

sunday

The Sunday Telegraph

SMILE

Sugar & Spice

WHY MEGAN GALE'S
THE ULTIMATE CATCH
BEAUTIFUL, BRAINY, BOLD
(AND BELOVED FROM CANNES TO CARLTON)

BULGARI earrings,
(02) 9223 3611



If Megan Gale could play a character in *Game of Thrones* – and it's possible she'd sell a limb for the opportunity to do so, such is her obsession with the show – she'd be the ballsy kingmaker Cersei (Lena Headey), or the even ballsier mother of dragons, Daenerys (Emilia Clarke). For those who haven't seen the award-winning HBO fantasy, these two beautiful and powerful women eat balls for breakfast. That's hyperbole of course; in reality Cersei orders the massacre of children and Daenerys devours raw horses' hearts. "She [Daenerys], in particular, is this determined, fierce woman," says Gale who, when we meet, has just come down off a *GoT* high shortly after the premiere of the show's third season. "I think she's amazing."

There's something fitting about Gale's edgy character choices. Of the holy trinity of household-name Aussie models – the others, of course, being Jennifer Hawkins and Miranda Kerr – Gale, 37, has always stood out as the one who packs a bit more punch. Kerr is the beaming earth mother, Hawkins the bouncy beach babe. But Gale, with her flashing green eyes, siren curves, progressively hotter boyfriends, and smart head on her shoulders, is the one with a little more tang, a touch more bite, a little less conformity. She's not about to eat a horse's heart any time soon, but she's certainly more than just a smile for the cameras.

Today, she's bringing bold back at our photo shoot, arranged to celebrate her upcoming trip to the Cannes Film Festival on May 17 and 18 as an ambassador for beauty giant L'Oréal Paris. She's a natural in front of the camera and just as involved behind it, confidently suggesting poses or set-ups she thinks will improve the shots. "You don't work in this business for as long as I have," she explains of her 20-year career, "without picking up a thing or two."

READ MORE ▼

This assertiveness wasn't always apparent – in fact, the Perth native used to be extremely shy. It was actually a blow to her self-esteem that led to her becoming a model in the first place. After having her heart broken at the age of 15, her mother suggested she try department classes. Reluctant at first, certain she'd be too bashful to participate, she eventually agreed and was soon scouted as a model.

It wasn't an easy beginning. Her athletic curves hit the market at the exact moment the world's most famous athletic curves, found on models like Cindy Crawford and Elle Macpherson, were taking their final catwalk bows, replaced by the skinny mid-'90s waifs of the Kate Moss variety. Frustrated, but summoning a grit she may not have known she possessed back in her unassuming teens, she threw herself into TV commercial work, which led to her well-documented big break in the form of an advertisement for an Italian telco. Almost overnight, she became an Italian obsession; when the client flew her to Europe for promotional duties, she was mobbed in the streets. And Australia, a country that traditionally values few

things more than an international endorsement, suddenly couldn't get enough of Megan Gale.

Since then she's rarely slipped from the public consciousness. She scored and retains a contract with retail superstore David Jones, even though much of the nuts-and-bolts catwalk work passed first to Miranda Kerr and then, since Kerr's departure in March this year, to Gale's fellow 'Perth-onality' Jessica Gomes. She's also dipped a toe into TV, with appearances on Network Ten's *Can of Worms* and hosting Foxtel's *Project Runway Australia*, tried her hand at acting (she appears in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which is due for release next year) and launched a swimwear range, *Isola by Megan Gale*, aimed primarily at women in their 30s and 40s. Flirting recklessly with understatement, she agrees, "I wear many hats."

But why the endurance? Modelling is no marathon; most clothes horses get a good sprint in their teens or early 20s, then hang up their boots. Her agency, Chic Celebrity Management, believes the key to her longevity lies in her versatility, in particular the fact she can talk as well as walk. "Her ability to both entertain and communicate elevates Megan from

other glamorous women in fashion," her agent, Jane Weston, insists. She has a point: Gale's contracts with L'Oréal Paris and David Jones regularly require her to address roomfuls of VIPs, and her appearances on *Can of Worms*, in particular, have shown her to be articulate and thoughtful. She's comfortable outlining her thoughts on the prime minister ("I don't envy her and I do respect her for trying to do the best job she can while coping with the pressure...") and animal welfare ("There are plenty of people out there putting animals under a great deal of unnecessary stress and torture... I would like to explore more and be educated more [about this subject]"). She may not be about to give a TED talk on either topic, but it's refreshing to hear her wanting to engage beyond the obvious.

And the obvious topic beyond the physical, when it comes to Megan Gale, is her love life, which has all the hallmarks of perfect column-inch bait. Her four-year romance with radio's Andy Lee, of comedy duo Hamish & Andy, which ended two and a half years ago, is off-limits in our interview today ("Out of respect for everyone involved, it's time to put it in the past,"

FIVE ICONIC CANNES MOMENTS

1955 Grace Kelly bewitches not only her fans but also Prince Rainier III of Monaco, who she marries the following year.



1991 Back when people were still shocked by Madonna, the material girl scandalised in Jean Paul Gaultier's now-famous cone bustier.



2006 Comedian Sacha Baron Cohen one-upped Madge 15 years later in his provocative and, er, alluring *Borat* mankini.

2008 Pregnant with twins, Angelina Jolie trooped up the carpet in fern-green Max Azria Atelier.



2010 Cate Blanchett shows why she's never met a red carpet she couldn't conquer, wearing Alexander McQueen months after the designer's death.





her publicist explains), but she's happy to discuss her current relationship with Carlton ruckman/forward Shaun Hampson, 25. The couple are a celebrity match made in heaven: she the smouldering supermodel; he the classically handsome athlete. In Melbourne, where Hampson is, as Gale puts it, "like a rockstar", they've

been mobbed. "Most of the time, people are lovely and it's particularly sweet when little kids come up to say hi," says Gale. "But they can also be aggressive. I've had people grab my arm when I'm in the middle of a private conversation and say, 'Right, we're getting a photo.' It can be frightening."

The scrutiny – frightening or otherwise – was there from the beginning. By the third day of their fledgling relationship, people were calling Hampson her boyfriend, which any woman would find awkward. Today, she's happy to discuss him, and lights up at the mention of his name. "He's got such a lovely heart," she says. "Just the other day, he picked me up from the airport in Melbourne – I'd been away for a couple of weeks – and as I got into the car, he reached behind my seat and pulled out a massive bunch of flowers. I'm anti-Valentine's, so I really value spontaneous romantic gestures, just because he'd been thinking about me."

Ask about potential children, however, and her eyes narrow. "That question is off-limits for me," she says when pressed. "I think asking a woman if she wants to have a baby is the worst thing you can ask her. What if I were trying to get pregnant and, for example, going through IVF? Aside from saying I'd love to be a mum one day, that's all I want to say about it."

Fair enough. Back to more placid waters: work. This year will be the second time Gale has made the trip to the French epicentre of glamour in Cannes, where she'll be once again walking the famous sweeping red carpet – "an absolute honour" – mingling with L'Oréal Paris ambassadors including Jane Fonda, Eva Longoria and Sheryl Cole. Last year, she managed to draw the attention of the famously brutal Cannes press pack (they're known for booing the films or individuals who irk them), wowing in two arresting floor-length gowns by Atelier Versace and Australian designer Alex Perry.

She was nervous about it all last year, but feels more confident this time. Plus, she says, L'Oréal Paris provides an "army to take care of you". We both know she won't need it. 📍



TAP TO FOLLOW @Alex_Carlton

NEXT STORY ►