

BEAR FACTS

by JENNIFER SCHULTZ

photographs by RUSSELL HAMMOND



The Bearton kit bears in three sizes, each with its own stamp of individuality, whether it's a ruffled lace collar; severe pincé-nez; tartan neck ribbon; crisp sailor collar; Christmas fabric waistcoat or natty bow-tie.

EUNICE BEATON lovingly makes and restores traditional Teddy bears. Join one of her classes and give a home to Bearnard, Beartrice or Bear-nice, from her Bearton range

THREAD BEARS is carrying on a tradition made famous by the bear-hunting US President, Theodore Roosevelt. On an unsuccessful hunting trip in Mississippi, his companions captured a bear cub and tied it to a tree for Roosevelt to shoot. He couldn't.

A political correspondent, Berryman, who was there, depicted the President and the bear in a cartoon in the *Washington Post*. Their President's compassion captured the Americans' imagination, prompting a shopkeeper's wife to make a bear and place it in their shop window. As demand grew, they approached President Roosevelt to name their bear after him. He agreed – thinking the craze would be a flash in the pan – and so the Teddy bear was born.

In Germany, at about the same time, there were similar

bear stirrings. Margaret Steiff, a polio victim, was encouraged by her art-student nephew to make a bear from a drawing of his. She took it to the Leipzig Fair where it aroused little interest. As she was packing up, an American ordered 3 000 – the Steiff bear had hit the market. Instantly recognisable, each has a button on one ear and looks different from the American Teddy – an original now sells for thousands of dollars.

Simultaneously in 1907, the English developed *their* Ted, named after King Edward VII.

EUNICE'S bears, similar to the English bear, come in kit form and have the traditional five joints and hump back. Pattern pieces for each size are printed on the back of a cotton-rich velour – the most appropriate fabric she could find in South Africa.





1 The first bears Eunice ever made. The quaint pince-nez perched on the end of the Mommy-bear's nose is stocked by dollmakers. The heads didn't turn in the early stages – surprisingly, she actually found it easier to joint the neck than sew on the head.

2 Upholstery fabrics, as long as they're the same thickness, can be used for the bears as the joints can be bought separately.

3 Before Eunice started serious bear making, she created a trunk full for her family and grandchildren.

4 Teddies were originally dolls for boys – Eunice made this soft, fun Hunnybear to her grandson Lee's requirements.

5 The Bearton kit bears – including Bearnard, Beartrice and baby Bearnice – complete with pince-nez and ruffled broderie anglaise collars, hard at work.



The kits also include a joint system masterminded by her husband (her craft has infiltrated the whole family); eyes; paw-and-foot pads; embroidery thread; satin ribbon; and a swingtag for the bear's maker and its given name.

A delightful practice, developed in Eunice's classes is for students to write a little love letter on the tag removed from the joint packet, and place it in their bear's tummy when filling it. The recipient not only receives a special hand-made bear, but also a hidden message of love of which they're unaware.

Her bear-making lesson consists of two classes of four-and-a-half hours each, at the end of which the bear maker takes home her own Mommy, Daddy or Baby bear. Eunice is charmed by the names given to their bears by some of the



students – like Samson and Delilah – and says that, although they're made from the same kits, they are all unique.

At the end of the two days there's a photo session of the students (more like proud mothers) and their prodigies.

A shoot with Eunice and the bears she's created would demand a very wide-angled lens, as her passion for bears began years ago. She has made scores for her family, from leather-waistcoated Cowboy bears, to "humungous" fun bears, to short-sighted Mommy bears wearing pince-nez, to tiny tartan bears . . .

As a little girl she loved fabrics and so, when she retired and wanted a craft, her daughter Di – who helps with classes – suggested she try her hand at patchwork. It didn't grab her, but in '84 a magazine article Di showed her about Teddy bears did.

In the '80s there wasn't the interest in bears there is now, and Eunice battled to find the accessories. She had to start from scratch and design and manufacture what wasn't available – like the joints for instance!

She also has a bear clinic where treasured but tattered bears are lovingly restored to their former glory with anything from fur transplants to pad replacements – although some collectors feel bears should *not* be restored.

The marketing side of Eunice's bear making fell into place when a gift shop began ordering a bear family a month. This soon escalated and Eunice, who was still running a home, decided to give bears a break.

Again Di was the catalyst for her mom's revived bear interest – Di's quilting group had become fascinated with bears. A year later, Eunice met Bev Essers at a quilting meeting and agreed to share a table with her at a craft fair. She struck the right market! Orders poured in – everyone wanted a bear in their lives. She soon began teaching the quilters and, from this, her kit developed, complete with instructions.

She isn't loathe to teach people how to make bears – she'd love to see lots of individual bears made by various artists on the market – and, since May this year, has run regular classes. If the rage continues, she'll be doing it for a good few bears to come.

I can't think of a warmer person from whom to learn the bear necessities.

Buyer's Guide: To send your bear to hospital; buy a bear or bear kit; or attend a class, phone Eunice on (031) 207-2255; 52-3492; or write to her at Box 22377, Glenashley, 4022. For a special, introductory-price KIT, fill in the coupon below. ●



TEDDY-BEAR-KIT ORDER FORM

Please complete the order form below and post it to: **Thread Bears, Box 22377, Glenashley, 4022**; enclosing your cheque or postal order made out to: **Thread Bears**.

I would like to order (fill in required number next to bear's name):

- 35cm-high Bearnard R43 (incl P&P)
- 30cm-high Beartrice R33 (incl P&P)
- 23cm-high Bearnice R28 (incl P&P)

All from the Bearton range.

For Namibia, Botswana and Zambia, add R1,25 to each of the above prices for every bear purchased.

I enclose my cheque/postal order for R
(Regret no credit-card facilities.)

Name:

Address:

..... **Code:**

Tel (H): **(B):**

Money-back guarantee if not satisfied with your purchase, and goods are returned within seven days of receipt of order.

Thread Bears, 191 North Ridge Road, Durban, 4001.

Note: Variation in colour may occur if you buy bear kits at different times.