

# The bear facts

For Eunice Beeton, every day's a teddy bear's picnic. She gave **Janis Fraser** the bear facts.

**E**UNICE Beeton, just back from the Cotswolds — heart of the teddy bear world — is just as you'd imagine a teddy bear expert should be.

Soft voice, gentle smile and — naturally — a gold teddy bear brooch pinned on her caramel, teddy bear-toned blouse.

The front door of her Durban flat is a step straight into teddy bear land. Shelves of teddies from her Thread Bear range sit companionably around the tea table, scan miniature copies of the newspaper through small spectacles and generally keep a bright and shiny eye — safety secured of course — on affairs.

Among the mohair and cotton-cord bears, Eunice points out a rare bear made from hand-woven silk of the mopani worm. He sits in a romper suit in his high chair just along from a wedding group decked in lace and orange blossom.

Each bear bears an identity lable with his name and pedigree. These are special bears, collectors' items which appeal to adults just as much as youngsters.

The mohair bears cost R300 or more, but do-it-yourself velour kits start from as little as R25.

How did the bear business begin? Back in 1985 in America — where President Teddy Roosevelt started the bear mania in 1902 — says Eunice.

"I was in New York, visiting my daughter, who was studying patchwork. She said I should do something: 'What about teddies?' They're big in the United States."

Eunice was hooked from teddy number one. She's made a point of studying the history behind the teddy bear mania which has made vintage teddies big news in the Southeby's and Christie's catalogues.

The Germans had cherished their toy bruins for more than a century. Then, in 1903, when Roosevelt refused to shoot a brown bear which had been tethered as a target on a hunting trip, the Americans took them to their hearts as well.

Says Eunice: "When a Washington Post drew a picture of Roosevelt walking away from the captive bear the whole of the United States was taken up by the compassion. A couple in Brooklyn decided to make a toy bear, which they put in their shop window. It was sold immediately and that was the start of big business."

Now bears are quite a business for Eunice and her daughter, Di Sturgess. They give bear-making classes in Di's Durban North studio, sell the do-it-yourself kits and send out Bear Mania — a newsletter for teddyophiles.

On December 4 they will be holding The First Annual Teddy Bear and Doll Fair at the Virginia Preparatory School Hall in Margaret Maytom Avenue, Durban North, from 9am to 4pm. Admission is R2 for adults and R1 for children.

There will be demonstrations and bear signing, special dolls and bears in all shapes and sizes, a children's teddy bear's picnic and storytime plus a competition for the best dressed bear and the smallest and largest bears.

Golden oldies will be on display and there will be raffles, door prizes a tea garden and lots more. There's ample parking and Eunice — on telephone 2072255 — or Di — on 523497 — will give further information.

■ To celebrate the First Annual Teddy Bear and Doll Fair, Eunice has donated a heirloom of the



Picture: LAURIE BLOOMFIELD

EUNICE Beaton and her Thread Bears. The ruffled chap on her lap is the R300 prize.

future as a prize in our bear competition. He's a hand-made mohair bear — dressed in his best bib and tucker — valued at more than R200, plus a sew-it-yourself Bertram Bear kit.

To take part in the Lifestyle/Teddybear competition, just answer the questions on the coupon below, cut it out, paste it to a postcard and send it to: Teddy Contest, Natal Newspapers, PO Box 47516, Greyville 4023.

The competition is not open to employees of Natal Newspapers or their immediate families.

## Lifestyle/Teddybear competition

Name:.....

Address: .....

Code: .....

Telephone (day):.....

Question:

1. What's the name of Eunice Beaton and Di Sturgess's business?

Answer:.....

2. When will the Teddy Bear and Doll Fair take place?

Answer:.....