

# Around the World With Ty

BY MATT ALDERTON

## BEANIES & MORE TAKES A LOOK AT COLLECTING AROUND THE GLOBE!

**I**n 1993, when Ty began selling nine small bean bag toys at stores in the United States, nobody could have predicted they would take over the world. But that's exactly what they did.

Today, collectors in countries on six continents are scouring their local retailers for new releases, combing the Web for foreign exclusives and meeting with fellow Ty enthusiasts to showcase their collections. Separated by geography, customs and even language, they are united by their common passion for all things Beanie.



## AUSTRALIA

Linda Baldock calls herself "a superbeanieholic from Down Under." She lives in Perth, Western Australia, with her husband, two children and a collection of more than 800 Ty products.

Baldock, 33, began collecting in 2003 when her husband, Rod, bought her Iggy and Roam.

"I was so impressed by the character that was in each creation. That was the beginning of a serious addiction," she says. Since then she has acquired 746 Beanie Babies, 13 Buddies, 15 Punkies, 8 Classics, 12 Pluffies, 7 Jingle Beanies and 2 Teenie Beanie Boppers. "My husband works long and hard to keep us in Beanies."

A big part of collecting in Australia is trading, according to Baldock. She and her husband regularly visit their local retailers and scour the online trading boards for unique finds.



Linda Baldock of Perth, Western Australia, is a "superbeanieholic from Down Under!"



Aussiebear, Wattle and Koowee, Baldock has been able to trade with friends all over the world in countries such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Holland.

Of course, Ty isn't the only plush on the block in Aussieland, but it is quality, choice and value that keep the Australians coming back to Ty.

"When all is said and done," she says, "Ty has my heart. I can leave my baby with a Pluffie and feel safe knowing that it is a quality product that won't fall apart in his little hands. I trust Ty with my kids, and I know others feel the same."

## CANADA

Because she is disabled, Andrea Brook rarely leaves the house — except to hunt for new Beanies. Brook, 41, collects with her 75-year-old mother in Ontario, Canada. Always an avid collector of stamps and coins, then miscellaneous mice and dragons, Brook received her first Beanie, Early, from a friend in 1999.

"That same year my sister-in-law gave my mom a Fuzz the bear," she says. "And they say once you have two you are hooked. Well, we were!"

Together, Brook and her mother have some 900 Beanie Babies and 200 other Ty products. Her most prized Beanie is an Old Face teddy without a hang tag, which she gave to her husband while they were dating.

Pam Stradeski also lives in Ontario, Canada. An accidental collector, Stradeski, 45, started collecting Beanies in 1997 when she purchased Iggy and Rainbow for her son, who loved lizards. Her name was entered into a drawing for a Princess bear and she won, sealing her fate as a zealous collector.



"The staff and customers in the store made such a fuss over my win and clued me into Beanies," she says. "The rest is collecting history."

Stradeski and Brook agree that Canada is ripe with collector expectation due to what Stradeski calls its "Beanie drought." Canada has not had a country exclusive in more than a year and many Canadian collectors want to find Beanies that will be valuable to traders in other countries. Especially popular are Garcia and Peace bears, as are the Garfield Beanies and the hard-to-find Ratzo.

But collecting in Canada is about more than finding and selling the most valuable Beanies, Brook says. Canadians value quality workmanship, and they like the sense of community that collecting brings them.

"I think that at the beginning people in Canada collected because they thought that the Beanies would be valuable," she says, "but now they collect for the pure enjoyment it brings to them. Beanie collectors are caring individuals and Beanies are not the only things that they share. They share life experiences and the joy of having friends."



Canadian Pam Stradeski's first Beanie was a Princess bear.



Before stockpiling Beanies, Andrea Brook of Ontario, Canada, collected stamps, coins, mice and dragons.

## JAPAN

Japan is the birthplace of the Samurai, a legendary class of warriors that live according to a special code of honor and ethics. Ty's Japanese fans collect with the very same spirit of loyalty, self-discipline and respect that is embedded so deeply in their history.

"Some collectors try to gain peace of mind in collecting Beanies," says one collector in Tokyo, Tomoko.\* She started collecting Beanies in 1997 when her niece introduced her to them. "She presented it to me, and then I [wanted] to collect them because they were so cute!"

Since then, Tomoko has amassed a collection of Beanies that she says is much too large to count. It includes dogs, cats and, of course, bears, which she says are the most popular type of Beanie in Japan. Her personal favorites are her Billionaire Bears.

Japanese collectors say that trading is an important part of their hobby because it gives them a unique opportunity to make friends, at home and abroad.

"I love to trade with many people," Tomoko says. "I had a few great friends in our trading. I would like to meet with many foreign countries' people in trading Beanies."



The M.C. Bears are among the most coveted Beanies in Japanese trades. Tomoko has her own MasterCard, but because she lives in Japan she is not able to earn her own M.C. Beanie. "Even if I use [much] money to buy many things by [MasterCard], I will not be able to exchange my points for Ty M.C. Beanies. [I am] so disappointed."

Her fellow Japanese echo the sentiment, hoping for future exclusives that will follow in the footsteps of Beanies such as Sakura and Nipponia. But as the Samurai lifestyle suggests, patience is key.

"If it is impossible for them to get it, they give up to get it soon," Tomoko says.

## THE UNITED KINGDOM

Sue Owen spends her spare time raising funds for cancer research in the U.K. She has raised more than £20,000 — nearly \$36,000 — since 2002, much of which she says was gathered through the sale of Ty products. She runs a Web site, called **CHERISH** ([www.boglin.net](http://www.boglin.net)), to reach out to collectors all over the world, using Beanies and custom-made Beanie clothing to raise both money and cancer awareness.

But Owen, 48, doesn't just sell Beanies; she collects them too. She currently resides in Buckinghamshire, England, but began collecting in Germany in 1997. She purchased some feline Beanies, as well as Erin and Halo, and truly caught the collecting bug when she returned to the U.K. in 1999.

Owen says her collection has grown so large that she has stopped counting; but a few Beanies stand out as her favorites, including Libearty, which her husband gave her.

"However, it is those bears which I managed to obtain as a result of hard work and persistent searching in shops or through trading that have given me great satisfaction," she says.

A large trend in the U.K., Owen says, is purchasing Beanies by mail.

"I have found it difficult to find new Beanies locally," she says, "so I now buy by mail order from a shop that I have visited in another town." Even in London, she says, the latest Beanies are scarce, and so British collectors rely heavily on trusted retailers throughout the country to help keep their collections current, in person and by mail.

And right now, keeping current in the U.K. means clamoring to your retailer for the American city and state bears.

"It is always exciting to get a new country exclusive," Owen remarks. "And we have been lucky with some beautiful U.K. Beanies in the past."

But Owen agrees that obtaining exclusives is secondary to the joy she receives from building global friendships.

"I think the days of hoping to make a quick profit are long gone!" she says. "The community theory is probably more relevant nowadays. Before I started collecting Beanies, there was nothing in my life that would have brought me so close to people in other countries. Such friendships are not unique in the Ty collecting community and are perhaps one of the most positive spin-offs of the hobby."\*



*Sue Owen uses Beanies to raise money for cancer research from her home in Buckinghamshire, England.*



**"SOME COLLECTORS TRY TO GAIN PEACE OF MIND IN COLLECTING BEANIES," SAYS ONE COLLECTOR IN TOKYO.**

\* name has been changed per collector's request