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Smith Roberts Handles Harlequin/NASCAR Book Launch

by Gail Chiasson
Feb 10, 2006

Harlequin Enterprises Ltd. and **NASCAR Inc.** have called on **Smith Roberts + Co.**, a young Toronto-based advertising and design shop, to launch their new series of racetrack romances this week in a move designed to capture the massive NASCAR female fan base of more than 30 million women.

The new books follow the signing in Nov./05 by the two brands of a licensing agreement to produce the collection with romantic plotlines centred on NASCAR, with each book bearing the NASCAR brand on the cover.

The premiere novel in the new series is titled *In the Groove*, written by award-winning author **Pamela Britton**. The launch is timed for Valentine's Day and the start of the renowned **Daytona 500** race in Florida Feb. 19 - the first race of the **2006 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series**. *In the Groove* is now available wherever books are sold at US\$6.99. The series will publish seven titles over two years - three in 2006 and four in 2007.

To support the Harlequin/NASCAR series launch, Smith Roberts was commissioned to design and produce: a national U.S. print advertising campaign; a national radio campaign including **XM Satellite Radio**; an interactive Web site www.getyourheartracing.com featuring news and information about the Harlequin/NASCAR collection; and a colour brochure promoting the launch title that will be distributed in the Daytona 500 programs on race day. The agency also handled the media buy.

"It takes a moment to wrap your head around what seem like totally opposite brands, but with 30 million female NASCAR fans, it's a really astute move on Harlequin's part," says **Malcolm Roberts**, principal, Smith Roberts.

The launch of *In the Groove* is the latest of several initiatives Harlequin has charged Smith Roberts to produce for them over the last 18 months. Other key brand-building projects include trade and consumer launches in the States for Harlequin's new **HQN** and **Next** brands, re-branding and cover art redesign for Harlequin' **SuperRomance** and **Blaze** series, and national U.S. print campaigns for *Red Dress Ink* and *Mira*.

Smith Roberts was launched in April/04 in Toronto's Distillery District by Roberts and **Brian Smith**. Roberts held senior creative positions at several agencies, including Ogilvy & Mather, and has worked on such accounts as American Express, GlaxoSmithKline, Kraft, Smirnoff Vodka, Royal Bank, Toyota and De Beers. Smith was a multi-award winning senior writer at Ogilvy & Mather, working on such accounts as Duracell, Quaker Canada, World Wildlife Fund and Timex creative. He left Ogilvy in 1998, working as an independent creative consultant on such brands as Telus, Air Canada Tango and Air Canada Jazz before linking up with Roberts to launch their new shop.

Among Smith Roberts' other recent work is the launch of **Marc Anthony** cosmetics in the U.S. with a national magazine campaign. it also recently helped to re-launch the *Canadian Business* Web site for **Rogers**. The agency has also won an as-yet-unannounced account win after being selected from among 11 Canadian agencies.

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