

When St Nick came to town



Tens of thousands line central-city streets to enjoy the spectacle and catch a glimpse of Father Christmas at lively celebration

Susan Strongman

Head float builder Peter Taylor was keen for a beer after he put the last decorated platform back into storage after the 82nd Santa Parade in Auckland yesterday.

It was Mr Taylor's 40th year looking after about 28 of the 35 floats that proceeded through the central city in the Farmers Santa Parade.

He got up at 5am, and was done by about 4.30pm.

"It's quite a physically hard job, the floats come out of the warehouse for their little day in the sun, they get dusted down, and then they go back again for the year."

Most years, between 130,000 and 150,000 people came along to see Father Christmas, he said.

With this year's event starting an hour earlier, organisers had some concerns about the turnout – though they were pleased with the number of attendees, Mr Taylor said.

"There was a great rush of people arriving towards the end."

The parade began at the corner of Cook St and Mayoral Drive at 1pm, and headed down Queen St before winding up Albert St to finish on Wellesley St.

Crowds of young and old lined the streets and cheers burst out as the floats went by.

Police on festive bikes wearing green reindeer antlers looped their way through the crowds, followed closely by red and gold fairies on roller skates.

A floating Santa Elmo imported from Canada and a giant Cookie Monster turned Queen St into Sesame St, to the excitement of the little ones.

Lucy Gardiner, 24, said she'd brought her 3-year-old son Todd to the parade this year to prove Santa's real.

The biggest cheers and applause went to Santa as he rolled on to Mayoral Drive on his sleigh, flanked by little kiwi birds, dolphins and a pohutukawa tree.

Later, Father Christmas fans headed to the party at Aotea Square, where they were entertained by singing, dancing and carnival rides.



The sun shone on the Auckland crowds at yesterday's annual Farmers Santa Parade. Picture / Jason Greenham