



SIMON SAYS

By Matthieu Chan Tsai/Archive photography

There used to be this funny skit on Saturday Night Live. Actor and comedian Mike Myers would sit in a bathtub almost overflowing with white foam and welcome a not always so comfortable guest to show him and the audience weekly childish drawings. “Hello,” Mike Myers would say, “my name is Simon, and I like to do drawings...” It was not a very subtle skit, yet Myer’s little British character Simon became an instant hit. Everybody wanted a little Simon who could do drawings for them. The paintball industry as a whole may never have desired a little Simon, yet by some unforeseen twist of fate, they got one. And he likes to do drawings too! As a matter of fact, you might own something that Simon Stevens once drew... a belt-driven loader or an Empire Intimidator, and you never knew.



The first production C&C X-mag.

PROFILE

Simon Stevens is a soft-spoken thirty years old, often known by his internet nickname *Manike*, who describes himself as a "big fan of the sail, the internal combustion engine, beer and women." Indeed, although Simon has been involved in paintball for the past fourteen or fifteen years, he spends his free time snowboarding, sailing, driving fast cars, motorcycles and off-road riding with ATVs. Dedicated to his work, Simon also believes in "playing hard" and the concept of Karma.

Simon Stevens talks with a British accent. He is from Stratford Upon Avon in the UK, a city otherwise known as the birthplace of a certain William Shakespeare who would have graced the world, some say, with some of the best plays ever written. Simon's family, including his mother and two older sisters, still lives in England. His father lost his fight against cancer last year.

Growing up in the UK, Simon was a very respectable young boy in that he participated in the national pastime of the UK: rugby. Rugby is the sport that makes overbuilt football players look like sissies when they walk on the gridiron with all their gear. He played rugby very seriously, as a No.8 or blindside flanker, up until his final year at University when, in the span of one season, he dislocated both shoulders for the second time and had to take time off to recover. He also had a degree to finish. When he had to hang his cleats for the last time, Simon could look back at a successful rugby career. He had played for the first teams of his school and his university, as well as for the Southern Region Under 19's squad. If he had been in the US, he would

Christmas he bought his niece and nephew their first dinghy so they could experience what brought their family very close together for many years.

Simon enjoyed the regular life of an English schoolboy. At 16, he took the first significant exams of his young life and passed these tests, called GCSE's, with A's (top mark available). He was joint-top student in his year. He studied Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, English, English Literature, French, Technology, Geography and History. With such good grades, he went on to do what is called "further education" in the UK, which completes a high school education and prepares to university life. He studied Biology, Mathematics, Physics and General Studies. But he didn't do as well as expected. That year, Simon's love for fast cars almost brought his own life to a brutal and untimely end. Simon always enjoyed cars. When he was just fourteen, his parents gave him a Volkswagen Beetle, and he would spend most of his days underneath the chassis, trying to fix everything and learning about mechanics. But by the time he was 17, he would drive his father's car and take it for drives on his own. He developed good driving skills, but overestimated himself one fateful night. It was a night that would change his life, a night that had started like every other night and finished with two cars crushed, like bloody wounded beasts waiting on the side of a straight road. Simon had been speeding, had felt invincible at the wheels, and had never seen the car that was coming on the other side of the road. Though straight, this road had a slight hill in the middle, a bump that was just big enough to hide just

invincibility that had come with his teenage years vanished. The notions of reality and of responsibility took on a whole different meaning. Yet, life went on and just as he was about to take his final exams, he had to have his appendicitis taken out. Simon didn't do as well as expected, but his other extra curricular activities boosted his scores and he was thus able to be accepted at the university of his choice.

PAINTBALL EDUCATION

Simon went to Sussex University where he studied Mechanical Engineering and Business Management. He achieved a 2:1 honors degree (one grade down from the top degree possible) and won an award from the IMech E for the best Mechanical Engineering project. The project was entered into the 'Engineering Student of the year' competition and he came third in the South and in the top nine Mechanical Engineers in the country. Simon also added some specific classes to his curriculum, courses specifically selected because they would help with his paintball projects. He studied rapid prototyping, computational fluid dynamics, ballistics, thermodynamics and would ask questions that often confused his professors yet helped him with paintball problems.

Paintball had been on Simon's mind for a long time when he graduated. Simon actually discovered paintball when he was fourteen years old after walking past a bookstore and seeing a paintball magazine. But you had to be sixteen to play paintball in the UK in those days. He was forced to wait for two years and then played on his actual

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surely have been an All-State football player.

Simon comes from a close family. But while other kids would go to the park to kick a ball around with their siblings and parents, Simon's family used to spend a lot of time sailing, which has provided him with some of his fondest memories. He started windsurfing when he was eight years old and would go out to sail whenever it was windy. The Stevens even traveled abroad to go sailing. Over the years, Simon has developed quite an experience and has sailed everything from windsurfers, racing dinghies to yachts capable of crossing oceans. Sailing has always been important to his family and last

for a second, an incoming car that Simon, lost in speed fever, never saw. The collision was violent; a head on crash.. When Simon opened his eyes, he felt pain in his shoulders, his collarbone was broken, and he saw that the passengers of the other car were also hurt. The driver and the kid who had been in the back were fine, but the front passenger was stuck, immobilized by broken legs... Nobody died in the accident. But for Simon, this night was the beginning of a long period of depression that would take years to heal... It is actually paintball that gave him a way out. Having caused an accident and almost having killed somebody hit Simon like a wall. A life could have ended. Suddenly, the sense of

sixteenth Birthday. He could not have waited another day. Today, he cannot recall when the addiction first began: "I don't know if I was hooked when I read my first magazine or when I played my first game." Only two weeks after playing for the first time he bought a Lapco Spectre from a young Owen at WDP. He immediately performed a trigger job on it to get the auto-trigger to work correctly, and then two weeks later, he joined a team (SGP, Survival Game Predators) and played in his first tournament.

A few weeks after he started playing regularly, he broke his hopper (hoppers were made of drain pipe back then)

so he set out to make parts for his gun because he was not really satisfied with what he could buy. Simon's professional career and paintball have been interlinked. Since he was a kid, he was always interested in engineering and advanced technologies. He was almost born into engineering, and first used real tools at two years old. His father was an Engineer, and so is one of his two older sisters. His training started early as his father would get him involved with designing and making things around the house when he was a young boy. If anything became broken beyond repair he would take it apart to learn how it worked. Simon recognizes how much his father influenced him: "He taught me to design, think outside of the box, and that nothing was impossible... I just might not find the right solution at my first attempt, but that it was okay to try again because there is no one who has innovated who didn't make mistakes along the way." It is with this philosophy that he invented the force feed system. He was young and spent a long time with different companies who would not take him too seriously. He constantly had wait on other people to help him take the project further. He was naive but learnt a lot through the whole process. He put a huge amount of time and money into the project and had a hard time bringing it to fruition. He was only a student with no great financial backing so he wrote his initial patent application himself, and did all the CAD images to save on costs. He ran out of money doing so,

paintball was still on his mind and he was able to use the technologies of his work place to design paintball equipment that would give him a competitive edge. There were days when he would work two eight-hour shifts, one for BMW/Land Rover and the next for creating paintball equipment. He spent so much time designing paintball equipment that he actually got better and better at the technologies he used at work, and so he would get promotions or job offers, and moved up through the company. Eventually, he became so good with the software he was using that the company who produced it asked him to start a subsidiary in the UK for them. It was a great experience. Simon ran the UK subsidiary of Tebis for three years and got to work with companies from the gaming, the automotive and the aerospace industries. He flew around the world teaching techniques and how to use Tebis' software to different companies.

FROM THE UK TO THE USA

Ever since he had been involved in Paintball, Simon had been close to AGD (Air Gun Design) and had become great friends with John and Jackie Sosta, and John Bonich who worked for AGD Europe. One day at an event in Brighton they told him they were planning an 'E-Mag Extreme' with an aluminium body, and John Bonich showed him the prototype. They wanted to do a very fancy milled version. Simon volunteered his help

visa and flew to Dallas to start up the R&D Department with Dave and start working full time for NPS.

Today, Simon is the "Director of Research and Development" for NPS, where he wears many hats. He is involved in everything from control projects with outside inventors/developers, control prototyping and pre-production runs, fix production problems, to the design and development of new products ("the favourite part of my work"). He has designed and innovated on everything from barrel plugs and CO2 valves to Goggles and guns. When he first joined NPS, Gino (Postorivo, CEO National) asked Simon to design a goggle system. He had never done this before and took it as a challenge... and that is how the whole new Vents line came to be. A year and a half later, Gino walked into his office, shook his hand and thanked him for designing the goggles. That is the type of recognition that really matters to Simon. He cannot be any happier than when one of his peers, one of these crazy paintball inventors, takes the time to tell him how good of a job he did on such or such product. There is actually one thing that has made him happier in life: fulfilling one of his father's dreams. Simon's father had always wanted a little yellow sports car, but he got sick with cancer. Almost a year after Simon had moved to the US, he flew back to the UK for his father's birthday. His father was undergoing chemotherapy and thought that his birthday gift was

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but his parents, although they did not understand this paintball thing, supported his efforts and helped him out. He applied for this first patent at 20, although he had been seriously working on it since he was 18.

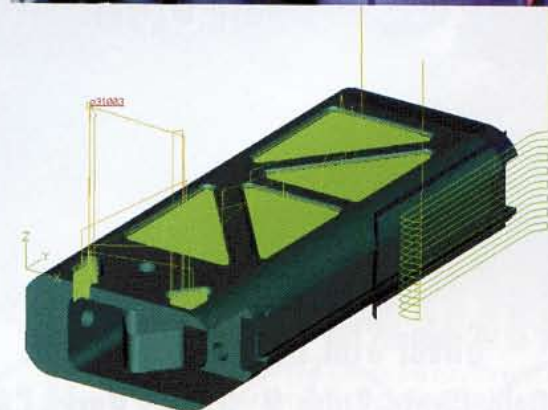
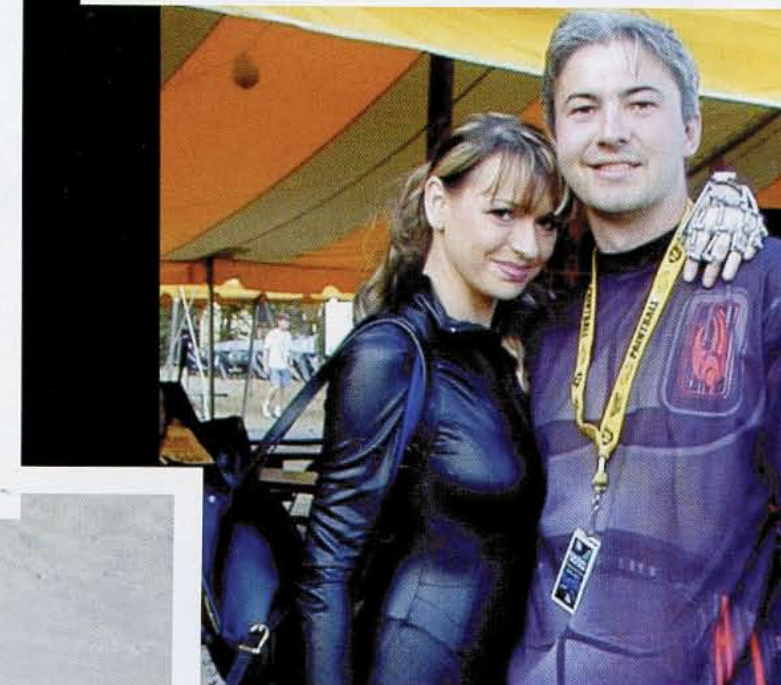
DOUBLE SHIFTS AT THE OFFICE

Simon's career started in design and concept in the automotive industry, specializing in Rapid Prototyping of concept vehicles and working on brands such as BMW, Aston Martin, Rover, Land Rover, Mini, Ford, MG, Lincoln, and Jaguar. He ran the UK subsidiary of a multinational CAD/CAM company working with state of the art technologies in design, machining, rapid-prototyping and reverse engineering. But all this time,

and went on to design what became known as the C&C X-mag. The design was inspired by a motorcycle. After that, he started doing more and more parts although nothing really made it to retail. At about that time NPS found out about his loader patents. NPS took a licence on his patent and things took off. NPS started giving him contract work to do, including the design of the Empire Intimidator, which was done in one hour and a half... At this point NPS had signed Simon to an exclusive contract which gave them first rights to anything he would design. He resisted offers to work full-time for about a year and then finally gave in when he heard that Dave Bell would be coming back to work in paintball. It was Nov 2003 when Simon got his US

Simon flying back to see him. But Simon gave him a box with car keys in it, telling him that he was repaying the loan he had received many years before. A yellow Lotus car waited outside. This was a special time that Simon will never forget, his father passed away last year.

Simon plays all forms of paintball, from tournaments to stock class with 12-grams and 10 round tubes. He has played for Mayhem Tigers, Warpig Factory, the Fallen Angels, and European Union. But what makes him successful is that he is an engineer and a paintball player, and has a vision that he shares under the name "Manike" in chat rooms all over the globe. ♦



Manik-battery: CAD image and CNC code written to cut it out from a stock battery pack.