

To go, to be, to play

Brio, the family brand

Text: Heiko Schulz
Photo: Andreas Ackerup

Do you know this company? Probably not as well as you think you do.

Nature and society have imposed many duties on parents: 1. they must bring up and care for their children; 2. they must nurture their own relationship with love and 3. they have to earn money. As far as point one is concerned, a certain Swedish company can offer some inspiration and support.

The home of Brio is Sweden, where people are renowned for their

fondness for children. The company is justifiably famous worldwide for its wooden train sets, but sometimes it's wrongly assumed that these are all the company makes. Since 1947, Brio has also been designing and producing baby carriages, pushchairs and other smart items of furniture for the modern family. Today there are three Brio product ranges: *to go*, *to be* and *to play*. They are all intended to help enlightened parents bring up their children in the 21st century.

To go

Anyone who has tried to board a full bus with a pushchair knows that travelling with children isn't always easy. Brio therefore thinks up and builds pushchairs which make life in the big city much less stressful.

A shining example is the Sitty model, which has been specially designed for city living, where busy traffic and conditions not conducive to pushchairs prevail. This vehicle smoothly negotiates all obstacles of day-to-day living. Even slalom courses

and bumpy surfaces present no real challenge. Weighing just 7.5 kg and extremely compact when folded, these pushchairs fit easily into any car – and any bus. To ensure its little passenger the soft ride it has been used to for nine months, this mobile flyweight has an extremely comfortable seat with pillow and cushioned arm rests. Also, as only one thing makes your little treasure grumpier than lack of comfort, and that's lack of food, the Sitty has plenty of room to store an adequate supply of refreshments.

As well as the Sitty, the Brio fleet also includes Happy and other baby carriages. All can be adapted to suit the particular needs of the owner and/or the one pushing. Brio offers useful upgrades like sunshades, seat linings, insect nets and nappy pockets so that your little one feels quite at home even when it is out and about.

(One reason why even celebrities like Stella McCartney push their youngsters around in one.)

To be

Feeding children is a problem, particularly when they're still very small but want to eat just like grown-ups do. Civilisation has found a solution: the highchair which places children at eye-level with their parents at mealtimes. Very comfortable, smart and safe, the Brio Grow is the ideal piece of furniture for the young diner!

Thanks to its space-saving, geometric design, this new highchair integrates perfectly with the interior decor of style-conscious parents (and

without lowering the tone set by the Arne Jacobsen chair).

Brio has also considered functionality in its design. A softly upholstered seat ensures comfort and an adjustable harness guarantees safety. You can bet that, once it is enthroned in such style, your little tyke will tuck in with a lot less moaning and complaint. In the best case scenario, baby is now burped and taken off to beddy-byes. But, experience has shown that little children will do everything they can to stay awake rather than do

what's good for them and their parents. So, the Brio programme includes a very cleverly designed place to sleep: the Sleep children's bed, the brainchild of Peter Andersson and Matti Klenell, two of Sweden's most highly praised and innovative designers. The bed they have produced offers exceptional comfort and versatility: the bed "grows" with its occupant. It starts as a baby's cot with protective rails all round, but is transformed into a junior bed in next to no time just by removing the rails. As a





piece of furniture, it is very stable and robust enough to withstand the lively habits of a 6-year old.

Naturally, a sleeping place should also have its own individual colour and there's a range for modern parents to choose from. The right dab of paint guarantees a smooth transition into every child's favourite world: the world of toys. And, when you have the advantage of being young and small, toys are perhaps the most important reason for scrambling out of the Brio bed in the morning.

To play

Play is as much part of childhood as earning a living is part of being an adult. That's the way it should be, because a lot is learnt through play: how to deal with emotions and conflict, for example, and also how to distinguish between reality and fiction, i.e. how to tell that your nasty big brother isn't really the wicked robber Hotzenpotz. Science has come to realise just how important play is for human development (after all, we spend most of the first ten most for-

mative years of life in play). Ludology, an actual academic discipline, attests to a new, extensive awareness of play and a belief in the "power of play."

But the very fact that play has become so relevant has made many parents unsure about what toys they should buy; which toys are the most instructive; what level of difficulty is suitable at different ages; which are the sturdiest toys which still leave plenty of room for imaginative play; and which toys are safe.

Brio is aware of its responsibility towards parents and children, and deals with important questions like these every day. Anyone who has looked at the company's website is amazed by "Building Blocks", a toy guide that helps even the most inexperienced godfather choose a suitable new acquisition for the playroom. Simply select from one the seven different age ranges, and you'll learn everything you need to know (and a bit more besides); for example, that in the first six months, your child deve-

lops motor skills and hand-eye coordination just by picking up and putting down toys. The perfect Brio product to introduce a baby of up to six months to the world of play is the classic rattle.

To answer a child who wants to know who actually made the toy, parents don't have to put it down to "Father Christmas" any more. They can simply say: Isak Akerlund. Akerlund is a design engineer at Brio. After serving his apprenticeship in this traditional company, he

invented "Networkers", and to some extent he re-invented the train wheel.

Akerlund's concept is so simple, it's brilliant! It combines the classic wooden railway set with the modern, high-tech world of computer networks. Where sand and building blocks once littered the playroom, it's now emails, data, etc.

It may well be that, one day, four-year-olds will no longer dream of becoming engine drivers. Instead, they will say: "when I grow up, I want to be a system administrator".

Brio is something of a modern pro-family movement, inspiring a new generation of parents and children with clever products. Only one question remains. What will the next big Brio innovation for children be? We can't wait to see!

Brio, founded in 1884, stands for Bröderna Ivarsson Osby (Ivarsson Osby brothers); today Brio is a group with subsidiaries in ten countries. It supplies to about fifty countries. www.brio.net