

COVER STORY

KALEY LEESON:

FROM VIC HIGH TO LONDON'S HIGH FASHION

It's a long way from the hallways of Vic High to the fashion runways of London. Former Victoria resident Kaley Leeson got to strut her stuff at L'Oreal's British Colour Competitions on May 17th. At the event - billed as the most magnificent hair show ever - she was gawked at by an audience of some 3,000 people, including 1,000 hairdressers.

The L'Oreal Trophy was launched some fifty years ago and is considered one of the most prodigious hair competitions in the world.

Kaley's walk started after her arrival in England in early December. She settled in Swindon, a smaller city located north-west of London and obtained work cooking in a nursery weekdays, serving drinks in an '80s bar three nights a week and cooking in an Irish bar on Sundays.

As her pocket book started to grow, so did her hair, and she visited the J.J. Hair Group (They have salons in Crombey Street and Old Town in Swindon, and Cirencester.). Her 6'1" height, plus her "altogether look," prompted the question, "Would you like to model?" Kaley, who had only modeled before a Baptist woman's church group when she was twelve, agreed and the Swindon team began practicing on group nights. Her hair was cut and coloured, as well as makeup applied, over a couple of sessions until they achieved the look they wanted.

This was interesting and exciting, and rewarding in other ways.

"They were really, really kind to me," Kaley remembers. "They were pleased with how I took part, and was part of their team and always on time and everything and really devoted and got off work early and took the day off work ... They were really appreciative and understanding ... I got along with them really well. They were really funny and friendly. They were some of the first friends I made in England."



"It was just the fact that I was in London and doing this modeling thing, and there was a sense of cockiness and joyfulness, thinking of where I was. I'm standing in front of 3,000 people, strutting my stuff, to this amazingly cool, funky song."



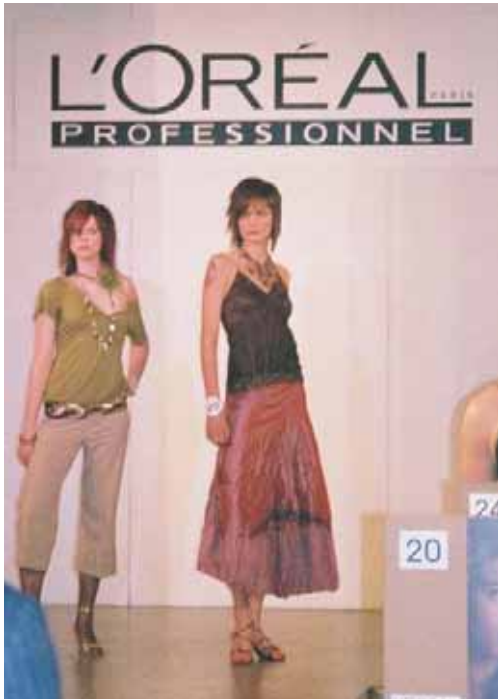
L'Oreal was calling for entrants to their British competition in March and 1500 applicants submitted pictures to qualify for Regional Finals. L'Oreal's mandate was: "to create a visionary street style incorporating sensational styling with innovation."

Kaley describes the JJ. look for L'Oreal: "Right now the style in London and Europe is kind of Moroccan – Bohemian ... My hair was kind of spicy colour, like turmeric, kind of cayenne - a rich look. And my dress was this kind of rich, pinky-red colour - with lots of beads and jewelry."

The JJ. group headed off to the regional finals and the pressure was on.

Joe Hemmings, who styled JJ.'s male entry, said: "The fact that serious names in the industry are there to judge you makes it really nerve-wracking, but so worthwhile...."

Backstage in the Bristol Marriott, Kaley had her own pressures. She quickly realized that all of her competitors were professional models.



"I was the only one who wasn't trained as a model," she smiles. "Everyone else knew how to do their thing...."

So, what did Kaley do? "I just had to go on, making up being a character – pretending I was acting or something."

She also used one of her greatest assets, humour, to help her along.

"Every one was fairly quiet, until you started talking to them," Kaley smiles. "And I'm friendly and started cracking jokes. On the backstage in Bristol, just to make everyone laugh -

everyone was quiet and we were all just standing there waiting to go on stage - and I said, "I really want MacDonald's."

In Bristol, the rookie model went Supersized to win the English Western Colour Trophy.

And, it wasn't just the colours and cuts that won the competition.

"In Bristol the judges came up to me afterwards and said, 'Really excellent job,' because the stairs collapsed and I almost fell. One of the judges said, 'I really carried myself well and nobody noticed.'"

Kaley knew she couldn't trip at Earl's Court 2, where tickets were selling for \$600 and there would be the press from some 33 countries.

continued on next page...

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"We arrived at 9 a.m. in the L'Oreal Institute in London," she remembered, "where the school is, and had breakfast and they started the competition – working on our hair - and we did a catwalk in front of a panel of judges. The presentation was at Earl's Court that night, but the competition was at L'Oreal that day."

Kaley was facing 25 competitors, all of them highly-paid professionals. "The competition seemed a little more steeper [than in Bristol], because everyone there seemed like they were taking things more seriously ... They just knew what they were doing. They knew how to act and feel comfortable in all of the situations. They didn't really show any nervousness - which was intimidating." Once again, Kaley was the friendly Canadian.

"I think I initiated a lot of chat," she laughs. By the time they were in Earl's Court, everyone was relaxed. "The models in London were the ones who knew what they were doing," Kaley continues, "so they were really comfortable in themselves. They were all getting drunk and 'taking the piss.' They were smoking and talking to each other."



So, how did Kaley cope with the 3,000 spectators and two dozen professional models staring at her? "I was just thinking about my attitude, and there was really a good song playing, and I was taking it in the experience. By the end of the whole thing, by the end of the whole day, when I finally did the cat walk, I was pretty much relaxed, as much as I was nervous. It was pretty much the end of it, and I didn't have anything to lose. It was just an enjoyable moment ... It was just the fact that I was in London and doing this modeling thing, and there was a sense of cockiness and joyfulness, thinking of where I was. I'm standing in front of 3,000 people, strutting my stuff, to this amazingly cool, funky song."

In the end, the legendary Scotts won once again. The Alan Edwards salon from Glasgow became the first team in the L'Oreal history to win the competition twice (Toni&Guy of Kensington in London and Barbara Daley from Liverpool placed second and third.).

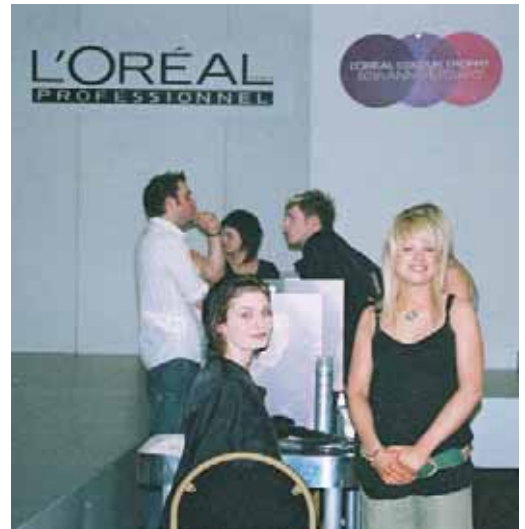
Had Kaley's team members thought they could win? "They were just happy to get there – in the top 26," Kaley says. "They were just pleased to get there."

Did Kaley think she could win? "Because of the scale it was, you could never think this could happen to you. I mean, I never win at anything, so I never thought, 'I would win at this.' And we actually won at Bristol, so I guess in London there was a part of me that said, 'Anything can happen.'" But I was really content in the fact that I had made it that far."

By the time the hair spray bouquet had diminished, Kaley had made some modeling contacts, was given the beautiful dress she had worn, and was returning to Swindon in a limo.

And the M4 was a long way from the Island Highway.

THE L'OREAL WEBSITE SHOWS A VIDEO CLIP OF THE EARLS' COURT FINALS:
<http://www.lorealcolourtrophy.com/Newsroom/VideoClips.htm>



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