

On the Road With Jan Brett

Author gets ready to roll to promote latest book

Rutherfordton, N.C.; Bossier City, La.; Fargo, N.Dak. — hardly common book-signing stops for a bestselling author on tour. But Jan Brett's upcoming trip to promote her September picture book, *On Noah's Ark*—due from Putnam with a 225,000-copy first printing—has little in common with the average author tour.

In order to visit bookstores off the beaten path without taking multiple planes between stops, Brett and her husband Joe Hearn will travel in a gaily decorated, canary-yellow bus, whose exterior features splashes of animal art, the book's title and the author's name. Between October 29th and November 23rd, Brett's tour will take her to independent and chain bookstores in 22 towns and cities.

Seemingly undaunted at the prospect of so many days on the road and the thousands of miles they will cover, Brett spoke excitedly of the advantages to this mode of transport.

"Deciding to travel by bus just made sense logistically, since we wanted to make sure I visited stores in some of the smaller markets," she explained. "A very good time to do signings is in the late afternoon or early evening, when kids are out of school, and this is difficult to do if you have to fly from one city to another and then take a second plane to reach a smaller city or a town. And there is also the chance of having a flight canceled or re-routed, which can result in missing an appearance and disappointing the children."

Rhalee Hughes, associate director of publicity for Penguin Young Readers Group, helped map out Brett's tour and select the independent and chain stores to be visited. Asked how she put together the itinerary, Hughes responded, "Jan tours virtually every fall, so we make an effort to send her to new places or locations she has not visited in a long time. When we decided she would travel by bus this fall, we obviously had to make her route a ge-

ographic daisy chain and string the stops together logically. The publicity and sales departments worked together to select stores that we feel will do the best job with the signings."

According to her publisher, Brett's sizable fan base (her picture books have some 25 million copies in print) is concentrated in smaller cities and towns, especially in the Midwest and the South. Brett, who has significant input into her itinerary on this and prior tours, noted that she and Hearn also locate her fans them-

vides buses for musicians' tours, the bus that will carry Brett and her husband across the country features a "wrapping" designed by Bob Scully, senior designer in Penguin Young Readers Group's marketing department. "That company arranges for the bus to be wrapped and provides the drivers and maps," Hughes said. "All I had to supply was the address of each store and the date and time Jan had to be there."

The author enthusiastically listed many of the items she and her husband will bring along on their road trip. "We are taking so many things that we couldn't possibly travel with if we were flying," she said. "We are bringing a backdrop featuring art from the book. Kids can have their picture taken with me against the backdrop, which makes it look as though the children are going right into the ark. I am also bringing my very own easel, which makes it easier for me to make the



Brett's bus will visit 22 cities on the author's fall tour.

selves via mail and e-mail.

Brett's Web site (www.janbrett.com) has greatly facilitated the author's communication with her readers. In her words: "Over the years I have received so many letters by mail, and as I responded to them I realized I wasn't able to give everyone sufficient answers to their questions. So about eight years ago my husband and I set up the Web site so that we could provide more information. The site now has information about my books as well as more than 2,000 pages of free activities for teachers to download and use with their students."

Brett is currently conducting a contest on her Web site; first prize is lunch with the author. The response attests to the site's popularity: the contest was posted on July 15 and in the first month brought in more than 16,000 entries.

A Touring Billboard

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vides buses for musicians' tours, the bus that will carry Brett and her husband across the country features a "wrapping" designed by Bob Scully, senior designer in Penguin Young Readers Group's marketing department. "That company arranges for the bus to be wrapped and provides the drivers and maps," Hughes said. "All I had to supply was the address of each store and the date and time Jan had to be there."

Aside from useful props for her bookstore appearances, Brett hopes to take some unusual company along on the bus—traveling companions that would certainly not pass muster with airlines officials. These are her pet hedgehog and chickens, which she often portrays in her picture books. "I'm not sure this will work out," she admitted, "since I don't know what the laws are about transporting chickens across state lines. But I would love to have them along." Young fans—if not booksellers—will likely be delighted to make their acquaintance, and Noah himself would surely approve. ■