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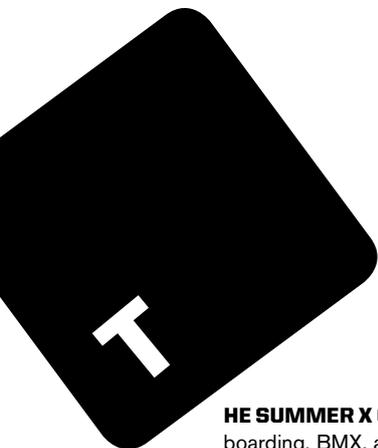
Motocross racer
and tattoo reality-TV
entrepreneur
Carey Hart broke
everything—
relationships, records,
his own body—
and built an empire
from the pieces.

BY CHAUNCEY HOLLINGSWORTH

PHOTOS BY TRAVIS SHINN







HE SUMMER X GAMES ARE A ROMAN CIRCUS OF SKATE-

boarding, BMX, and motocross—a four-day orgy of sports that don't require teams or uniforms. Balls, however, are a must. Deep into the parking lot of L.A.'s Home Depot Center sits Carey Hart's encampment, a brigade that includes three massive tour buses emblazoned with sponsor logos and the words *Hart & Huntington* in flowing tattoo-style script.

Hart—the motocross racer, reality TV star, and sometimes-husband of pop songstress Pink—is pivotal to the X Games. He is a motocross godfather and the first freestyle motocross (FMX) rider to land a backflip on a dirt bike in competition, a trick that's now an expected component of any freestyle rider's arsenal.

Outside, he's signing posters and posing for photographs with fans waiting six deep for the privilege. A steady crowd of nearly a hundred people wave their arms, snap cell phone photos, and scream continuously as a member of Hart's entourage eggs them on, periodically tossing them a T-shirt or bandanna. An hour later, Hart's still signing autographs and there are still a hundred people screaming for him.

toothed grin stained. "I've been doing this since I was 14—now I'm 48," he tells me later that day, popping a cigarette into his mouth. His shirt is wet with sweat, his nicotine-ravaged voice hoarse and strained. "I've been doing this all my life, before there was contests. I've watched it go full circle too many times. But it's better to have kids get paid to do this shit than not get paid."

Carey Hart has placed a premium on getting paid. The Hart & Huntington brand encompasses three tattoo shops, two reality TV shows (*Inked* and the upcoming *Hart Luck Life*), a nightclub (Wasted Space at the Hard Rock Hotel), and a motocross team. Of course, there's also Hart's personal exploits, including his FMX career, motocross racing, a stint on VH1's *The Surreal Life*, and a book of tattoos also called *Inked*.

Inked, the TV show, was the first of its kind.

"We were just trying to do a show that spotlights tattooing in a crazy environment—a hotel in Las Vegas—and all the personalities and trials and tribulations that go along with it," Hart says. "I came up with the idea, so we shot a pilot, shopped it to A&E and Discovery. A&E jumped on it, and Discovery went and did *Miami Ink*. I think our two shows did a lot for tattooing. They took all the bad perspective away and brought [tattooing] to the foreground, and now everyone's making good money and tattooing is a huge craze. It did a lot for tattooing in general worldwide. I think it's great for all artists."

Hart has no tolerance for backlash. "I never got into tattooing to get rich," he says. "I got into tattooing because it's a fucking passion of mine. I can't draw to save my life, so the next best thing is I'll hang out in a tattoo shop where there's amazing art going down. Kat Von D will sit there and talk shit about me, but I'm creating jobs. I've got 43 tattoo artists, probably another 30 shop help, and another 30 receptionists who all have a job because of these stupid TV shows that we did. What is she doing for the industry other than buying fucking Range Rovers and having a big house in the Hills?"

He's equally passionate about FMX, where he's best known for two major contributions: the Hart Attack, a trick in which the rider jumps a gap while doing a handstand on the bike with his body completely vertical, and the first backflip, which he did on a 250 cc motorcycle at the 2000 Gravity Games (a move briefly known as the "Hart Breaker"). It's a measure of FMX's break-

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"This is how it always goes," Hart says later, while relaxing on one of the buses. "We're very professional and by the book, but at the same time we create a hype and a value—bring some brand awareness, bring the party to the event."

As soon as he speaks, the image of the reality TV stereotype starts to fade. He's smart. He's insightful. And he has impressive mastery of marketing-speak: Talk of brand synergy rolls off his tongue with the smoothness of a well-executed no-footed can-can. "I guess I'm not your typical athlete," he says by way of explanation. "I had the talent, sponsors gave me the money, and I didn't just cash the check and go buy a Bentley. I learned. Why are these companies paying me so much money to ride for them? It's because I'm the face of their brand and I bring their brand cool factor. So over the course of the years, I talked with my team managers and found out how they controlled and built their brands, and that's what I've been doing with Hart & Huntington. I might not be the most accounting-, P and L's-, business-savvy person, but I know how to build a brand." Hart's use of the term *P and L's* (profit and losses) belies any idea that he lacks business know-how.

The invited athletes and X Games Skate Park Legends competitors—including ex-members of Stacy Peralta's Bones Brigade and '80s skateboard stars like Christian Hosoi—provide a peek into the path of many other extreme sports icons. Tony Hawk sits in an air-conditioned broadcast booth awaiting royalties from the upcoming 12th title in his video game franchise; Duane Peters—the '80s skateboard legend and punk rock singer who has struggled with drug addiction—mugs for cameras in 90-degree heat with pads and helmet on. Time has not been kind to Peters. His face looks tired, his snaggle-

neck progress that riders now regularly do backflips, with rider Travis Pastrana completing a double backflip at the X Games in 2006.

It's also a testament to the sport's incredible danger. Hart fell after landing that first backflip, injuring himself severely. And Hart's brother died in a motorcycle crash during a practice session for the American Motorcyclist Association's XTRM Supermoto Championship series in August of 2008. He was only 21.

"It's heavy," Hart says. "We all sign up for it. I've had three or four close brushes with death, and I was lucky enough not to [die], and that's part of the sport."

Hart has broken both arms and both legs twice, and almost bled to death twice. The scarred joint at the base of his right thumb is now the size of a walnut, thanks to surgery he had to reattach its tendons. He casually pulls up the leg of his shorts to reveal a six-inch scar on his right thigh from one surgery that put a metal rod in his leg.

He describes the bleed-outs with little emotion. "I was practicing for an event and came over a jump; a tractor swung around the backside of the jump. I didn't see it—I hit the tractor, broke both my legs, broke both my arms, compounded one of my femurs, almost bled out. What was considered my career-ending injury was when I got hurt on Tony Hawk's Boom Boom Huck Jam Tour. I had to avoid hitting the skaters; [I] flew into the vert ramp, broke both legs, both arms, almost died, almost bled out in surgery. I actually did the math not too long ago and I've spent probably two to three years of my life in a wheelchair."

Hart credits his workaholic tenacity to these long periods of recovery. "What pushed me to drive super-hard on the business side of things was when I was hurt. I knew I wasn't going to be able to ride a motorcycle for a



Las Vegas, CO.

LAS VEGAS



few years, so I had to have something that I could focus all my time and energy into, and that was business.”

He also blames his type A tendencies, at least partially, for causing his split from Pink. “I’m not chill or laid-back, and it drives Pink absolutely fucking nuts,” he laughs. “We can’t go on vacation together. It just doesn’t work, unless we’re on a vacation where there are activities and I can keep myself focused. We try doing the Fiji thing, sitting on an island for five days and just staring at each other, and I’m climbing the walls by day two.”

By the time Hart and Pink separated in 2008, their schedules and careers stood between them. “She’s a full-time touring artist, I’m a full-time athlete-business owner, and the timing wasn’t right,” he says. “We both, probably more so me, needed to take a little bit of time to get our lives straight and kind of take some things head-on. And in the course of that we both grew a lot and learned about things we did right or wrong in ourselves and in our relationship.”

Hart wears his wedding ring on a chain around his neck, but he insists, “It’s not about throwing wedding rings on and going back to these old routines. It’s about making new routines and putting our relationship first and foremost.” Pink announced they were back together on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* in May. “Once we got back together, we tried to come up with ways we could be together and I could still get accomplished what I have to. So I did a Hart & Huntington-titled freestyle motocross tour in Australia in the parking lots of her stadiums, and it was great. Here we are, full circle, and it’s better than it’s ever been. The biggest thing is, she’s my best friend, my partner in crime. We have a great time and we keep each other happy. I like to be with her, hang out with her. We share the same common interests and same life objectives. That’s hard to find, especially in the circles of people we’re both in. Pretty much from the time I met Alecia I knew we were going to be together forever.”

SHOT ON LOCATION IN WASTED SPACE AT THE HARD ROCK HOTEL & CASINO, LAS VEGAS



THE DAY WE SPOKE WAS A WEEK FROM THE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BROTHER'S death. At Hart's race earlier in the day, he wore his brother's number, 141, instead of his usual 46. He shows off the black and gray angel that he tattooed on his neck as a tribute. He also has a clover and walking stick behind his ear, a piece shared by others in his crew. "I got it when my grandfather passed away. He had this old '70s-style hot rod van—actually, I own it now and I'm restoring it—and on the side of his van he had *Irish Mist* with this clover and the walking stick. So when he passed away I did that tattoo for him, and then I did my neck for my brother."

Much of Hart's tattoo work was done by Dan Adair, who owns Soul Expressions Tattoo in Temecula, CA, and who also tattooed motocross riders Mike Metzger and Ronnie Faisst. Scott Harrison and Mister Cartoon have also placed their marks on Hart, as have artists Dave Logue and Ben Corn. In addition to a sacred heart on his back surrounded by waves of color, he has a tiki torch on his chest flanked by an angry koi fish and a tiki mask. A vintage car adorns his stomach above the words "Viva Las Vegas," and much of his arms are a tribute to old and new Las Vegas in the form of classic venues, newer landmarks, and flaming dice.

His knuckles are inscribed with "H-A-R-T" and "L-U-C-K," and the backs of his hands are tattooed in Latin—one translates to "from the heart" and the other "from their blood," with a cluster of clovers representing his grandfather and his father.

"The day I decided to tattoo my hand, I was getting a bit of heat from my manager and from different people: 'Aw, man, you're getting your hands tattooed, your neck tattooed—you can't cover that up.' I'm like, I seriously doubt Bank of America is going to call anytime soon and give me a job as a teller. And you know what? If I tattoo my hands I have no choice but to succeed, so I've got to work that much harder."

Though he's blasé about his hands, he admits to being a little freaked by his own neck piece. "After it was done, there was actually a little element of fear, like, Fuck, I got my neck tattooed!" Hart exclaims, laughing. "I used to get the ladies grabbing their purses in general walking through the grocery store, but now with a neck tattoo, it's on a whole 'nother level."

Hart's tattoos were part of what first alienated him from the motocross racing scene and drove him to freestyle, and he savors a clenched-jaw satisfaction in recounting the H & H team's success. "I definitely have some leftover resentment, and that's why I'm taking that monster head-on by being involved in supercross," Hart says. "I'm doing it my own way because I was never allowed to do it my own way. It shows that we can come in and be tattooed scumbags with a cool angle and a cool vibe and create a fan base that's actually a lucrative, profitable business. There's always naysayers out there, and here we are going into year four and we're going to be bigger and better. There would be nothing better than in the next two or three years being that factory team and winning championships and pretty much giving the big fuck-you to the rest of the industry who used to look down their nose at me. Because those people are still around, and those are the same people who walk around the pits and kiss my ass now."

"I ACTUALLY DID THE MATH NOT TOO LONG AGO AND I'VE SPENT PROBABLY TWO TO THREE YEARS OF MY LIFE IN A WHEELCHAIR."

DURING HIS X GAME RACE, HART WAS SECOND-TO-LAST IN THE RUNNING AND SEEMED TO BE TAKING the turns tentatively, as if distracted or extra aware of the potential cost of failure. Each time he appeared on the track in front of the bleachers, usually alone, the crowd roared its approval. It was impossible to tell if they knew it was Carey Hart or if they were just cheering for the guy who doesn't give up.

"I do this for fun now," says Hart. "The days of putting all the pressure on myself are over because I lived that lifestyle for over 10 years. I've made my goals, I've won my medals, I've put my stamp on freestyle motocross, I've accomplished everything I want to do in that circle. I couldn't care if I win or get dead last—it's all the same."

Later, watching the motocross finals with pro skateboarder and Sirius radio personality Jason Ellis and others, Hart sums up the difference between the gladiator athletes chasing each other on dirt bikes and the stars of more

traditional sports. "Action sports guys are very in their bodies as opposed to in the mind. You have to know that you'd be in horrible pain at any moment. In my life, that's what separates action sports from traditional sports. You look at pro sports—basketball, football, baseball—I'm not taking anything away from them, they're great athletes. But what we do is pure passion because when we got into it, there was nothing. It's only in the last five years that anyone's been making money at this. Everyone who does this, if it's skateboarding, motocross, BMX, snowboarding, whatever, they do it because they are genuinely passionate about it. They'll do it whether they get a paycheck or not. Does Joe Montana play two-hand touch on the weekends now that he's retired? I'm basically technically retired. I'm still racing. I still ride. When Kobe's all done, is he going to do fucking pickup games at the local park? There's a chance that we could die or be in a wheelchair or severely break bones, but we do it because we like it so much."

He acknowledges the divide between the dirt bike rider he is and the businessman he needs to be, and how he's jumped that gap with the same skill that defined him as a freestyle pioneer. "The biggest thing is, mentally, I'm still the same person I was at 21," he says. "I'm 34 now, and I'm still having a lot of fun at what I'm doing. But I don't let myself relax. One day on the couch is one day I could've been working on something. That's why I'm still very active on a motorcycle and in a race truck. Everything I'm doing, I have to spin it into business in one way or another or else it won't be enjoyable to me. I get to race supermoto, I get to go race trucks, I still get to ride freestyle. I'm doing it, one, because I love it—but two, it's helping build my brand. So at the end of the day I feel like I'm still getting something out of it, as jaded as that sounds."

And then he laughs. ■