



Left: Nicholas "Santa" Claus

Above: Taking a break before harnessing up to fly

AN INTERVIEW WITH SANTA CLAUS

Preparing for the Midnight Trip

By Lorraine Payette

Getting ready for the big trip has almost become second nature for the Clauses of 1 North Pole Lane, Presentville, NP. Almost, but never quite, because there is always so much to consider.

"Travel was a lot easier years ago," said Nicholas aka "Santa Claus." "Back before NORAD and all the newfangled regulations, it was pretty much make the toys, wrap them, pack the sleigh, and away we go. But then people started looking a lot harder at everything, and we've had to adapt to the times."

Back in 1948, the US Air Force sent out an important communiqué telling the world that an "early warning radar net to the north" had detected "one unidentified sleigh, powered by eight reindeer, at 14,000 feet [4,300 meters], heading 180 degrees."

The message quickly got to the North Pole, and the elves changed the route to make sure Santa could still do his job undisturbed. However, in 1955, Santa got together with

(the now present-day bankrupted) Sears company and set up a telephone line to reach children more quickly than he could by letter. A misprint in the phone number accidentally connected them instead with the Continental Air Defense Command (CONAD) alerting Colonel Harry Shoup to this unusual aircraft and its pilot. He started tracking the sleigh, and reporting Santa's location to those who were interested. He also sent out a press release stating "CONAD, Army, Navy and Marine Air Forces will continue to track and guard Santa and his sleigh on his trip to and from the U.S. against possible attack from those who do not believe in Christmas."

NORAD took over in 1958, and now coordinates tracking Santa's trip, aiding whenever necessary. They have helped him get all necessary international permits for border crossings, and have made sure he is recognized as "undoubtedly friendly" in no-fly zones, as well as cleared him for all danger, restricted and advisory areas.

Due to his years of experience, Santa had little difficulty in obtaining his private and professional pilot's licenses. However, he is required to do a road test every year to make sure that in the case of emergency landings, he is capable of manoeuvring safely over various terrain. This is usually done with a horse and sulky to help him maintain his anonymity, but he has been seen more than once driving out on the Thousand Islands Parkway heading toward Gananoque. Road examiner "Happy the Elf" is pleased to say that Santa has a flawless record and expects it to remain that way.

To make the world trip, the sleigh and reindeer have got to be in top form. What looks like a simple wooden sleigh with basic metal runners is actually a very advanced piece of technology. While the sack used to move presents around is a simple bag, the compartment that actually holds the toys is a portal into another dimension, designed by the same team who helped Dr. Who create the TARDIS!

"That extra space is essential," he said. "With nearly 2 billion children worldwide who need to receive gifts, we have to find the most efficient way of getting them there. TARDIS Tech joined with the makers of the SC Third Millennium Sleigh Corporation to create something with infinite cargo capacity and the ability to twist through time making it more than possible to deliver every present to every child before dawn. The trick is to remain inconspicuous – we don't want anyone stumbling onto the science behind our magic."

In the stables, the reindeer are kept in top form by a dedicated squad of elves from "Lapland". Honoured to get a chance to work with the North Pole team, they have created special diets and training regimens to make sure only the strongest and best fliers pull the sleigh.

"Although people only see eight or nine reindeer at any time, there are actually many more," said Santa. "People know the names of the main team, but there are always others waiting to take over in case of emergency. When "Donner" pulled a hamstring muscle and couldn't fly, "Astra" stepped in to fill that important place. "Rudolph" also has a back up and – contrary to rumour – his nose is a perfectly healthy genetic mutation. His offspring all have the same wonderful ability."

Even toy making isn't what it once was. Every toy has to pass international standards, or it doesn't go on the sleigh.

"So much has changed now," said Santa. "Small parts, things that pinch or break or come apart or might be toxic. We had to hire an entire lab of specialist elves to make sure that children have the best without getting hurt. We still make occasional mistakes, but far less now than there were before."

"Even Santa's lifestyle has changed," said his wife, "Holly". "We've brought in healthy snacks and a gym. The elf fitness trainer is a toughie." While cookies and milk are still a big treat, the rest of the year he sticks to a carefully regulated diet and schedule so he will never get too tired before the job is done.

"It isn't easy, but every time a child smiles, it's worth it," said Santa. "And remember, there is an elf in every house who keeps in touch with me on Christmas Eve and all year round. They tell me when you're sleeping, so snuggle in tight – we're ready to make your wishes come true."

'Time and Relative Dimension in Space (TARDIS) – method of conveyance, trademarked by the BBC

LH

All information concerning the history of Santa Tracking and NORAD may be found online.



Above: Holly Claus

TOP ROW

Far right: The all important road test – Santa and Happy the Elf on the Thousand Islands Parkway

Middle: Waiting for a turn in the flight harness

Left: Elf Dan making some adjustments on a training sleigh



BOTTOM ROW

Right: The all important road test – Santa and Happy the Elf on the Thousand Islands Parkway

Left: Many animals are pets at the North Pole, and Shorty the Goat likes to help Elf Dan with sleigh maintenance

