



URSULA BÖTTCHER

As the polar bear has become more and more an endangered species, one sees fewer such bear acts in the Circus. One can look back nostalgically to the famous bear trainers of the past, Doris and Alfons Arnt, Jean Michon, Charles Illeneb, William Schaefer, Lillian Daniels, John Steinhoff, Bjornsen, Ramon Pietro, Theodore Schroeder, Reichert, Fritz Schilling, Ida Mülker, to name a few. And who could forget the great Willy Hagenbeck, who presented seventy polar bears in the same cage? The most famous polar bear act of recent years is that of Ursula Böttcher from the East German State Circus. Born in Dresden, she joined Zirkus Busch in 1952 and for various East German shows presented groups of lions, brown bears and a mixed group, from 1955. In 1964 she took over the presentation of an impressive group of polar bears and in 1971 took the act to Holland's Circus Toni Boltini, the first of many bookings outside East Germany. For six years, she starred with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus in America and in 1984 was with Circus Knie in





Switzerland. This year she is to be
performed in Japan from February to
August in a State Circus from the
Soviet Union. In 1980, she became the
first female circus artiste to be awarded
the Nationalpreis, the highest arts
award from her country's Ministry of
Culture. The diminutive blonde,
who started her circus career as an
acrobate, has risen to the top of
Circus world with her fearless
taming of the arctic giants, some
of which reach a height of twelve
feet and weigh nearly 1,600
pounds.

Photos by courtesy of Circus Knie,
Circus Ringling Bros. and Barnum and
Coley Circus.

