

Start Me Up

Meet Bella, who for seven years spent a serious amount of time in ditches, bogs and butts, so decided to design a suitable clothing line to cope with her lifestyle



Starting your own business is never quite as easy as you think it will be. Time is invariably scarce and there are always streams of well-meaning voices offering help and advice and only too willing to relay tales of horrific failure that would make even the bravest soul question why they are doing this. There really never is a right time.

In this series we meet a range of women who have taken the plunge and struck out to fulfil their business dreams. For Bella Hoskyns-Abrahall, leaving London and settling in Northumberland gave her the opportunity and inspiration to start the clothing brand she had always (secretly) dreamed of having.

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Starting a new business is always such an exciting time, how did the idea first come to you and why now?

I grew up in the countryside in Warwickshire and later I met my husband Bertie at university in Newcastle. At the time I thought I was a true country girl, but I was really put through my paces, spending the next seven years either in a ditch, a hide, a bog or a butt. I realised pretty quickly what I wanted and needed to wear and felt there was a gap in the market. So I decided to design a couple of things such as a tweed shooting coat with velvet collar and quilted lining and a waistcoat. I got great feedback whenever I wore them and decided I would love to do it as a business. This was 12 years ago now.

Why did you finally settle in the North East?

Bertie and I lived and worked in London for 14 years and after our second child was born we decided we needed to find a rural place to escape to for half terms and holidays. Bertie's cousin had an idyllic house to rent near Haltwhistle and so we didn't hesitate to give it a go. Not once did we ever regret the long journey and we always felt heavy hearted when it was time to leave. So after one short year we made the decision to reverse our lifestyle and moved up permanently, although my husband still continues to work in London three days a week.

What do your designs represent, and who are they for?

I'd like to think my clothing represents understated, effortless elegance. Wearing the Bella Hoskyns label shouldn't feel as if you're standing out in something new, but rather enveloped by an 'old friend'... giving you confidence, whether you have grown up in the countryside, are going into it for the very first time or simply crossing the divide between urban and rural lifestyles. I want it to appeal to older and younger men and women.

How does your life now differ from your life in London?

I loved the hustle and bustle and the glamour of it all but if you asked if I'd go back I'd say no. It was great for work and for having small children but my life has changed beyond belief, in a good way. The change of pace allows you to take stock, take things in and think.



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Did moving somewhere remote give your something to prove?

I definitely felt I needed to prove something to others but more importantly to myself. I didn’t want to be written off as someone living in a remote place who had lost touch with reality. I had also talked about what I wanted to do for such a long time people were bored of hearing about it, had lost interest and I felt belief in me. I wanted to feel worth something.

What does your family make of your venture?

I think my husband is rather proud of me and my children are very excited about it all. My seven-year-old daughter likes to have a say on all colour decisions. After the County Show my five-year-old son said, ‘Are you happy Mumma? As I know your coats are precious to you.’ I try my hardest to get everything done when the children aren’t around, so that my time with them is just that. First thing in the morning, when my toddler sleeps in the middle of the day and in the evenings are full throttle Bella Hoskyns time. I’m lucky that my husband isn’t here for two nights a week in a way as I can sit on my computer without missing out on him or he on me.

Your first day of sales was the Northumberland County Show this year – what was that like?

I so nearly didn’t do it as I wasn’t ready, mentally or physically. My branding wasn’t sorted, I had no stock and I hadn’t even spoken to the manufacturer to see

if they were ready. I just took it as an opportunity to see what people thought and literally gain feedback rather than sales. When I approached the tent and saw two ladies trying on my waistcoats, I just couldn’t believe it. It was so exciting. It was a thrill to see differently aged women, differently sized and shaped women all trying on my clothes and agreeing that they looked great. At the end of the day I packed up and drove home on my own, I rang my mother and burst into tears. I think it was the relief that the day had been a success and the emotional realisation that people had actually bought into my very own designs and that it might just be a goer.

What’s next?

I am working on a website and on a few more styles and pieces for the range. I plan to do a lot of fairs, circumnavigating the country to spread the word.

www.bellahoskyns.com



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