



Model image

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Laura Stace has left behind the not so glamorous world of international modelling for a career in journalism.

When I embarked on an international modelling career at the age of 12, I thought I would soon be submerged in the glamorous world of high fashion and rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous. After 15 years in the industry, I have discovered that it is not all it is cracked up to be.

"Your ankles are too fat if you ever want to be a model," said the woman who discovered me while shopping in a Brisbane mall.

"Jabba the Hutt", as she was commonly referred to by the other models, gave me some exercises that would make my ankles trim, taut and terrific. I never did the exercises but miraculously I must have lost my "kankles" as Jabba called to say she wanted me to do a photo shoot for my portfolio. After the shoot I became a popular model in Brisbane and, much to my excitement, I was soon booked for jobs alongside supermodels.

When Naomi Campbell jetted into Melbourne for its annual Fashion Festival, I was really looking forward to meeting her. However, my excitement was met with bitter disappointment. Not impressed with her clothes in the show and refusing to go on until the problem was rectified, Naomi insisted on inspecting the other model's racks to see if there was anything she fancied.

When it was time to get dressed ready for the show my five-inch black heels had been replaced with bright yellow tennis shoes. As I stood in the wings waiting to go on, Naomi walked past me wearing the shoes that were originally assigned to me.

With all of Australia's fashion elite's eyes on me, I hit the catwalk wearing a short black evening dress and bright yellow sneakers. At least, in hindsight, Naomi didn't throw anything at me.

Not really interested in university, but keen to make my small fortune while I could when I graduated from high school, I was soon off around the world. First stop was Athens where I worked every single day posing for magazine covers, advertisements, editorials and TV commercials. I lived in a model apartment called Tony's Hotel, where they took your passport for insurance. I had no spare time as I was working every day so I was really disappointed when a club promoter came to the hotel and offered the models a boat ride plus accommodation on Mykonos for the weekend for \$US5 and I couldn't go.

One of the perks of being a model is you get invited to loads of places for free. Bars, clubs and gyms all want to be full of pretty people – I guess it is good for business.

The next week in Athens, I found the usually friendly and outgoing British male model looking pretty grim in the common area of Tony's. He told me that once he got to Mykonos the club promoters had given the models drinks and he didn't remember anything else until he woke up naked on a sun lounge two days later. Apparently, the same thing happened to the female models.

Towards the end of my stay in Athens I was booked for a fashion show with Claudia Schiffer. When I met her I was not disappointed. Really beautiful and super friendly, we chatted backstage.

I took to the runway in a beautiful pink and white gown and just as Claudia was about to pass me on the runway, a loud screeching drowned out the music. Claudia and I jumped off the stage and ran outside. We stood in the car park of the hotel as firemen searched the building for a bomb. TV cameras and photographers jostled to get a shot of Claudia. The next day a few friends from Australia called to see if I was OK, they had seen me on TV standing next to the supermodel.

The day I was due to leave Athens, my agency refused to pay me. I slammed my fists down on the accountant's desk and demanded cash. A few hours later I made my way to the airport with bags full of drachma (Greek currency). Next stop was Munich. The market was slow, the weather sucked and the model house was full of catty girls stealing each other's clothes. A photographer who was obsessed with me stalked me around town. I heard the models in Milan were being driven to parties by their agency way outside the city and left to hitch rides back with the rich elderly men who attended the party. Milan was to be my next stop, but upon hearing that I headed to London. I was becoming tired of all the nonsense and seediness of the industry and wanted to start saving money to come back to Australia to go to uni.

At my first job in London I opened the studio door and it looked like a porn star's suitcase had exploded in the room. While modelling requires you to do things you would not normally do such as walk in crazy high heels and pose with male models with B.O., I was not prepared to dress up like a hooker. Despite much wailing and gnashing from the photographer and the client, I left.

The next week I stood in the Royal Albert Hall being sewn into a full-length white lycra bodysuit for a hair show. Once stitched up, they worked on our hair for the next eight hours and there was no getting out of the bodysuit. By the time I took to the stage I desperately had to use the bathroom.

When the show was over I ran backstage to find the hairdresser, who was canoodling with his practically prepubescent fiancée as the models waited to be released from their outfits. After five minutes I couldn't take it. I ripped my outfit off and ran to the loo. The next day I was told by my agent not to destroy wardrobe on jobs again.

For every good modelling job there were 10 jobs I walked away from feeling horrible about myself or just mad in general at the stupidity of it all. It was not the glamorous career that I had envisioned when I was 12. In fact, I had discovered it was an industry that exploited young girls for their beauty.

Nevertheless I stashed the cash and headed for the City of Angels en route to uni in Australia. Los Angeles is a town where old models are put out to pasture. While they can still fit into a size 6 Dolce and Gabbana dress, they need botox and lipo before they can drag their emaciated carcasses from job to job.

I signed with LA Models and soon realised that I could do a few modelling jobs a week and go to uni in the US. I enrolled at Santa Monica College and got myself deals with Ralph Lauren Swimwear, Calvin Klein and Wella hair care.

The red-headed tub of lard woman at Ralph Lauren would ring my agent screaming that I was too fat, but in the same breath she would book me for two-week stints in New York and Miami. Why anyone would fork over copious amounts of dough for a 'fat' swimsuit model, weighing in at just less than 55kg and 6ft tall, boggled my mind. Despite the miserable time I was having modelling, I applied and was accepted to the journalism school at California State University Northridge. My hard work studying in between shoots while other models lived it up with famous boyfriends and parties in Hollywood was starting to pay off.

I write this story now from my desk at The Cairns Post where I am doing an internship.

The chief of staff just called me over and gave me a story to write about a local girl who was selected as a competitor in the Girlfriend magazine competition. I dial the number and reach her mum.

She is off overseas next year travelling to fulfil her modelling dreams. She just turned 12. I wish her the very best of luck.

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Laura Stace in her heyday ... her modelling career took her to Europe and the UK where she appeared on the cover of magazines and on international catwalks.

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