

# Lotter luck!



Arts Editor **BILLY SUTER** talks to a former Durban woman who, since featuring in Cannes publicity shots for the hit film *Borat*, has been partying with movie and music celebrities in Hollywood, making a name for herself on the Los Angeles modelling scene and planning a future in film

**I**T'S not every day that one visits Cannes during the annual film festival there, gets invited to an early, hush-hush test screening of what later becomes a massive hit movie, and then is asked to appear in publicity photographs alongside the film's famous star - pictures that end up in newspapers and magazines worldwide.

However, it happened to former Durban girl Simone Lotter. And the 22-year-old - who grew up in Umbilo and left the country, aged 9, in 1993, to settle in Switzerland with her mother, Shan - has seen her career on a roll ever since.

The novice actress-model had been in Cannes in May with friends, who had wangled a ticket for her to a test screening of the outrageous comedy *Borat*, now showing in Durban.

Its offbeat British star, Sacha Baron Cohen, also known as Ali G, plays the title role of a quirky TV newsman, "the sixth most famous man in Kazakhstan", who heads for America and sets out to make *Baywatch* star Pamela Anderson his wife.

Cohen, who presents the film as a mock documentary, was at the Cannes test screening, gauging audience reaction to his movie. Afterwards, his representatives from 20th Century Fox asked Lotter to join three other women in strolling through Cannes with Cohen, to drum up some publicity for the film.

Cohen posed with the bikini-clad beauties on the beach, wearing his now-infamous... truly awful... green thong, which made global headlines.

"We met at Nikki Beach, the most popular and luxurious beach in Cannes, and then walked along the Croisette, the main



SIMONE Lotter, formerly of Durban, in a US modelling shot and, on the right, in pink bikini, with other models and *Borat* star Sacha Baron Cohen



street, to another beach," recalls Lotter.

"At first it was just one photographer from Fox taking pictures, but it didn't take long before all the paparazzi had picked up on what was going on and we had about 50 photographers following us around."

The whole shoot took about two hours, she says.

"All we had to do was wear a bathing suit. That's the only instruction we were given. It was actually very informal."

Cohen, who has now been nominated for a Golden Globe award for his title role, in the category of best performance by a male in a comedy, stayed in character throughout the shoot, even introducing himself to Lotter as Borat, complete with accent.

"It was hilarious the way he was carrying on at the beach - and we were not the only ones who were shocked by his thong. You can imagine the faces of those older-generation French people when Borat ran around, acting as

if he'd never seen a beach before."

Lotter made a lot of connections during the festival and she whispers of some "big projects" next year, but prefers not to reveal too much too soon, lest it might jeopardise her chances.

She does, however, mention the possibility of two movie appearances. And she is excited that her management company is considering shooting a TV pilot, titled *Simply Simone*, which it plans as a comedy-drama based on funny and unusual situations in which Lotter has found herself since moving to Hollywood.

She certainly seems to be hobnobbing with those in the limelight, having recently attended the glittering American Music Awards bash, partied with the likes of Snoop Dogg and Cuba Gooding Jr, met Eddie Murphy at a mutual friend's dinner party in Bel Air and spent many an hour at Hugh Hefner's famous Playboy mansion.

Of the latter she says: "It's a lot of fun and not sleazy, as people imagine it to be. I hang out there on

Sundays and often play volleyball or tennis. I also love the animals they've got there: from different types of monkeys to peacocks and, of course, rabbits."

Hefner's exclusive Midsummer Night's Dream Party and the famous Halloween Party are truly amazing, she adds.

"That's where you'll see Paris Hilton partying away, with the likes of Owen Wilson, Matthew Perry and David Hasselhoff - and so many more."

Lotter hadn't planned on an acting career. She had started out studying to teach languages, doing some modelling on the side, after she left Switzerland at the age of 20.

Her modelling assignments have included a runway fashion show in Beverly Hills, a shoot for the American Military Calendar (she's Miss November) and an appearance in a promo music video for *Midnight* (a song by recording artist Dawud Wharhnsby).

The acting bug bit hard, she says, when she successfully auditioned for a role as a victim of a

mass murderer in *Murder By the Book*, an episode of an American courtroom drama series titled *Court TV*.

Lotter played a woman who eventually escapes death after being brutally abused by the killer, who poses as a photographer.

"I never dreamed of being an actress and living in Hollywood. But I saw a door opening and was given a lot of opportunities, so I took them," she says.

"Now I know it's the right thing. I love what I do and I'm working hard to take things to the next level."

But Lotter has her head in the right place. If things don't work out, she says, "there are lots of other things to do, and ideas I have, that will make me happy".

She will be arriving in Durban with her mother on her birthday, next Thursday, to spend a month holidaying here with family.

"South Africa will always be my home. I love it and no other country can replace it. But I have to say I feel comfortable in Los Angeles now."