



Baby's big day out

Single, RACHAEL OAKES-ASH wondered what it's like for a parent to go to town with an infant. How pram-friendly is Sydney?

SUGGEST a trip to the city to the mother of any child under three and watch them run away screaming.

"Take my child into the city? I'd rather hang naked from the AMP tower," said my friend, Fiona, a mother of two.

This, from a woman who thinks nothing of taking on the managing director at the weekly sales meeting or entertaining for eight on Saturday night with five minutes' notice (she swears by Cuisine Courier).

"Come on," I said "it can't be that bad, we'll just pop into DJs and check out the sale before nipping into the food hall for a quick latte."

"Go without me, and here, please take my baby."

2pm: Picked up borrowed baby from girlfriend's house in Bondi, packed stroller with baby wipes, nappies, bottles, comforter, cardigan and small hip flask for emergencies (made mental note to return baby to same address later that day).

2.05pm: Waited with baby and stroller for bus. Acted nonchalant, as if parenthood is an everyday occurrence.

2.15pm: Missed first bus as cannot get stroller up stairs.

2.30pm: Missed second bus as still cannot get stroller up stairs. Wonder how Paralympians were going to get to Stadium Australia. Voice inside me told me there were wheelchair-accessible bus routes in Sydney but this was not one of them. Told voice to shut up. Voice pointed out all ferries were pram-friendly with ramps to get on. Ignored voice.

2.45pm: Tried to hail a cab but remembered at last minute that only 10 per cent of Sydney's cabs have baby capsules and only 50pc of Sydney's cabs were on the road at any one time, meaning likeli-

hood of baby capsule cab stopping on a Friday afternoon equalled likelihood of Michael Knight resigning before the Olympics.

3pm: Stroke of genius removed baby, bottles, comforter and cardie from stroller, folded stroller, hailed bus and carried collapsed stroller on to bus. Why was there no applause?

3.01pm: Remembered baby, bottles, comforter and cardie on pavement. Knew why there was no applause.

3.10pm: Arrived at train station, performed balancing act with baby, collapsed stroller, bottles, comforter and cardie and alighted from bus into gutter. Packed Baby and Co into stroller and headed for stairs. Realised too late I had chosen one of the 287 of 306 city train stations not wheelchair or pram-

accessible. Made mental note to remember the 19 stations I should have taken.

3.35pm: Smiled sweetly at man in business suit who offered to lift stroller down the stairs. Had mild panic attack as man in business suit (ie, complete stranger) lifted stroller with baby and made for ticket office. Tried to think of excuse to give girlfriend about why I let a man in a business suit run off with her baby when same man deposited child at ticket office, waited patiently for me, winked and ran for his train.

3.40pm: Called for the station-master when I wedged baby and stroller in the automatic ticket gates.

Looked for lift to station platform. Spotted two-tiered staircase and started sobbing. Tried to wheel



Pushed to the limit: The brave author discovered many unpleasant things on her 'prambulations' through Sydney, the most daunting was tackling stairs.

baby and pram gently to platform without scraping my high heels. Man grabbed bottom of pram and began a tug of war. Wondered why no-one was stopping him from taking my baby. Realised he was offering help and let go of my end of pram, baby fell forward, seat belt prevented falling further, man stumbled, regained balance and muttered as he carried stroller down stairs. Checked heels for scrapes and followed tug-of-war man to platform.

3.42pm: Train arrived. Entered carriage with baby and stroller, having conquered the art of lifting front wheels into train first. Sat among other baby-carrying women at end of cabin and suffered mild attack of "pram envy". Looked at that Black Watch tartan Bribon (the Range Rover of prams) with its swivel wheels, reversible handles, low back position, bootie cover, removable and washable liners and one-hand fold action and it's aluminium, only 7.5kg in total. I felt enormous. Compared Bribon with my stroller and started to feel inadequate. Hated baby Bribon and baby Bribon's mummy in her matching tartan pants. Spent rest of trip juggling finances in head in hope of

getting a Bribon then remembered baby was not mine and must be returned at end of day.

3.56pm: Arrived at Town Hall station. Headed for nearest escalator and safely arrived at top of station in one piece. Tried to spot stationmaster to prevent further turnstile disaster, waited patiently by swinging door to outside world until stationmaster arrived, took ticket and released me into the highway of hell known as the Town Hall-QVB underpass.

3.57pm: Tried to remember "pram rules" crammed in front of ER last night. Never give way to oncoming pedestrian traffic, ankle-gate those in front, show no mercy for pramless people and go for it. Wished for a McLaren (better than Bribon) super road buggy pram with full wheels for maximum suspension, lamented my stroller again. Made note to explore pram envy in next therapy session.

4pm: Headed for DJs for a spot of retail therapy and the lingerie sale. Lifted stroller up steps into store. Took lift to third floor. Tried on La Perla push-up in aubergine in cramped change room with baby and stroller, baby started crying (I suspected at the sight of my breasts), entertained baby with La

Perla on one breast, past its use-by-date-Bertei on other. Gave up, purchased La Perla in hope it fits and return in a month's time when it doesn't. Took still-screaming baby into parents' room on lingerie floor and waited patiently for one of three change rooms. Meantime, baby stopped crying so returned to store and headed for toy floor where baby cried at sight of one large Banana In Pyjamas.

Headed back to change room on third floor and wondered why no change room on toy and baby clothes floor. Gave up change room when noticed queue, and stuck silencing bottle in baby's mouth (and hip flask in mine). Headed for pharmacy and renewed contraceptive pill prescription.

4.20pm: Checked out Grace Bros perfume counter on the way to counteract body odour brought on by stressful La Perla experience. Realised smell was coming from baby and took lift to toy store and parents' room. Said three Hail Marys as entered sublime comfort of Grace Bros "parents' room" (felt like a fraud) which resembled a small hotel suite complete with stainless steel sink, surgical taps, microwave oven and private feeding rooms.

FIVE THINGS I WISH I'D KNOWN BEFORE

1. Always have a strategy before embarking on trips to the city with your baby and pram. Map out your route, mark parent rooms on map and stay within a 200m radius, start a gym program to work on the biceps you'll need to carry the pram up all the station stairs, design a lunch box menu (forget your favourite cafe; there's no room for a waiter and your pram).
2. Stranger danger does not count when a nice man offer to help you take stroller down stairs. Most people will offer assistance when faced with a crying mother wrestling her pram or stroller down or up the stairs.
3. Baby change rooms are not all created equal. It seems property-obsessed Sydney has crossed over into the parent rooms of this city. Any discerning mother wouldn't be seen dead in a parent room without ceiling murals to keep baby amused while changing, black leather nursing lounges (Chatswood Chase), free nappies, baby wipes, microwave ovens and TVs. Next they'll be demanding a harbour view.
4. All prams are not created equal. If you're going to take a pram or stroller into the city, make sure it's the right one for your needs. One-step-collapsing is ideal although you might want to practise at home. I never quite conquered the art of the one-step.
5. Wheelchair-friendly means pram-friendly if a person in a wheelchair can get there, so can you. Sydney buses have signs saying they are wheelchair-friendly. These are great if you don't want to collapse your pram, but be warned: don't bother in peak hour.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JON REID

Toys 'R' You

Be warned, these are the toys your children will want under the Christmas tree, writes JOHANNA LEGGATT.

The Tweenies, a group of preschoolers, communicate through song, dance and rhyme. Following their recent debut on TV here, Tweenies merchandise is tipped to take off. As well as plush toys (\$29.95) there are also Tweenies bath friends with swim rings and arm floats for \$19.95. In stores next month.



Action Man Security Defence has a built-in electronic intruder sensor which triggers head movement and speech when anyone tries to pass him. This allows children to monitor who enters their bedroom when they are not there. They cost \$55 and will be released in September.



Poo-chi the robotic dog is perfect for young children wanting a pet. The pup features animated head, ears, legs and mouth and can stand, sit or dance on tiptoe. It can sense a child's touch and its biohythmic technology allows the child to interact with the robot. It costs \$59.95 and will be released this month.



The JD Razor, already well known, is a micro-scooter with tiny wheels designed for young teenagers or workers for cheap transportation. The Razor is collapsible and easy to carry, and includes suspension. They range in price from \$139 to \$199 and are available now.