

From left to right: Reggie Rabbit (adopted),
Tango, Banjo, Brandon (adopted)



Discovering Russell Bears

Kim Russell
is an artist
who has
been making
a name for
herself 'Down
Under'
;Jo Rothery
finds out
what makes
this multiple
award winner
so successful

Most collectors, like myself, invariably find that it's the face which first draws them to a particular bear. There will be something in the expression which reaches out to you and seems to be clamouring 'take me home, take me home!'

Similarly for most bear artists, working on the face, giving the bear a personality and making it 'come to life' is the most enjoyable and satisfying part of the creative process.

That is certainly the case for Australian bear artist Kim Russell, who has a remarkable flair for creating bears - and other creatures - who quite literally appear to have a life of their own. Gaze into those charming features and there's an immediate connection between you and the little fellow in question - you feel almost as though through that wee face and realistic, smiling eyes, you look into the window of his soul.

Kim lives in Perth, Western Australia, and I came across her work quite by chance, while browsing the internet. I was hooked the moment I saw her Russell Bears and it was no surprise to learn that although she began making bears as

recently as 2003, she is already a prodigious award-winner.

In fact, her attractive website was the prize for one of her most recent successes, winning Bear of Show in last year's TABA - The Australian Bear Awards. In Australia, she has won 95% of the competitions she has entered, taking first places and Bear of Show in around 20 cases over the last two or three years. An even more prestigious accolade has come her way this year - a Toby Industry Choice Award for 2007, thanks to her stunning Frog Prince character - a truly beautiful bear with a delightful, quirky frog.

So often a passion for teddy bears and a love of animals go hand in hand and this is certainly at the heart of Kim's ability to conjure up such 'lifelike' characters.

"I'm 38, married to Darrin, we have no kids but we have a Rottweiler and a cat - my pets and my bears are my substitute babies," she says. "All my inspiration comes from animals, all sorts of animals. I love to create a realistic face that connects with people. I have recently started commission bears for collectors' dogs - just a good



Kim with some
of her bears