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Pleo robot dinosaur

Must-have new friend or expensive paperweight?

by Stuart Miles published on 29 April 2008

Pleo is a friendly looking robot dinosaur Camarasaurus, but is it any better than other robots on the market, or is this just another executive toy destined to become an expensive paperweight? We agree to babysit one to find out.

The 21-inch long, 7.5-inch high latex covered dinosaur robot comes with a power charger, a leaf for feeding and a thin instruction book. The latex skin covers an exoskeleton that has over 100 custom-designed gears, and 14 motors for highly-articulated movement, the skin also covers eight sensors waiting to be stroked, spoken to, viewed on and even moved and using the sensors Pleo reacts accordingly.

There is no remote control, no quick fire way of controlling it and once it's out of the box, you're on your own.

The battery, which gives you around 40 minutes of play before needing another 3-4 hour charge, slots in under his belly and luckily there is an on/off switch for when you've had enough. If the battery does run out, which of course it will, then Pleo nods to sleep rather than keel over and play dead.

Beyond that there is a mute button if the sniffles, groans and munching noises get too much, and a USB socket and SD Card slot so you can connect Pleo to your computer and download new behaviours from the supporting Pleo world.

Pleoworld offers you information, the chance to chat with other Pleo owners and a place to get downloads. It's like The Caravan Club only for people that have spent 250 quid on a baby robot dinosaur.

Back to the toy, I mean pet, in front of you and



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like any newborn dinosaur there is a hatching stage to endure. This lasts for up to 10 minutes and sees your new friend trying to stand up, yawn and generally getting used to what's going on. The more you interact the better this, say makers Ugobe, will go.

Of course you're not done yet and you've still got another 45 minute stage to go through before you've got a fully functioning robot 1-week-old Camarasaurus.

Once fully fledged it has a range of tricks up its sleeve to impress you with (it doesn't actually) and a hour in you'll either think it's the best thing in the world or have got bored already.

So what can you do? Well there seems to be a lot of stroking and petting. Commands to sit will work (if you've downloaded the behaviour) however don't expect your little critter to play ball (did they even have balls in the Jurassic period?).

If you're looking for a bonding experience you can feed it with the included plastic leaf and listen out for the munching noises or if Pleo isn't hungry play tug of war, although Pleo is no T-Rex so expect to win everytime.

Being over 30, I fall into the "Lets get one for the office" and on this basis would have to agree it's a heavy paperweight. After showing everyone I know the new gizmo and even thinking about taking it to a couple of meetings, the fact that it doesn't really do much and the battery life is so poor it's already started to gather dust. Mind you, it looks good just sitting there on the desk. This isn't your average piece of plastic tat.

Feeling that maybe it would fair better with kids, we gave the Pleo to a 2-year-old girl. The response as you can imagine was one of wonder and awe. It was kissed, patted, cuddled and manhandled and the poor family dog was forgotten about for 10 minutes.

At a glance

What is it?

Robot dinosaur

Good

Life-like, like a real pet

Bad

Doesn't do much, poor battery life

Verdict

Fido start counting the days

Price £250

Our score

8/10

Your score

?/10

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Then Pleo ended up in a 9-year-old girl's hands and it finally got to learn the true meaning of being loved. Photographed from all angles, cuddled, kissed, patted, and played with, in the 20 minute experiment (the things we do for you) Pleo had not only replaced the family pet (they didn't actually have one but if they did it would have), but the Nintnedo Wii as well.

When asked which our 9-year-old would prefer given the choice, the Wii or a robot that doesn't do much, we surprisingly got "Pleo". However her parents, quickly suggested that the novelty and excitement would soon wear off probably after a week and annoyance at the battery life.

VERDICT

Pleo is a very clever robot that is sure to entertain your kids as they look after their new family dog replacement.

However as there is no remote control or ability to control your robot pet, you might find yourself, just as with a new puppy, getting frustrated when it doesn't do what you want it to.

This is frighteningly the way that robots and no doubt pets (Just as Sci-Fi writer Philip K Dick predicted) will go, and the soft latex skin only helps the realism.

Fido, start counting the days.