

SHEROES

a courageous woman who has the principle share in some exploit.

Alexandra Henderson: Young Woman of Promise



Meet Allie Henderson:
From jumping horses
to jumping ramps, this
woman wants to fly.

Going to X-tremes

Twenty-three year old Allie Henderson is not what she seems. With her lovely, long locks and striking features, you might mistake her for a model.

Sandwiched by an older brother and sister and younger twin sisters—she's more daredevil than typical middle child. Dressed for success at Kelowna's Access Furniture by day, she shields herself, head to toe, in protective sporting armor by evening (and weekend too).

Enthusiastic but controlled, articulate yet introspective, Allie is many things but her most authentic self might just be the most surprising: Fearlessly flying through the air, she's a woman looking to make a soft landing in the hard-edged, male-dominated world of Freestyle Motocross (FMX).

An extreme sport, FMX involves riders racing a dirt bike up a ramp, propelling over an average 75-foot gap, and performing an acrobatic trick in the air,

before landing—on the bike—on a ramp, on the opposite side.

Dangerous? Yes! Scary? Sure. No place for a lovely young lady? Whoa, that's where this former equestrian jumper challenges stereotypes.

"I always wanted a dirt bike as a kid but I wasn't allowed to have one," Henderson explains. Instead, she had a horse.

story by Shannon Linden

From 12 to 18 years of age she was involved in show jumping. After graduating from Kelowna Secondary School, she travelled to Europe, riding professionally in Corfu, Greece. While the experience was enriching, it required complete commitment, to the exclusion of Henderson's varied goals.

"A quote came to me," she explains. "I could have anything, if I gave up everything." Being a well-rounded woman, she sought to satisfy her many sides and in the end, craving balance and missing family and friends, she found her way home.

Buying, training, and selling horses, she made a living, re-investing in more horses until at 19, she sold one named Chevy and bought a bike that brought her the freedom to fly.

"It was too big for me," she recalls. "It was too heavy and I had no idea what to do with it if something went wrong." Watching u-tube videos, she learned a lot about her equipment, but it was her passion for the sport that kept her riding through thick and thin.

"Even when I hated it, I loved it," she grins. "Even when my bike broke up in the bush and I had to push it back home, I loved it."

Watching freestyle for the first time when she was fourteen, Henderson says a spark was lit but it wasn't until recently that she fanned the flames. With only a handful of women in the world competing in the sport, few know much about it, and even less have the opportunity to delve in.

"You need property," Henderson explains. You need to build or buy

ramps, you need big dirt mounds to land on...there is no coaching, schooling or programs, it's really an independent sport."

With no women currently competing in the sport in the X Games, Henderson sees a gap of opportunity—quite literally.

"This past March I started jumping ramps on a friend's compound," she says. Bruce Cook—who became the first Canadian to compete in the "best trick" in the 2012 X Games—coaches Henderson, mentoring her amazing progress. Within five rides she went from a gap of 10 to 50 feet, pulling "no hand landers" and fender grabs, while progressing toward seat grabs.

Sponsored by Dan Kenzie of Pinnacle Elite Athlete, she spends early mornings at the gym, performing freestyle specific routines Kenzie creates, before heading to her day job at Access. After work she rides, does yoga, and enjoys free time with friends.

"Right now women are where the men were when this sport first started," she explains. "They're doing freestyle shows and u-tube videos. They have to do their time."

And so will Henderson. While she dreams of joining the ranks of women like Canada's Jolene Van Vugt—the first female to backflip on a full-size dirt bike and winner of the first Women's Canadian Motocross National Championships—Henderson has even higher hopes.

"I love freestyle but I also want to help people turn their own dreams into reality."

Using her freestyle platform for



notoriety, Henderson ultimately sees herself as a personal development coach. "I believe every woman must break barriers to be exactly who she is meant to be," she explains. "Though there are many barriers that could prevent me from jumping my dirt bike through the air, I do it because I love it and my goal is to challenge women to do what it is they uniquely love, to blow through their own limitations."

It's an empowering message, applicable to women of all ages. If Henderson has her way, more of us will value our brains over looks, our passions over men, and our experiences over safety.

"I'm compelled to share my message," she says. "I challenge women everywhere to be better, to be bolder, and to start living by their own rules."

X-tremely good advice, don't you think?

