

DEMOLITION GETS A

The Movers & Shakers juggernaut rumbles on. But this time it's painted bright pink and driven by a woman. The woman's name is Simone Bruni, and she has proved that women can be just as successful as men in the tough business of professional demolition.

For its 180-year history, Volvo Construction Equipment has seen it all. It has seen good and bad times, generations of employees coming and going, Volvo machinery performing most unusual and demanding tasks in every corner of the globe. Nothing seemed to have the capacity to surprise such a seasoned veteran. Except, maybe, for the sight of a pink demolition excavator crawling over the rubble of the post-Katrina New Orleans. Simone Bruni, a corporate event planner-turned-Demo Diva, did manage to astonish – and not just Volvo but the whole industry – with her pink machines. With a brilliant piece of marketing, Simone has made demolition a glamorous proposition indeed.

Stereotype-bashing amazon

It's a women's world out there, in case you did not no-

rice it yet. Women have equaled or excelled their male counterparts in almost any field one can think of. These days, women run multi-billion dollar businesses, drive articulated haulers and play football on a professional level. Now demolition – men's ultimate playground – is being invaded by hard hat-wearing amazons. And it is no coincidence that they have chosen Volvo excavators to make their presence known. An acclaimed and decorated innovator, Volvo CE has a great reputation for breaking new grounds and demolishing stereotypes. It takes vision and courage to tread an unbeaten path that's why pioneers and trailblazers command so much respect in community. This is where Simone Bruni belongs. Hers is a heart-warming tale of a woman whose life was changed forever by a natural disaster but who was bold enough to stand up against the tide.

The unplanned-for event

Simone Bruni spent 10 years of her life as an event planner, putting together multimillion-dollar parties for one of the top firms in New Orleans. High-end stuff. But in 2005, an unplanned-for event changed Simone's world for ever. It was called hurricane 'Katrina'. "I was flooded and laid off," Simone says. "My house was in Katrina." Simone snuck back through the barricades before New Orleans officially was reopened to the public following the hurricane. She had to park blocks from her home and climbed over huge live oak trees that had fallen, criss-crossing her street. Everything was insulated with gray mud. Her front door was swollen shut with the moisture. "There was a smell of death in the air, and a silence that really hung heavily," she says. Simone was offered work in New York — another event planning gig and a chance to leave all the ugliness behind. But she stayed, and in doing so found her future within the devastation. "I remember just standing on my front porch with no job, flooded property, and I could see all these men," Simone says. "I didn't know what a dually was, but the sound of an F250 just rocked my world.

It was so attractive. I just knew it was the sound of men who were here to help."

Feeling her way around

Simone started asking questions. What kind of machine is that? Who are those men working for? Where did you get your sand? Who owns that truck? And then her neighbors started asking Simone questions: Should we tear down our homes? She realized then that if they were going to demolish their homes, she should be the one doing it. She wrote contracts on the hood of her car and gathered a crew. The latter was easy enough to do. Simone and her customers could pay. The government and FEMA, whom many contractors rushed to New Orleans to work for, were taking weeks to produce cash.

Enters Demo Diva

Simone decided to target women. Tearing down one's home is an emotional proposition, and it's one where the woman of the household calls the shots. The name Demo Diva was part of her marketing strategy. Simone wore pink shirts. She spent about \$350 on fliers and yard signs, all in pink. She targeted women. With her hired crew bringing their own equipment, Simone's company was launched. She started doing about two houses a day. That went on for three years.

Switching to Volvo

Then Simone started having trouble with her crews and decided she wanted more control. Rodney Guggenheim, with Scott Equipment, had called on Simone once, inquiring whether she was interested in looking at a Volvo. She pushed him off then, intimidated by the prospect of buying. But she did her own research. She talked to people around town. Her hired crew had shifted its own equipment from Caterpillar to Volvo and swore by their new machines. They said they were fueling up a lot less with Volvo's higher efficiency machines. "Not being an operator myself, just being the one paying the bills, that was one of the biggest things to me," Simone says. She also asked one of her competitors what he knew. He said it's not only the Volvo machine; it's the service that Scott Equipment provides. "He said if you have a problem, Scott Equipment within a few hours will be there with a part in hand and putting it on your machine," Simone says. So she went down to visit Rodney. "He really held my hand through it," Simone says. "My experience with Volvo, I feel like I have been working with a big brother — the Scott Company, all of them. The service guys, they are my friends. I really feel that way." Rodney remembers it well. "It took over a year to sell her first machine. It took me about 20 minutes to sell her the second one," he says.

More muscle power, less fuel consumption

Her first purchase, just a year ago, was an EC210C. She leased another one about two months later. On order now is an EC210CLD, with Volvo's full de-



A WOMAN'S TOUCH

molition package. To fit with her branding, Simone painted each machine pink. The reaction, she says, has been amazing. You don't see a pink excavator every day. "Just this morning we were tearing down a residential house," she says. "I had 10 neighbors come out to watch. They were like, 'You go girl!' They love it." Tank Gillard, Simone's chief operator, says his Volvo is the best machine he's run in his 17 years in the business. It's quiet, he says, and has the requisite speed to keep up with him as he loads debris onto trucks to be hauled away. On this morning, he was looking at a 1,700-square-foot home, rotted out by termites. It already had been a busy, attention-grabbing morning. Just getting the machine to the site meant passing by a group of gawking school children, curious about the pink excavator. Sitting in front of the house, Tank was confident. "Five minutes, it's done. In five minutes, I'm walking on it," he says. That's because, he says, of the power behind the EC210C. It's equipped with Volvo's 147-horsepower D6E engine. During his year sitting in the cab of his Volvo, Tank has torn down everything from wood-framed houses to concrete-

block commercial buildings. "It's all muscle," he says.

The role model

Residential work remains the core of Simone's company. She tore down a three-and-a-half story home that was owned by the owner of Popeye's Fried Chicken. And she once tore down an entire city block. But Simone also has been doing some commercial construction jobs, too. The way Simone describes it is she's "got the power of pink" behind her. She's teamed up with Radio Disney and the NFL on starting an all-girls flag football team in New Orleans. She's been to games to talk to the girls about their ability to break the mold, to take the non-traditional route. Cheerleaders have created cheers in her honor. Simone also has attracted broad media attention both locally and from trade publications. She's met Reggie Bush, the New Orleans Saints star. She also sells Demo Diva gear, from pink shirts to hard hats. The brand has taken hold. Recently, a couple of girls stopped her on the street and asked if they could be the Demo Diva for Halloween. She said she'd set them up with hard hats and shirts. And



so it goes for the one-time party planner. "I think when you have passion about something, you really come alive," she says.

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