



Alumna Shifts into High Gear In American Le Mans Series

By BILL STUDENC

Tyra Sitton '03 MPA '05 didn't know understeer from underwear when she started her public relations career with the American Le Mans Series, a road racing and endurance series based on the world-famous 24 Hours of Le Mans. Sitton admits she was "wide-eyed as a deer in the headlights during a baptism by fire" in March 2006, when she found herself surrounded by more than 100,000 fans and working with 400 members of the news media at the 12 Hours of Sebring, one of the three largest sports-car events on the planet.

"This was my first time at any race track, much less one of the biggest motorsports events in history. There were a lot of people with just the race teams testing on the track, but then the fans started coming, and they didn't stop," she said. "There were people everywhere, because the track opens to the public before the green flag at each race. We literally had tens of thousands of people on the actual race track, and I was in charge of making sure they got off in time for the race to start."

Among those people Sitton was in charge of shepherding to safety was actor Patrick Dempsey from "Grey's Anatomy," one of her favorite television programs. "Everything was happening so fast I even told Dr. McDreamy to go to the wrong place at the wrong time. The sad thing was, I didn't know half of the drivers, the cars they drove and the classes they raced in, and I was charged with telling the announcer everything to say."

Sitton and her co-workers now look back on her first week and laugh. That's because she quickly learned the ins and outs of the sport to become a valued staff member. "She used the skills and expertise accumulated as a student and put them to work in the world of motorsports," said **John Evenson**, vice president of communications and broadcasting, who studied at WCU before transferring. "What she starts she finishes, and in a very professional and first-class manner."

After less than a year on the job, Sitton was promoted to director of public relations/media services and promotions. Her job now entails not only day-to-day media relations and media-



Tyra Sitton '03 MPA '05 races into action.

driven promotional activities, but also creating relationships with national and international news media.

"After graduating, I knew I wanted to find a job in public relations where heavy travel was required. I've found exactly what I wanted. Our schedule includes 12 races taking us from the beaches of St. Petersburg, Fla., to the snow-capped mountains of Salt Lake City, Utah, from bustling New York City to beautiful Monterey, Calif., and everywhere in between," she said. "Although I never banked on the long hours, the not-so-flattering track wear and the unpredictable weather, I love every aspect of my job. From writing for the Web site, to traveling and meeting new people in new places all the time, I have found my spot in the PR world."