URT RUSSELL likes to tell the story of how he got his friend Tom Cruise interested in plane ownership. 'He wanted to fly and I had a little single-engine airplane, a Rockwell 114, so one afternoon I picked him up and we flew from Los Angeles over to Catalina Island. I turned the plane over to Tom, and he did very well – he's a very good pilot.

'He got very excited about it and said, "Gee, this is fabulous! It would be a great thing to get into." I told him it was fun and it really made you concentrate. He then asked, "This airplane here, what did it cost? \$300,000? \$400,000?" Now, we're talking over ten years ago, and I said, "As a matter of fact, Tom, I'm thinking of selling this plane. If you're interested, I'll sell it to you for what I paid for it – \$320,000." He replied, "You know, I could be interested in that..."

I then put him straight: "Tom, this airplane cost \$139,000, so before you get into buying one, you might want to look a little further into what they really cost!"

As a story, it pretty much sums up its narrator in a nutshell: good-natured with a touch of mischief, slyly droll, and – for all it takes place some 2,000 feet up in the air – having his feet planted very firmly indeed on the solid ground of old-fashioned common sense. Kurt Russell has been a part of Hollywood for almost as long as he can remember, starting out as a child star before he was even ten years old. Yet, as an adult, he says that, much as he loves his profession, it is his love of flying that has provided what has often been a much-needed sanity saver over the years.

'I've flown a lot of airplanes,' he comments, with some understatement – in fact, he is an FAA-licensed pilot with multiengine and instrument-ratings. 'I've flown G3s, Super Cubs, Pitts, aerobatics airplanes, and more. And I'll tell you what's nice about

flying is this. Just after I got my private licence, I took aerobatics training, which is a good thing to do for safety purposes. It was in a little airplane called the Pitts Special S2B. You sit down in the plane and in the panel immediately in front of you is a little sign with a picture of a bull's ass and a circle with a slash-mark around it, which translates as "No Bullsh*t".

'That's what I like about flying. It's the exact opposite of the film business, where you can talk your way into and out of anything. It doesn't matter to the airplane how well you can talk – the airplane only cares that you understand that it will perform

Mr. Disney himself, who taught me a very valuable lesson about the film business, which is that when you're making a film, you should look at the project from the point of view of the project itself, not just from how it might affect you personally. You need to concentrate on how you can make the whole picture better, which means making everybody in the picture better. Then everybody involved will be happy – the audience, yourself, everybody. If you're just looking at it as an actor playing a role, and you want to improve your own role to the detriment of the film, then ultimately you will be doing yourself a disservice. It's

'I think it's a shame that everybody doesn't fly. We have the equipment and the ability – all that's standing in our way is that it costs too much money'

exactly to the specifications it has been made to; no more, no less. If you understand that and remain within its confines, then you'll probably stay alive. If you don't, you won't. End of story.'

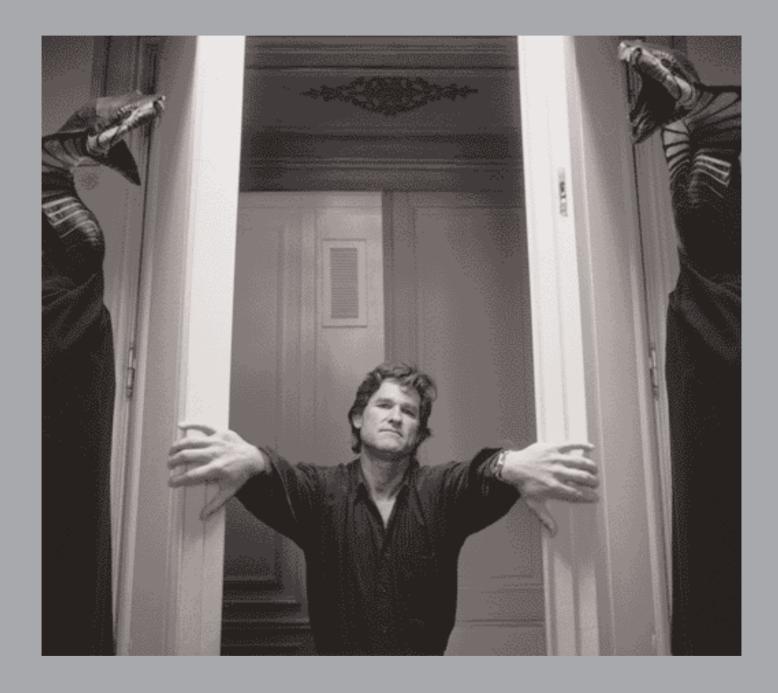
The son of baseball player-turned-actor Bing Russell, Kurt was born in Springfield, Massachusetts and moved to Los Angeles with his family when he was a child. He quickly made a name for himself as a child actor when he was just nine years old, and was signed to a ten-year contract by the Walt Disney Studios. 'I thought that was a terrific piece of luck for me because I was with the studio through all that difficult period for teenagers – the transition from being a kid to an adult. I had work for all of that time, and I'll always be grateful to have been there. I had a wonderful ten years and had the opportunity to spend time with

the same as playing baseball – it's better to hit 260 runs in a season on the team that wins the World Series than to hit 350 on a last-placed team. If you don't believe me, ask any professional player!'

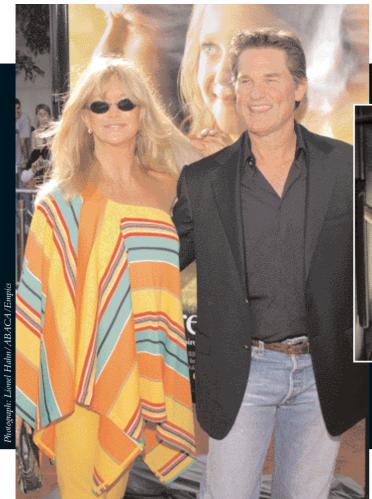
The baseball reference is not accidental. Like his father, Kurt became interested in baseball as a boy, and again like his father, he pursued it. But then, in June 1973, an injury to his shoulder – a rotator cuff injury – forced him to give it up. 'In fact, as a kid, I assumed that baseball would be my career because I was better at it than I was at acting. And all the time I was growing up, I heard the stories about my Dad's ball-playing days, and thought, "Gee – to be a ball player would be fun."

'So from around nine years old until I had to stop, I really concentrated on baseball and just did the acting as an aside. But when

ACTION ACE



Although veteran Hollywood actor Kurt Russell loves his profession, it's his other world, the world of flying, that has been his sanity-saver over the years, as he tells **Gabrielle Donnelly**





Above Kurt Russell in *Poseidon*, the forthcoming remake of the classic 1972 film *The Poseidon Adventure*Left Kurt Russell with Goldie Hawn at the *Dreaming* premiere.

I was injured and had to leave the game, acting seemed like a normal sort of place to go, especially as Dad seemed to be having so much fun acting. And I enjoyed it. I still do.'

A genial leading man, Kurt has specialised in action movies – in which he often performs his own stunts – such as *Big Trouble in Little China, Escape From New York*, and, most recently, *Poseidon*, a remake of the 1972 classic disaster movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, due for release this summer.

It was an unusually sedentary role – as trumpeter Mike 'Lucky' Lockhart in the 1984 World War Two romance *Swing Shift* – that changed his life by introducing him to the movie's star, actress Goldie Hawn, with whom he has been happily involved ever since.

'We met and first went out on Valentine's Day 1983,' he recalls.' And the time since has just gone by in a flash. How does it work? I don't think anybody knows. I don't have any idea of how or why one is to remain in love – except that you just like that person. Because we are all human beings, it can be easier, after a period of time, to take the difficulties that come with any territory, and remain a charming person to your partner. Yet it can be easier to charm someone else

than it is to keep charming each other, and Goldie and I are both aware of this – so far, we have chosen to remain charming to each other. The other side of that coin is, will we still choose to do so next week? And that's a question I don't answer, because nobody can answer for next week – that's the mystery of life. But so far, it's working.'

The couple divide their time between their homes in Los Angeles and Vancouver where they moved part-time to help kickstart their son Wyatt Russell's hockey career - with frequent trips to New York City to visit daughter Kate Hudson, her husband Chris Robinson, frontman of the Black Crowes band, and their small son Ryder. Between the far-flung family and travel for work, that adds up to a lot of flying hours, and Kurt is adamant that, whenever possible, it will be in a plane he pilots himself. 'I think it's a shame that everybody doesn't fly,' he says. 'It's very unfortunate that, due to a lot of laws and restrictions, we have handcuffed general aviation. It's very easy to fly. We have the ability to teach people to fly safely within three or four months, and it's a political crime that everybody doesn't have a small plane in their garage that they can take anywhere. Planes should be like automobiles. We have the equipment and ability to make it so, and all that's standing in our way is that it just costs too much money and that's too bad. Flying is a convenience and a pleasure, and it should be available to more people.'

Which is not to say that he himself has not had his anxious moments. 'Once I was coming back to LA from Mammoth in a small plane, and I got caught in what they call the Sierra Wave. I got tossed around, rivets were beginning to pop out and I was all by myself, talking out loud, you know. I was trying to get hold of the airplane. I pulled it out of two separate spins and it was generally a pretty harrowing trip home.

"I landed halfway home at Fox Field and was able to keep the plane on the runway, but even so, I thought, "I wonder if I should really be doing this..." Then I said to myself, "This is important to me; it's something I like to do and I need to keep doing it." So I gassed up and got back into the airplane and thought, "OK, this is where you learn." And I made it. I kept my head, did what I was supposed to do and made it home OK. And that's what I learned that day."