



DIRT ROAD *Diva*

*Who says girls can't play with trucks?
Trading scrubs for a fireproof suit,
this registered nurse drives the big
ones alongside the guys*

Story by **Carina Belles** | Photo by **Ian Bates**

The mighty Samson looms just off a country road in Pickaway County, its metal-sculpted arms more menacing than its biblical namesake. The 2,000-horsepower beast weighs more than 10,000 pounds and is one of the most famous monster trucks in motor sports history. What's more, it's fueled by girl power.

Samson's current champion, 28-year-old Allison Patrick, lives a double life. By day, the Circleville native works 12-hour nursing shifts at the Berger Hospital intensive care unit, racing against the clock to save lives. On the weekends, she hits the road, crushing cars and jumping off school buses for thousands of spectators across the country. "Obviously, I like adrenaline," she says.

As the youngest daughter of motor sports legend Dan Patrick, this is the only life Allison could ever imagine. The little girl who used to cover her eyes and scream every time she watched her dad race now sits behind the wheel. However, the journey hasn't always been easy.

Driving a monster truck is nothing like driving a car. For



FROM TOP Allison Patrick poses by one of Samson's enormous 66-inch-tall wheels (Photo by IAN BATES); Allison and her father, Dan Patrick, prepare for one of her first shows (Photo provided).

one thing, monster trucks don't have doors. Once she's zipped up her fireproof suit and put on her massive helmet, Allison climbs up more than 6 feet into the belly of the beast. Samson's innerworkings look more like a rocket ship's control room than a car, but Allison knows exactly which buttons and levers will help her nail a 100-foot landing and which will leave her spinning in circles. The lifestyle isn't exactly easy, either. Allison works three 12-hour shifts a week at the hospital, leaves for shows on Thursday night, and typically won't get home until Sunday night. It might sound exhausting, but she makes it look easy.

Allison looks nothing like your typical extreme sports athlete. She favors colorful dresses, girly jean jackets and plenty of jewelry that set her apart from her predominantly male competitors. First and foremost, she's a woman—one of the only women to ever participate in monster truck driving. Only a handful compete professionally, and Allison is typically the only female performer at her events. Though she's only been competing since January 2013, Allison shows plenty of promise, and some of her male competitors aren't particularly happy about that.

"Some people don't like to get beat by a girl, but the sport has changed," Allison says. "You just have those people who think that motor sports are only for men."

Allison says most monster truck fans are boys under 10, and much of the sport is catered toward them. But Allison's proudest moments come from meeting the little girls in the audience—most of whom are totally shocked to see her behind the wheel. "They're like, 'you drive that?'" she says. "To see the look in their eyes when they come up and get autographs... they are so excited."

Allison's ultimate goal is to get more women involved in the sport. She cites a lack of early encouragement as the main reason little girls don't dream of growing up and becoming a monster truck driver.

Though her future in motor sports is bright, Allison will never give up nursing completely—she loves it too much. That branch of her career path came as a bit of a surprise to her parents, who thought she would go into sports marketing. They can't see their dirt road diva as the gentle caregiver her patients rave about. But Allison can't imagine a life without constant pressure.

"When patients come in, they've coded or something's gone wrong; I love it, and I thrive in it," she says.

The hot pink "Team Allie" shirt is one of the Patrick family's best selling T-shirts, and it's easy to see why. Allison's inherited more than just her father's racing skills. She has his charisma as well. Her parents don't hesitate to call her a drama queen—in a good way.

"She would get an attitude as a little girl," says her mother, Chris.

"I don't know where she got that," Dan jokes. His good-natured sarcasm is a big part of his appeal. He is a legend in the motor sports world, but he would never let you know it.

"We should have known she'd be a force to be reckoned with," her mother adds. Dan thinks it's this side of Allison that will keep her in the game for a long time.

"Our industry is way more than just performance," her father says. "It's personality. She's genuine; she's not going to turn it off. She'll treat a fan the same way when she's alone in a parking lot or in front of a crowd. We've instilled that in our family—we're here because of them."

Part garage, part museum, Patrick Enterprises is all about family. Childhood snapshots of Allison and her older sister Natalie playing in their "mini-monsters" hang alongside photos and memorabilia of Dan's time at the television show *American Gladiators*. The family lives in a modest home behind the



Samson crushes three scrapped cars at a monster truck event (Photo provided).



Allison Patrick signs autographs for her young fans (Photo provided).

garage, and they also have a test track for Allison to practice on, a far cry from the open field where she and Samson had their first disastrous truck-driving lesson.

Since it's almost impossible to see when you are in the driver's seat, Allison and Dan use walkie-talkies to communicate. That first day, their radios weren't synched properly, leaving Allison alone.

"Her dad thought she just wasn't listening to him, and she ran into the house crying," Chris says. "That wasn't a fun day."

Allison's involvement could soon change the sport forever. Now that Samson's helped her get her name out there, Allison hopes to debut a truck of her own next summer, one with considerably more girl power. "It's pink, it's leopard print, it's very girly," she says of her future ride.

"That's not going to happen anytime soon," her father jokes. "She can't drive anything that I wouldn't drive."

It's hard to imagine the imposing figure of Dan Patrick in anything leopard print, let alone hot pink. Not only has he been driving monster trucks for the past 25 years, he has built more than 100 trucks—inventing new parts and gears that have made the sport the crowd-pleaser that it is today. Patrick was the first to break the five-second barrier, the time it takes Samson to go from 0 to 60 mph.

Despite his larger-than-life charm, Patrick comes from much humbler roots. Born and raised in Pickaway County, he was a 17-year-old farmer who spent his spare time tractor pulling, an early motor sport that involves pulling a heavy sledge as far as you can. By the early 1980s, his hobby evolved into local arena shows, and he competed in the first motor sports event held at Madison Square Garden in 1984. "It all falls into luck," he says. "I thought it was going to last three or four years, and it's lasted a little longer than that."

By the late 1980s, Patrick was performing full time for a living, driving funny cars, an early type of drag racer, for Coors Brewery. He built the first dragster-style puller, and stumbled on Samson by accident in 1988 during a routine build. "I was going to sell a trailer, and I bought a monster truck instead," he says.

By the time his daughters were born, Patrick was on the road, traveling coast to coast for nearly 40 weeks out of the year, and he says he missed out on much of their childhood. "When [Allison] was born, I left the same day and went to an event in Houston," Dan says. "That's how I supported my family."

The Patricks are all about work. Though they have traveled all over the world together, they took their first-ever family vacation to Florida three years ago. Though Allison now lists her father as her biggest hero, his absence—he often spent more than 300 days a year on the road—did create distance between them.

Now that Allison and her father are on the road together, Dan says he feels like he is making up for a lot of lost time—even if he is occasionally teased for carrying her cheetah-print luggage around.

"She always wanted to be a mail lady in the day, and be a rock star at night," Chris says.

It's safe to say she's come pretty close. ♦