



IN FULL BLOOM

Orlando Bloom trades his swords, bows and arrows in for some human interaction.

Considering Orlando Bloom has carved out a career up until now predominately wielding a sword or a bow and arrow – while invariably sporting a fetching pair of pointy ears – it's hardly surprising that the chance to play a real-life grown-up who engages in human interaction in his latest film *Elizabethtown* was an exciting novelty.

"This was my first contemporary leading role," he says of his stint as Drew Baylor in the romantic comedy, which co-stars Kirsten Dunst.

"A new responsibility and a new bridge to cross. There's a thing about being in an action-adventure movie where it's react, act, react. There's a lot to distract from what the actors are doing. But when it's just humans interacting, it's a subtlety and nuance that was new and exciting to me."

Following roles in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Troy*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Kingdom of Heaven*, filming *Elizabethtown* may have felt somewhat like coming down to earth with a bump, but Bloom, 28, is the first to admit that his fairytale, and

rapid rise onto Hollywood's A-list, has been one hell of a ride.

"For the most part for my career up until this movie, I've been living my boyhood dreams," he admits. "I've played a boxer, an Australian cowboy, a knight, a prince, an elf and a pirate."

This time round, unaided by props, he had to dig deep for the raw emotion to portray Drew, a whiz-kid turned failed salesman who is forced on an unexpected journey of self-discovery when he returns to his hometown in America's Deep South after his father's sudden death. On the way, Drew encounters and falls in love with Dunst's character, flight attendant Claire Colburn, the woman who helps brighten and ultimately change his outlook on the world around him.

It turns out his decision to do a Gap commercial with Cameron Crowe some years ago was the perfect chance to do a spot of paid networking.

"The hope and dream was that it would lead to something like *Elizabethtown*," he reveals. "We

kept in touch through music and movies – you know, sending music and little postcards and stuff."

Explaining that his previous brushes with America have been mostly Los Angeles or New York, Bloom says that stepping into the unexplored territory of America's Deep South was both a challenge and a huge learning experience.

"I never knew what it meant by the 'heartland of America' or 'southern hospitality' until I went to Kentucky and people baked cookies and cakes and made ice-cream. And there was an open door policy. There can be a lot

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of apprehension when a movie comes to town – that it's going to leave it in chaos and disarray – but we were welcomed."

As for the people he encountered, "I love them. They're vibrant and a crazy eclectic group of people. There's another world of America out there, which is fascinating.

"The America that you see in this movie is its heartland, that

sense of community, family and friendship."

His experience filming the movie even inspired him to take his own road trip through the US after filming was finished. "I drove from Nebraska to LA with my dog in my car, across the Rockies, across the beautiful plains. I was just very intimidated, because it was so big."

As for his famed old-Hollywood-era heart-throb looks – which no doubt helped him snare the title of 'most requested male name, worldwide, on Google searches in 2004' – co-star Dunst describes him as a "man boy" whose "feminine side" attracts the women because he's "not threatening".

While her public words would give many of today's heterosexual Hollywood heart-throbs a hernia, Bloom seems more than comfortable in his floppy-locked bohemian image. And being tagged a pretty boy certainly hasn't hurt his luck with the ladies.

His on-off relationship with actress Kate Bosworth appears to have weathered the constant and inevitable tabloid 'exclusives' of his romantic dalliances with Dunst.

Next up, he's back to his swashbuckling-best in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequel. But for the man whose father died when he was aged four, who struggled through school with dyslexia, and who once cheated death when he fell three

storeys, shattering his vertebrae, the impact of *Elizabethtown*'s message has had a profound effect.

"We're all going to go," he muses. "And you have to be able to appreciate what that means, so you're not afraid and can enjoy the moments you live through. That's a lot of what run through this movie. It's got a bit of everything."

Story: Madeleine Collins ●