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Photography by Bryce Thompson

Garnering interest

Model Toni Garrn is doing it all, from landing her first leading role to starting her own foundation. Bernd Fischer gets to know more



WOMAN



**'I don't remember
life without
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amburg-born Antonia 'Toni' Garrn is not a professional German soccer player, but if you believe in fate, and understand her native country's obsession with 'Fußball', it's more than probable to see how the sport led the bright and beautiful model into the spotlight, ultimately making Garrn one of Deutschland's most famous exports

As Germany's national sport, it's no surprise that both the men's and women's teams currently rest in the top three of FIFA's World Rankings at number one and three, respectively.

But to understand the connection between the European country's love affair with the sport and how it led to Garrn's burgeoning modelling career (and everything else that followed), you have to look back 12 years.

Soccer is German culture. In 2006, Germany hosted the FIFA World Cup, and it's in Hamburg that summer at a FIFA Fan Fest that a 13-year-old Garrn was discovered by Claudia Midolo, owner of one of Germany's most influential modelling agencies. Two years later, Garrn made her runway debut as an exclusive for Calvin Klein.

After that, it was work with more luxury fashion brands, including Boss, Chanel, Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Louis Vuitton and Michael Kors. Drop a name and Garrn has ticked it off the 'dream jobs' list.

'I don't remember life without fashion,' the 25-year-old tells

me when asked how she feels today when looking back at that lightning-fast journey. 'That hectic start also feels ages ago, and I miss the crazy fashion week days. Life has definitely slowed down, or I guess just normalised and become healthier,' she adds. 'To be in one place for a week or two and have a routine is my goal now, yet it honestly feels super strange still. I'm trying to get used to the less crazy lifestyle and enjoy it lots, too.'

But despite what Garrn says, she continues to fill her portfolio with glossy magazine features, appearing in *Glamour*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Marie Claire*, and on exclusive covers for numerous international editions of *Elle*, *Numéro* and *Vogue*. And the industry leaders love her: she boasts being shot by photographers Peter Lindbergh, Karl Lagerfeld, Steven Meisel, Mert and Marcus, Mariano Vivanco and Ellen von Unwerth. Again: drop any name.

So, we don't believe for a second that life could've slowed down, especially since we've only touched the tip of

the iceberg. But perhaps Garrn feels that way because her life has been in constant motion. By the age of ten, Garrn had moved with her family from Hamburg to London, then Athens, and finally back to Hamburg, a childhood that prepared her for the hectic lifestyle of modelling. 'I never had a problem being spontaneous and travelling anywhere in the world because of the way I was brought up,' she says.

Somewhere between plane hopping to cross borders and several timezones, often all in a day's work, Garrn has recently managed to pursue another passion: acting. Her most notable role, certainly to South Africans, is that of Reeva Steenkamp in last year's Lifetime movie *Oscar Pistorius: Blade Runner Killer*. The biggest challenge of portraying the former model on screen? 'Besides trying to keep the story as true as possible, and learning a South African accent in a very short time, I think the main focus for me was to honour and respect Reeva's life and legacy,' says Garrn. 'She was such a special and smart young woman,' adding that she was fixed on channelling empathy and doing the best she could

to understand Steenkamp's situation. 'Of course I wish I had contact with her family and friends to gain even more insight into her. Nonetheless, I'm proud of the work I did as the result of my extensive research into her life,' she explains about the controversial film that saw Steenkamp's family vehemently distancing themselves from the production. But the backlash has not set Garrn back where her acting ambitions are concerned. 'I definitely enjoy acting and I want to pursue more of it, for sure. But I don't think I'll ever stop modelling.' So we guess, among all the others, Victoria's Secret can rest assured.

Like many of her famous friends, Garrn also has her own way of challenging the stereotypes associated with the occupation. Right when her modelling career was kicking off, a crucial time for anyone in the industry, Garrn skipped fashion week in 2010 to focus on her final exams. As a champion of education for underprivileged young women, Garrn has done plenty of charity work throughout her life. She's been a global ambassador for Plan International's Because I am a Girl campaign since 2014, which led her to establish the Toni Garrn Foundation, aimed at uplifting young women.

'I want to support different campaigns, different projects and children in countries all over the world,' says Garrn, adding that she didn't want to be limited by an organisation or specific campaign to support women. 'I love travelling to Africa, and I have some great fund-raising ideas.'

Garrn has worked in South Africa – and fallen in love with the country – too. 'My work with my foundation has introduced me to an amazing woman named Mickey, who feeds 300 children daily from her own home in Khayelitsha. She was an inspiration to meet

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this past January, and it brings me joy to support her work.'

In a Trumpian world dominated by sexism and misogyny, Garrn still has a lot of work to do in the fashion business as well, where the #MeToo movement peaked this year. 'I think it's our responsibility to speak up, and tell the truth about every bit of our industry,' she says. 'I have been very lucky throughout my career, and I feel like it's our job to take care of the young girls who could easily be put in dangerous situations. It's time!' Here's to strong women like Garrn, who want you to know that it's possible to be both bright and beautiful. 