

# On board for a true-blue adventure

Grab a tinnie and get a taste of Australiana with a game that's sure to hit the spot, **Michael Ruffles** writes

**S**tart in Margaret River in south-west Western Australia, and head east. Chances are that you'll stop at The Exchange, The Albion and The Criterion on the way around the country, you may even get a job, play two-up or have a punt on the Melbourne Cup.

No, it's not a drunken grey nomad's tour of Australia's most famous pubs, it's a new board game from a Canberra entrepreneur.

Oz Crawl, recommended for those aged 15 and above, invites players on several trips around the vast brown land to collect six tickets from different pubs, two tinnies and \$100 to gain entry to the Crawler's Ball.

The premise sounds simple, but as with any game it depends on the roll of the dice and the cunning of the competitors.

Along the way you will face Fair Enough quiz questions about everything from the skins used in Akubra hats to Rolf Harris's fictional characters, and may have to busk, perform tongue-twisters or pay fines for scratching John Williamson CDs if you land on the No Worries space.

You can even take on a character, be it Bruce the truckie, Shazza the casual check-out chick, or Bob the public servant. If that sounds too much like work, why not go with Davo, the one-armed retired crocodile hunter?

Creator Emily McDonald stresses it is not a drinking game, but it's fair to say that some players will get a lot of enjoyment playing the game while partaking of a few beverages. It's plenty of fun sober.

McDonald, 30, has dreamed of creating the board game for years. It began as a hobby while she was working in Canberra, and now Crawl Pty Ltd has become a full-time job, with one game on the shelf and hope for more to come.

The first, Oz Crawl, is intended to fill a hole in the market with a down-to-earth Australian game based on the country's trivia, geography and sense of humour.

"What you have to do is travel around Australia and along the way you're faced with tasks, such as standing up and singing songs or answering Australian trivia," she says.

"You could get stuck on the Pitt Sunday Islands, where you get stuck for three turns unless you pay to get out of it. It's sort of like jail, if we refer to another very popular game.

"At times you'll be friends with them and you'll be allies, and other times you'll be fighting with them for money and bartering with them for money and things as well. There's lots of interactive things to do along the way."

The Fair Enough trivia questions come in a choice of easy, medium and hard, and a wrong answer means a fine must be paid to the "That's Gold" fund.

"You could have to stand up and sing two verses of your favourite Aussie song, or could get in trouble for burning the snags at the barbie or forgetting the ice for the esky," McDonald explains.

"It's very down to earth, very tongue-in-cheek."

The characters are based on types of Australians many of us will know, love and loathe, giving gamers a chance to pretend. Many people will see themselves or friends and family in one or more of the characters, others will choose to play as themselves.

"It's just a bit of a laugh, the characters are based on people that a lot of Australians have met," McDonald says.

"It's a little bit sarcastic, but they're all following the Australian dream."



McDonald is a bit coy about exactly how the concept came about, but it's fair to say that like many great Aussie ideas, a degree of drinking was involved. While the game is not designed to encourage alcohol consumption, the game does centre around a pub crawl, so is recommended for those aged 15 and over.

"I guess what I was talking about is there was not a true-blue Aussie board game on the market that is aimed at people my age, you know around the 30s or 40s, where you can just sit and have a bit of a laugh and it's Aussie sort of humour," she says.

"So, I wanted something that encapsulates Australia in one game, so there could be things that trigger memories or trigger

songs or trigger something that you had forgotten about from years ago that make you think, 'Oh, that's so Australian.'

"The game has no connotations of drinking or alcohol or any anti-social behaviour, however a lot of the connotations are probably things about the past Australian history that maybe a young person wouldn't get. It has a lot of adult content in terms of the trivia and buying tickets from a pub, so what we did was put it as mature age, however, plenty of younger kids have actually played the game and it's certainly not offensive."

Usually board game creators license their concepts, designs or products to a distributor, but McDonald decided to go it alone. This has been one of the hurdles she has faced in creating a game without any experience in the industry.

Plus, getting the game right in the first place was trickier than it seemed.

"A lot of people bring out their game and they may have a shelf-life of a year, whereas a popular game like Monopoly has a great strategy where each time you play it has a different outcome," she says.

"So it took a long time to get the actual game play right and exact so every time you play there will be a different outcome and a different winner."

"Also, myself and the artist have been working full time so it started off as a little bit of a hobby that then, because it looked so good and people really liked it, turned into a bit of a commercial reality."

The hobby-cum-career has come at a cost, having to invest in sourcing manufacturers, artwork, postage and "just little bits and pieces of printing and prototypes and getting everything right".

So far, the reaction has been positive and the investment has been worthwhile. Launched on

January 1, almost 200 games have been sold online and toy retailers are showing interest. A more official launch to the industry will take place later this month at the Australian Toy Hobby and Nursery Fair.

"That's where all distributors and game people play their games for the retailers to purchase. You sell it to the retailer and they put it on their shelves."

"The Super Toyworld in Fyshwick has actually put in an order, so they've been the first retailer that we've approached and said, 'Yes we'd like the look of it, we want to put it on our shelves.' Which is great because they're supporting a Canberra product as well."

For McDonald, now living in Coogee, Sydney, the next challenge is turning the early enthusiasm into lasting business success. Already it is a full-time job.

"In the future what I would aim

to do, the company's called Crawl Games, is to produce more board games and give other Australians an opportunity if they have an idea for a board game to talk to someone and get some help and advice," she says.

"I wasn't the biggest fan when I started but it's proved to be such a social thing, it gets you away from the TV, you can sit around with friends, have a bit of a laugh, it's competitive, it's entertaining."

The game is also notable for its colourful design, and the fact it comes in a bright blue, 30cm tinnie that stands out from the typical boxy board games. The board itself is actually a mat, made of washable neoprene, that makes packing up simple.

"Every single board game is packaged in the same box," McDonald says. "What I wanted to create was something different that was eye-catching, was appealing, it appeals to more ages I think, and also it was perfect because the



The Oz Crawl board, left and above, is made of neoprene, comes complete with its own characters such as Bruce and Shazza, and can be rolled up and packed away into a giant tinnie. Artist Keiron Pratt of Kaleen, top, illustrated the game. On the cover, the game's creator Emily McDonald with Oz Crawl.

mat comes on a neoprene material. The mat rolls up, and you stick it all in the tin."

McDonald, who worked at the ACT Chamber of Commerce for three years, has always had an entrepreneurial streak, but there is another reason she hopes the business will be a success.

For every game sold, \$1 will be given to Cure for Life, a donation inspired by friend Sarah Mamalal who overcame a brain tumour.

"She's had the all-clear and she walked the Kokoda Track with us. So hence my passion for the Cure for Life Foundation."

Canberra cartoonist Keiron Pratt is responsible for much of the game's look, and was "fully stoked" to get the chance after meeting McDonald through a mutual friend. His previous artistic endeavours have been less grandiose - drawing on envelopes while working in a mail room.

"At the start we didn't know whether it was going to go any-

where or not, but it was just the thrill of doing a board game, and an Australian-made board game," he says. "To tell you the truth, my biggest challenge was basically getting the shape of Australia right. I basically had to draw it off maps. I didn't have any large pictures to draw, so that was it, that was the hardest thing, figuring Australia out."

Pratt says his job was easy, and McDonald did all the hard work. Still, he is proud of his effort and seeing the game become a reality.

"Extremely happy that it's all finally come out, because of all the stuff Emily's been going through," he says.

"She's doing all the official stuff, legal stuff, having all the hassles and all I've been doing is sitting in a nice, cool room in front of a computer drawing pictures."

Oz Crawl retails for \$59.95 and is available at Toyworld in Fyshwick or online at [www.ozcrawl.com.au](http://www.ozcrawl.com.au)