

Talk Ups

By Alisa Bonsignore

It was barely a week ago when I first heard of these toys. My friend Rob was sniping a Mickey Mouse on eBay. Looking at the picture, it was clearly the goofiest thing I had ever seen. Tiny, stumpy body, oversized head... Rob, what were you thinking? And then I learned the tale of the Talk Up....



Once upon a time (1971, actually), Mattel manufactured a series of talking dolls called Talk Ups. These aren't your ordinary talking dolls, however; rather than having a pull-string located in their backs, these dolls pulled apart at the neck: The head pulls away from the body and retracts in the same way. Mattel obviously saw the humor in this, because Funny Talk, the brunette girl in the series, says things like, "Whoops! I lost my head for a moment!" Funny Talk is made even funnier when you realize that her voice was supplied by Joanne Worley of TV's *Laugh-In*.

Okay, so that sort of thing appeals to my odd sense of humor. I felt compelled to help Rob with his quest for the Talk Ups. Immediately, I found a talking Mickey with an oversized head at auction. Then another. Then another. Boy, was I good or what? I sent all of the links to Rob, thrilled that my superior research skills had helped in his quest. Alas, I was mistaken; I had fallen for the Chatter Chum, a similar-looking pull-string chatty toy manufactured in 1976. The Chatter Chums were all well-known characters (like Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse), and were double the Mattel size at nine inches tall. They were loosely based on the Talk Up dolls, with similarly oversized heads, but the unique pull-up head had been replaced by your run-of-the-mill pull string at the back of the character.

Rob took this opportunity to educate me on the traits of the Talk Up doll to prevent further confusion. True Talk Up dolls are about 4½" tall, able to fit into even the smallest child's pocket. There were nine dolls in the series: Silly Talk, a blonde girl; Funny Talk, a brunette; Dressy, a redhead, who came with seven dresses for each day of the week; Sheri (also spelled Sherri, Sherry, and Shere, depending on what resource you consult), a woman; Casper the Friendly Ghost; Donald Duck; Daisy Duck; Minnie Mouse; and Mickey Mouse. Funny Talk and Silly Talk are the most abundant of the series.

Think you might be in possession of a real, bonafide Talk Up? Here are some sample phrases that you could expect to hear (some funnier than others):

- "That's quite a stretch!" — Funny Talk, as her pulled-away head rejoins her body
- "I can fit in your pocket." — Silly Talk
- "I like Sunday to be sunny." — Dressy (all her comments refer to days of the week)
- "Here I am, Mickey Mouse!" — Mickey Mouse
- "(Oooh) Oh, I scared myself!" — Casper
- "I lose my head over you!" — Daisy Duck
- "Oh Boy! Qqquuuaakkk!" — Donald Duck, in that angry slurring Donald voice

The dolls are in relatively short supply. They were only manufactured for one year and few seem to have survived two decades of obscurity. Not that they sold well in the first place: Rob's mother is rumored to have picked up his for \$1 at a Mattel outlet bargain bin sometime during the Carter administration. Talk Ups rarely appear on eBay, and the few that do are usually misidentified, making them even harder to track down (it takes some creative keyword combinations and a lot of patience to separate an unidentified Silly Talk from other chatty dolls).

An unopened, mint-on-card Funny Talk sold for \$91 last year. An auction for a MOC Minnie Mouse closed last month at \$86 with five bids without meeting the seller's reserve price. The same item was re-listed by the same seller, appearing on November 4 with an ambitious opening price of \$200, with no bids yet. A poorly classified Donald and Daisy Duck (the ad did not mention that they were Talk Up dolls!) were a steal recently, closing at \$40 for the pair with just five bidders. Most Talk Ups in good condition seem to run more than \$30 and can go far higher, depending on how many bidders enter the fray.

So next time you're rummaging through your childhood toy box and stumble across a pocket-sized talking doll with an oversized head, don't throw it out! List it at auction and make a collector's day.