worried about the whole thing - after all, he relied on reindeer power to make his deliveries. But within a few days, this carefree optimism was ebbing away as quickly as the autumn daylight in polar latitudes.

With no access to the grid, all power at the North Pole was generator driven and when local fuel wholesaler Gaz Oil, popped by (in his Porsche Cayenne) to say that all deliveries were off, the scale of the problem suddenly dawned on Father C. No generators meant no production and no production, meant no presents. The elves looked pretty glum about this, but became downright rebellious, when Kerr O'Seen (the local heating oil magnate) also came by a day later in his X5, to say his deliveries were off too. Whatever magic was to be used to create the toys without power, would now have to work in sub-zero temperatures and in Santa's extensive experience, cold warehouses do not make for happy workers.

Nor do wet warehouses, so when the "bike, trike & scooter" building sprung a leak in the roof, matters became mutinous. Without bitumen roof-felt to make the necessary repairs, water was constantly dripping onto the workbenches and the building was quite clearly breaching HSE regs. There and then, the goblins downed tools and walked out, whilst the fairies immediately began working to rule. Only the elves agreed to carry-on as normal, although much of this was due to elf union leader, Red Dwarf, demanding (and getting) double time for his members.

Things surely couldn't get any worse, but on reading the November demand forecasts, they surely did! Why did this year of all years, have to have a 75% boy request ratio on footballs? Everybody knows that the inner-bladder of a football is made from butyl rubber and that this

problems that Santa faced that winter without refined fuel products. We could talk about the arm amputation that the medical teams had to carry out on an elf without anaesthetic (following an explosion in the chemistry set laboratory area), or indeed how the rescue teams managed to put out the consequent fire without fire extinguishers. One day, Portland will spill the beans on how all the presents were wrapped without the use of sellotape and how even Mrs C went fairly cool on the whole green thing, when she realised that she could no-longer use any lipstick or mascara. No, this being a short-story, all we can say is that once again – like every year – Father Christmas pulled it off. No-one really knows how he did it, but the fact is, all the girls and all the boys, got all their presents and all their toys on Christmas morning.

CHRISTMAS WITHOUT OIL – A SHORT STORY

is made from refined crude oil. And Play-Doh? Always a popular choice of course, but GCHQ (Gnome Communications Headquarters) was providing intelligence that forecasted 7 out of 10 letters would have this mineral oil-based product as their 1st or 2nd request. On reading the analysis, Santa sub-consciously made a desperate lunge for one of his home-brew bottles, but in his agitated state, knocked it over. He was then informed by a cold and clinical Rudolf, that searching for a bottle-stop was pointless, because since the refineries had shut-down, synthetic rubber didn't exist anymore. So Santa reached for his emergency chewing gum to calm his nerves instead, but was once again informed by a seemingly pleased (and certainly smug) red-nosed one, that without refined white oil, chewing gum was no longer available either (remind me to replace this smart-ar*e with Dasher as lead reindeer next year, thought FC).

And so the crisis continued. But this is a short-story, so we can't go into detail on all the

If you ever meet Father Christmas he'll tell you that he is still 100% behind the greening of the North Pole and is well on the way to balancing his energy needs between renewable and non-renewable sources. But just you try and tell him to do without petrol and its many uses and he'd probably politely suggest that you don't expect too many presents in your stocking the following year.



For more pricing information, see page 22

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