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## Gearing Up!

Courtney Hansen Takes On Cars, Travel Adventure, and Fashion

by Anne Seltzer

Car expert Courtney Hansen has two sets of wheels in her garage: an Aston Martin DB9 and a customized 2004 Ford Thunderbird. Like their owner, they're sporty, stylish, and go places quickly. Hansen, who turns all of thirty this year, is already a veteran television personality. She currently hosts Fox Sports Net's *Destination Wild*, a travel adventure show, and Spike TV's *PowerBlock*, an automotive how-to.

Car smarts and fast reflexes are probably part of her DNA; she's a self-described "pit kid" and a daughter of driver Jerry Hansen, winner of twenty-seven Sports Car Club of America championships (a record that remains unbroken). Courtney grew

up with her sister and brothers in Orono, Minnesota, near Brainerd International Raceway, which her parents owned. "I have a genuine passion for cars," Hansen says. "I spent my whole childhood on the track. My mom was always at the races, and she dressed all the kids in orange and blue, my dad's colors."

The future TV star also developed an early rapport with the camera. "I started modeling at about age five," she recalls. "A family friend asked me to do it, and things fell into place." A second family friend—the late movie star and avocational race driver Paul Newman—thought the lovely little girl belonged in Hollywood. "Paul Newman wanted me to be in movies, but mom



*PowerBlock's host is familiar with sports cars—her dad drove them.*



*Hansen lends glamour to her subjects.*

said no," says Hansen. "My parents are down-to-earth people. They steered me away from racing, too."

Tired of Minnesota's brutal winters, the family eventually sold the racetrack and relocated to sunny Naples, Florida, when Courtney was in high school. She continued her education at Florida State University, majoring in business marketing. Upon graduating from college, she took corporate jobs. But within a few years, Hansen's personality and photo-friendly features helped her get a role that offered her greater visibility: host of the pilot episode of *Killer Golf*, a game show developed with Jack Nicklaus.

*Killer Golf* went nowhere; Hansen went to southern California to seek out other opportunities in television. She supported herself as a waitress and a Rolls-Royce spokesperson before appearing in *Rides* and *Million-Dollar Motors*, two automotive specials that aired on the TLC Network in 2004. Her career shifted into higher gear with the same network's *Overhaulin'*, a reality show in which the cast separates a car from its owner through subterfuge, only to return it a week later with vast improvements. Fun was one of the fringe benefits of her position. "*Overhaulin'* was my first major show, and it was a blast," reports Hansen.

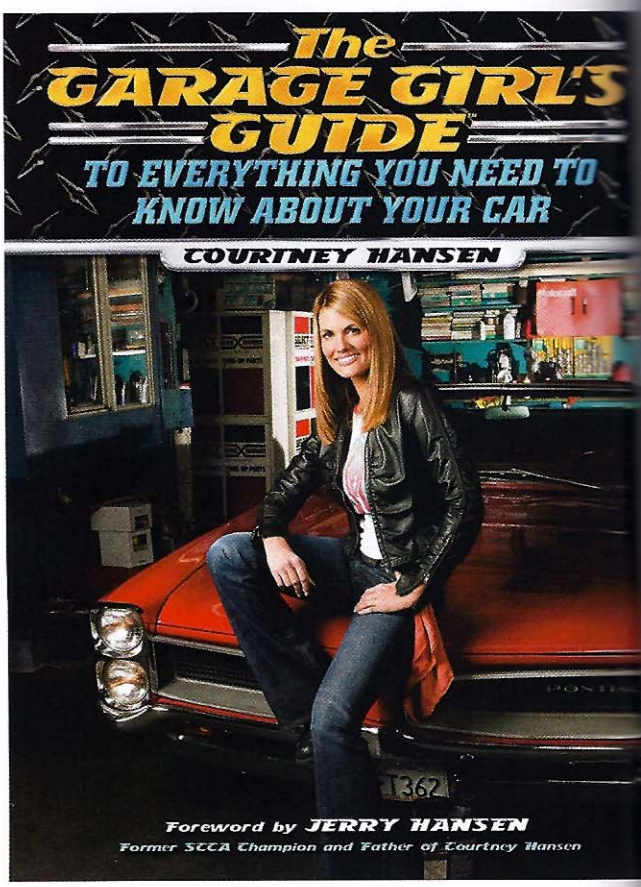
After several seasons, she found a new vehicle in *PowerBlock*, a weekend program devoted to truck and car makeovers. To prepare, she began immersing herself in automotive literature. "I didn't want to be a talking head," Hansen, who now spends much of her spare time reading and writing about cars. She has shared her expertise in a nationally syndicated newspaper column and a book for female drivers, *Garage Girl's Guide to Everything You Need to Know About Your Car*. "I'm grateful to be in a position to help empower the author declares. Her knowledge is more than theoretical. While she's too busy to handle major repairs, she changes oil and tires, and goes under the hood to make minor adjustments.

Given her tomboyish persona, she was an obvious candidate to host *Destination Wild*, an action show with the tagline, "can dream it you can do it." Since the Fox Sports series debuted in fall 2006, its host has traveled throughout the United States, testing herself in daring activities: kayaking, white-water rafting, bobsledding, heli-skiing. A former high school athlete who named the most valuable player of her tennis team, she has had a strong competitive streak. Her worst on-camera moment was her loss in indoor rock climbing to major-league

turned-sportscaster Rob Dibble. "I was ahead until I slipped and fell at the last minute," says a still chagrined Hansen, who sustained no injuries; like her rival, she was wearing a harness.

When she isn't filming her existing programs—now including a *PowerBlock* spinoff, *Great Builds*—this energetic young woman is thinking up new ones. "I've always thrived on having a lot going on," she explains. "As a Libra, I'm pretty balanced." She hopes to develop a TV show with her pal Sarah Larson, a onetime *Fear Factor* contestant better known as George Clooney's most recent ex-girlfriend. Eventually, Hansen plans to have a big broadcast network job and host her own show. "I'll make it happen," she vows. In the meantime, she's extending her brand into fashion by launching a clothing line called Auto Angel. Its first products: vintage-looking T-shirts with uplifting messages, such as "Geared for Greatness."

Far from bragging about her own considerable achievements, Hansen prides herself on being a low-maintenance Midwesterner who knows exactly how lucky she is. "Every project has been rewarding in some way," she concludes. "Every day, I wake up and thank G-d that I've been able to do what I love and make money doing it." ■



*A hands-on expert, the author performs routine auto chores, such as changing the oil.*



*Hansen enjoys the respect of her peers; here, Speed Channel reporters interview her at last year's NASCAR race in Daytona.*