

HOW I MAKE IT WORK

GEMMA HOWORTH

Gemma Howorth, 26, is a body model who has been the hands for, among others, Kate Moss, Lily Cole and Kylie Minogue. Having studied marketing and PR at the London College of Fashion, in 2008 she launched Body London, an agency for body models. She lives in London with her husband, Marcus, who runs an adventure travel company

HOW DID YOU GET INTO BODY MODELLING?

People always used to say nice things about my hands. Then a friend's mum, a photographer, told me I could be a hand model and took me to an agency. I was so excited, but I was still young, so they told me to come back when I'd finished school. I started aged 18, and went on to do a degree. Now I model my bottom, legs and feet, as well as my hands. I fill in for models such as Kate Moss, who has nice hands, but might not have the time or the inclination to model them. If I'm doing a bottom, it's probably because they don't want to get naked. But some models just don't look after their bodies.

WHY DID YOU LAUNCH THE AGENCY?

I'm more interested in longevity than fame. The original hand-modelling agency closed down, and body models were left without specialist representation. At the same time, demand was growing for doubles for those hard-to-perfect areas. Having made a name for myself, I established what is now the only body-part agency in Britain. I employ two really organised girlfriends of mine, and I still model.

HOW DO YOU DIVIDE YOUR TIME?

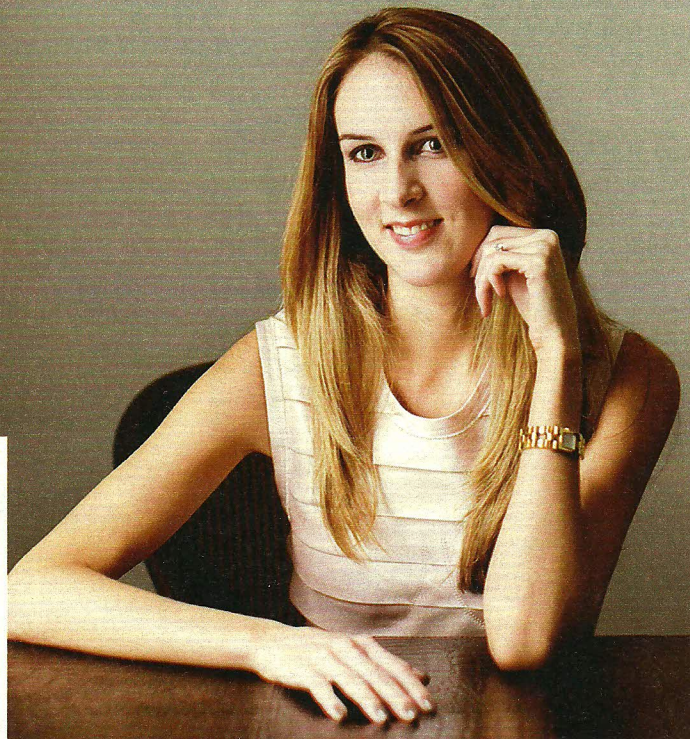
I'll do from three to six shoots a week, 90% of them in London. Otherwise, I work flat out in the office. Being in the office and organising models is much more exhausting. I work very efficiently from 8.30am (my husband leaves for work early, so I go with him) until about 6.30pm. I keep on top of the invoicing, admin and casting, as well as responding to the many emails from girls wanting to be body models. And I'm always scouting – on the Tube, in bars – looking for hands, lips, nails, legs, feet, eyes, hair, bottoms and torsos. There are lots of people with untapped assets.

HOW DOES BODY MODELLING COMPARE WITH FASHION MODELLING?

Unless you're at the top of your game as a fashion model, you never get the chance to work on huge campaigns with great photographers, but body models do. Obviously, the pay is lower – the most I've had is £2,000 for two hours' work, but it's usually £200-£600 a shoot – but the life span is longer. If I look after my hands, I should be working until I'm 40-plus. You can't pile on weight on your hands.

IT SOUNDS EASY. WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

Actually it can be painful. You have to hold your hand or leg in one position for hours – you're advised to restrict your liquid intake. I've even had to be fed while in position. Sometimes it feels like hard exercise. And it can be quite intimate. For a Max Factor campaign, for example, I had to have my fingers in Rose Byrne's mouth. It takes practice and extreme patience. If it's really hard, sometimes I hold my breath or just try to zone out. I remind myself that I'm being paid to be in this position.



WHAT KIND OF PERSONALITY DOES IT SUIT?

Personality is so important. I meet girls with incredible hands, but they might be a bit odd, which doesn't work if I need them in a compromising situation on a naked shoot. I've had to take over from a few models when it hasn't worked out with the director. You need to suspend your ego. My top models are those who are fun but not too fun, easy-going and steady. A hand model cannot be the star.

HOW DO YOU LOOK AFTER YOUR ASSETS?

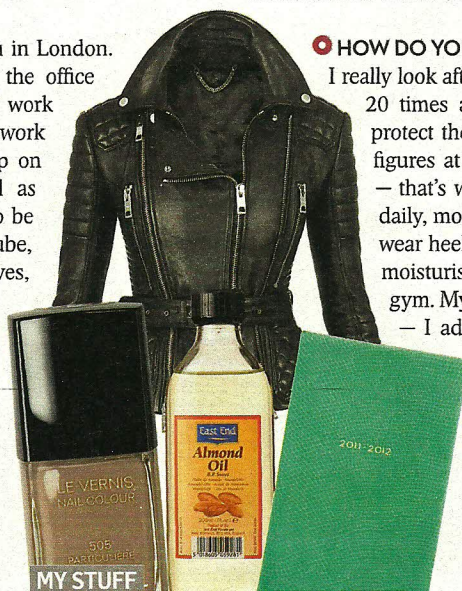
I really look after my hands – it's in-built now. I moisturise about 20 times a day; on holiday, I wear white cotton gloves to protect them from the sun; and I've insured them for seven figures at Lloyd's of London. Getting drunk is a nightmare – that's when nails get broken. For my feet, I pumice them daily, moisturise with peppermint foot cream and try not to wear heels too often. For my legs, I wax rather than shave, I moisturise and I get regular exercise – tennis, cycling, the gym. My friends are always asking me how to avoid cellulite – I advise massage, exercise and cutting out fat, sugar, alcohol and caffeine. You have to do what it takes to make your body the best.

WHO DO YOU TURN TO FOR ADVICE?

My husband is my support system. We talk everything through, which helps, and he guides me with forecasting, marketing and budgets. I should always set them and stick to them, he says. He also suggested that I write down my goals and the time limit for achieving them, then I can look back and assess my progress. It's really helpful – like a new year's resolution, but with structure.

HOW DO YOU ESCAPE WORK?

If you're running your own business, it's easy to end up only talking shop. My husband tries to enforce a no-business rule on the weekend, but I also like to tell him everything, as he's the first person I turn to. To unwind, I go to dance class, but sometimes I leave a shoot and I just want to go out. I'll go clubbing with my girls. I'm their friend as well as their boss. ●



MY STUFF

Burberry Prorsum black leather biker jacket, £2,195 'It was worth saving for.' Almond oil, £1.50 'The best, cheapest anti-ageing product.' Chanel Le Vernis Nail Colour in Particulière, £17.50 'Goes with every outfit.' Smythson Panama diary, £76 'It's always in my handbag.' Charlotte Olympia animal print booties, £595 'She's a shoe genius.'

