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*Cancun has undergone an extreme makeover since being ravaged by hurricane a year ago*

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*John Grisham offers a legal thriller in his latest book, but this time the tale is true*

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# A powerful blend of talents

**EX-SARNIAN IS ACTRESS, FITNESS COMPETITOR AND MODEL**

By JACK POIRIER  
The Observer

Having raced through frigid ravines, scaled harrowing cliffs, bested top fitness models and even scared off a grizzly bear, Shannon Leroux has come a long way since leaving Sarnia.

The now Mississauga model, actress and fitness competitor has enjoyed her share of excitement since opting to leave her hometown in search of Hollywood glamour four years ago.

"I'm not what you'd call a stationary person," explains the six-foot-tall blonde bombshell.

The 34-year-old mother of two has gone from packing lunches to packing on muscle in her search for physical perfection. Her resume over the past four years reads like something out of an adventure magazine.

Leroux has appeared in a number of commercials and TV spots, has been featured on the TV series *Degrassi* and has already made her movie debut.

Making healthy choices and working out became a constant companion. So when a colleague encouraged her to make the jump to fitness competitions, Leroux didn't hesitate.

"I thought it would open the door for more endorsement opportunities," she says.

And it did. She won her very first competition last October. This past June, Leroux secured her professional card as a fitness model, and opportunities have been pouring in ever since.

Leroux has her own fitness video, called *Shape Up*, will appear in a major fitness magazine and will be featured in a pair of upcoming reality shows.

"This was the most physically intense thing I have ever done," she says of filming an episode of *Mantracker*, which pits willing contestants in a brutally exhausting ordeal.

"They picked me because of my background in fitness," says Leroux.

The premise of the series, carried on OLN, is based on a hunter versus prey theme. The prey, in this case Leroux and her longtime friend Stephanie Bigras, are given a two km head start to navigate some 50 km with nothing but a map and a compass through rugged terrain. The goal is to make it to the finish before a 36-hour window elapses or being nabbed by *Mantracker* himself, a steely-eyed Alberta tracker named Terry Grant.

*Mantracker*, along with a sidekick, saddle up with nothing but their tracking skills at their disposal. It didn't take



NORA PENHALE The Observer

**Shannon Leroux has her own fitness video, entitled *Shape Up*.**

long, Leroux says, to figure why the producers want prey who are physically fit.

"We were scaling cliffs, put on a zip line across streams, waded through streams that were 3 C, it was tough," Leroux says.

At one point, the childhood friends came face to face with one of Alberta's most dangerous critters, a grizzly bear. Luckily, the show had prepared them for such an encounter, or so Leroux thought.

"Once we saw that big beast all that training and information went out the window," she says with a giggle. "We screamed like little girls."

Apparently it worked as the bear thumped away, literally shaking the ground beneath the girls' feet.

"It was intense," Leroux says, adding there were a few times when she and her cohort had to hide in the bush to evade capture by their horseback posse.

But, she won't spill the beans on whether she bested the RCMP-trained tracker.

"I can't," she says. "All I'll say is we did really, really well."

The show is expected to air October 2007.

While her career has taken Leroux from the glamour of

television to the opulence of a palatial existence in Dubai, it hasn't always been peaches and cream. Leroux says she didn't anticipate the climb to become a fitness competitor would have been as arduous as it was.

Without the support of friends and family, she wouldn't have made it, she admits.

"I never realized the kind of tenacity it would take," she says, while sipping on some mineral water. The formidable workout schedule is one thing, but the diet is entirely another bitter pill to swallow, she admits.

In the three months leading up to competition, Leroux's schedule reads more like marine training, only kicked into another gear.

Her daily food consumption consists of protein shakes and shredded wheat biscuits, boiled chicken breasts and spinach, egg whites, tuna or some other white fish, then more egg whites, boiled chicken and spinach. For dessert, how about chocking down a handful of vitamins and supplements?

On top of that there are the daily aerobic workouts, consisting of step classes, kick boxing, muay thai, plus weights and a 10-km run.

"To achieve excellence ... it does require some extreme measures," she says. As the days go by, there are times when Leroux questions what she is putting herself through. Peanut butter starts to look quite tempting.

"I know near the end my family is quite sick of chicken," she says of her 10-year-old son Troy, six-year-old daughter Kamryn and her partner Michael Price.

"But, they really keep me focused," she says. And it works both ways. Son Troy, even when he gives in to his natural temptation for a McDonalds burger, will order a garden salad to go with it instead of fries.

Michael says he also looks at nutrition differently these days.

"I definitely look at the impact of food and exercise differently than I did before," he says. "It really becomes a family routine."

Leroux says with the support of her family and friends there is no telling where her recent calling will take her. Despite getting a late start into the television and fitness gig, Leroux is confident she has a lot of years left in the profession.

"I will always be involved in fitness in some capacity," she says.



Photos by Michael Price

**Above: Shannon Leroux at the FAME fitness event in Hamilton. Below: Posing in bikini.**



# Lots of decisions to make if you're buying a scope

Birding scopes make a fine, though possibly expensive, Christmas present, a wish-list item for sure.

Some birders consider scopes as indispensable and necessary as binoculars. It depends, I suppose, on where you do most of your birding and how serious a birder you are.

If you're the kind of person who absolutely can't stand the thought of seeing a tiny blur in a far off field or across a wind-swept mud flat without knowing whether it's a grasshopper sparrow or least sandpiper, then I guess you need one.

Personally, I have a scope and use it regularly when looking across marshes, distant beaches, open fields and at rafts of offshore waterfowl.

There's no doubt that scopes extend your reach and make it possible to identify birds beyond the normal range of binoculars. The downside is that scopes can be awkward to



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carry, considering that you also need a sturdy tripod and tripod head to support it.

Most of the newer scopes are amazingly light weight, but after hiking for half-an-hour across a field on a hot day with one fastened to a tripod that's resting on your shoulder, you may think differently.

As with binoculars, design improvements and the use of newer materials have led to scopes that now are more compact and offer brighter images than their predecessors of a decade ago. Modern scopes provide astonishingly brilliant images of truly far-off birds.

Scopes generally have an objective or front lens of around 60-65 mm or 80-85

mm, the two most common sizes. In theory, the bigger objective lens (and correspondingly larger scope) provides a brighter image, particularly in low-light conditions.

With today's high-end instruments the difference may be difficult to notice or even prove. Smaller scopes quite naturally are more portable, possibly an advantage if you plan to travel extensively with one. Many scopes come with a fixed-power eyepiece, such as 20, 25 or 30 power or more.

Variable power or zoom eyepieces also are available, usually for more money.

Don't get hung up on power. Many birders will tell you that most of the time they use their scopes around 20-25 power. Much beyond this and you have to deal with heat haze, dust in the atmosphere, even wind that may jiggle the scope and tripod, issues that are magnified by whatever power you're using.

Scopes are available in either straight or angled view models. This is one of your tougher decisions. A straight scope might be easier to target onto a distant bird, but to look comfortably through the scope it has to be up around your eye-level, which may mean a big tripod. Angled view scopes, with the eyepiece at roughly a 45 degree angle, can be set up on a smaller tripod because you look down into the eyepiece. If you do a lot of birding with someone who is significantly taller or shorter than you, the angled eyepiece might be the way to go.

A lot has been written about digiscoping, including earlier here in *WingBeat*. It's a fancy term for using a digital camera to photograph through the scope, with the scope becoming a powerful telephoto lens.

Almost any scope will work for digiscoping, it's getting the right digital camera and a way to align the two and keep them

steady that are the challenges. If digiscoping is one of your reasons for getting a scope, a good website for advice is [www.digiscoped.com](http://www.digiscoped.com).

Alternatively, type 'digiscoping' and you'll get many sites. A number of the high-end scope manufacturers including Zeiss, Swarovski, Leica, Nikon and perhaps others make digiscoping adapters.

Several non-scope manufacturers also make adapters. This fall Zeiss is introducing in a limited quantity an eyepiece for their scope that incorporates a four mega-pixel digital camera. If portability is paramount and you expect to only occasionally need additional magnification, some binocular manufacturers make attachments that double or triple the magnification of one barrel of the binocular.

Depending on the manufacturer, the adapters either replace one eyepiece or attach to an eyepiece.

Various gadgets are available to mount the binocular on a tripod or mono pod to steady it. I went this way on a birding trip to Panama. After hiking all day in the heat and humidity of the lowland forest other birders who had lugged big scopes and tripods were asking to look at my set-up.

I wouldn't want to look through my 'binocular scope' for hours on end, but it's portable and a comparatively inexpensive option.

I steadied my 'binocular scope' with a mono pod, which also worked as a nifty hiking stick.

If you do find yourself the proud owner of a beautiful new scope, write down the serial number and call your insurer. You'll sleep better.

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