

In United States, drones take off as Christmas gifts

December 20 2014, by Loic Pialat

Andrew Steele, 15, chose a drone as a Christmas present. And he's not alone. Thousands of drone fans—young and old—turned out at a recent show in Los Angeles.

While historically people have thought of drones as military aircraft or flying devices used by businesses, the growth of drones as recreational vehicles has exploded.

And the range of devices on offer—many of which could end up giftwrapped under the Christmas tree next week—is as varied as the demand for them.

"I really like how it stays static, how it stays at the same place when you move it," said the teenager, whose parents had to fork out \$1,200 for his present.

The success of the quadricopter has enabled the Chinese manufacturer who makes them to multiply the number of people it employs by 100 in eight years.

Tony Mendoza, a salesman with UAV-RC.com who was manning a stand at the LA fair, showed off a much more basic model "This happens to be a simple drone and it starts at \$25," he said.

"It is basically for children and parents wanting to get something for their kids for Christmas."

Headache for regulators

Of course, the more drones are given as presents this Christmas, the more of them will be flying around in the New Year.

That is a headache for regulators.

"It's important, no matter how small the drone is, to be aware of your surroundings, making sure you're not operating the drone in a fashion that would endanger anybody," said former White House advisor Lisa Ellman.

In addition, you have to be sure "that you're not spying on your neighbors in your backyard," she added.

But even if [drones](#) are becoming accessible for everyone, flying one is not necessarily as easy as falling off a log.

Adam Gibson is a professional who regularly organizes training sessions for beginners.

"To properly know how to use the system, I would say you need about two weeks, 20 hours a week," said Gibson, boss of Ctrl.Me.

To avoid accidents, you need to both be able to pilot it and configure it correctly in the first place. If it is not set up right, the machine risks crashing.

"A lot of the crashes that we see are from not properly calibrating the compass or it could also be that someone has painted it and when they paint it, it interferes with the GPS," said Gibson.

Once you have configured it correctly and learned to fly it, the sky is the

limit, as long as you stay below 390 feet (120 meters), which is the altitude limit above which it risks getting mixed up with other, larger craft.

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