



body work

MICHELLE RYAN IS PROVING HERSELF TO BE AS UNSTOPPABLE AS THE BIONIC WOMAN SHE IS SET TO PLAY. BY CAROLINE PALMER. PHOTOGRAPHED BY LAUREN DUKOFF

There's a heat wave happening in Vancouver, and British actress Michelle Ryan is loving every minute of it—but then, she's no stranger to conditions others might find grueling.

Every morning, roused from sleep by her alarm clock, she joins her personal trainer for an endless array of wind sprints and cardio routines. From then, she goes to Krav Maga (a karate-like technique used by the Israeli army) lessons, where she passes a few arduous hours fending off pretend bear attacks and knife-wielding maniacs. In the afternoon, she meets up with her dialect instructor

to work on perfecting an American accent, and finally does a session with her acting coach before heading back home. "I had a dream recently that I was being attacked by a giant swan," she says. "And it got me thinking about the whole ugly duckling thing." It's a dream that surely stems from the fact that Ryan is currently undergoing a transformation of her own, rigorously training in preparation for her career-making role of Jamie Sommers in NBC's revival of the '70s classic television show, *The Bionic Woman*.

The actress admits that she took a flying leap two years ago by leaving the

cushy confines provided by her five-year stint as Zoe Slater on the beloved British soap opera *EastEnders*. "I was nervous because there's a stigma surrounding actresses who try to leave soaps," she says. But watching Ryan breathe life back into the iconic role of a woman who gets superpowered limbs after recovering from a bad accident—not to mention all the positive buzz surrounding the beautiful British export—it's clear that this was a career move very wisely made.

The past year has also forced the 33-year-old actress to think not only about professional transforma-

tions, but personal ones as well. A combination of living on her own for the first time, a recent break-up, and tabloid speculation, in Britain, that links her to various soccer players, has, as of late, put her in a contemplative mood. "In training one day, my trainer was instructing me to hit her, and I kept saying 'No, I don't want to hurt you! I don't want to hurt you!'" she recalls. "But her character was really coming out a new side to Jamie, and also out of me. This whole process is making me think about shifting away from always being polite and apologetic, to protecting myself instead."