

SV.

SILICON VALLEY:
a mindset, not a place

.....
GENTRY's take on TECH

GoPro's Nick Woodman

HOW A LAID-BACK SURFER
MADE HIS FIRST BILLION

KLOUT'S JOE FERNANDEZ

Wants to Pull Rank on You

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GIVING NOW

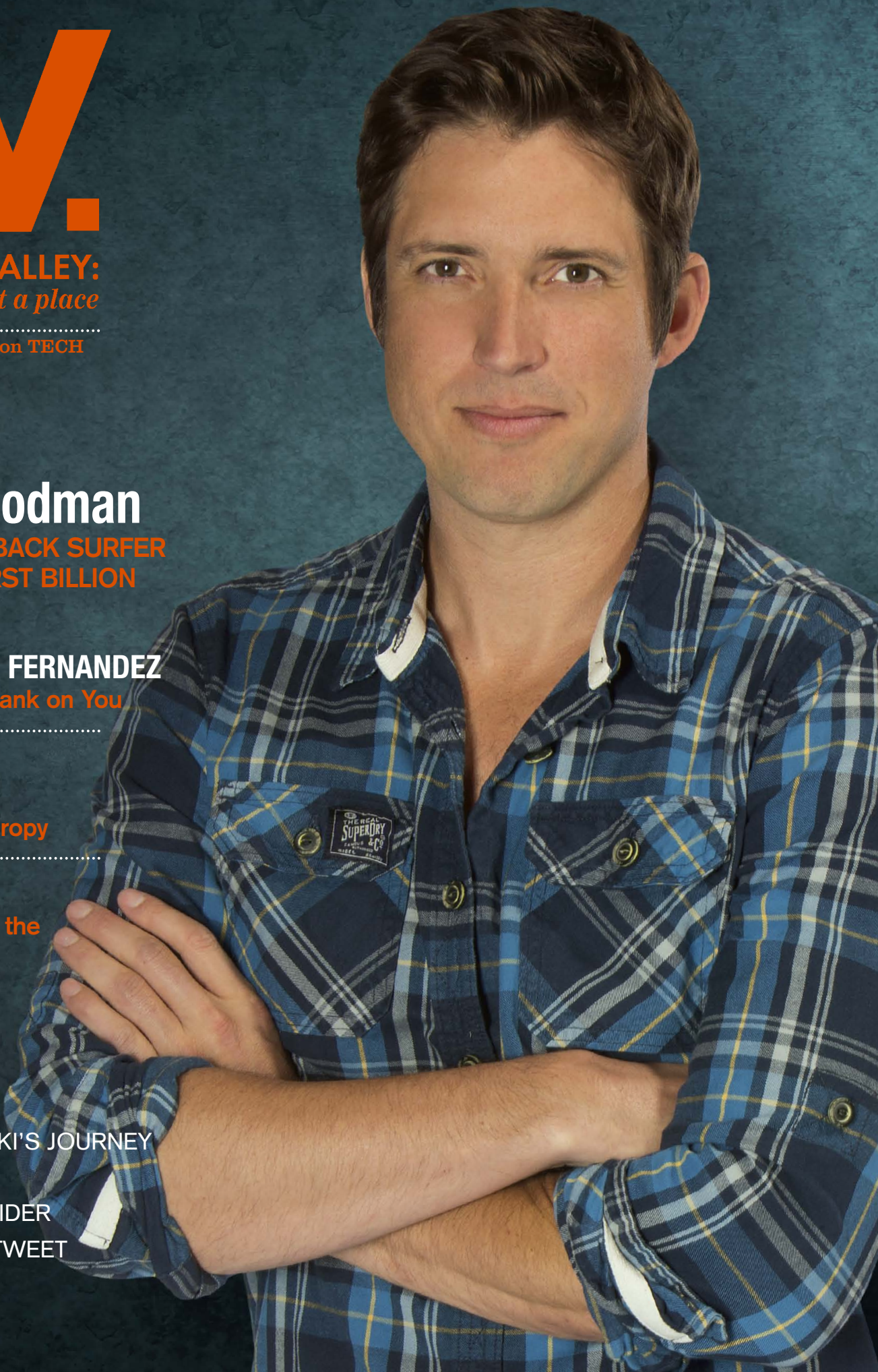
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Silicon Valley's PERFECT STORM

Nick Woodman, founder, CEO, and chairman of GoPro, didn't invent the camera. But he did invent something cameras can't do—make every amateur a potential pro. His technology has paved the road for all of us to be stars in our own time.

STORY BY CORRINE E. MEHIGAN // PORTRAITS BY JACK HUTCHESON



Unless you've recently returned from that first-booked vacation into space, you know that Nick Woodman has just become one of the youngest billionaires in the world. His journey toward this elite stratosphere began in 2003 when he invented the iconic GoPro camera with accessories that ensure the camera's protection and ability to be attached and mounted to . . . well . . . anything.

Much has been written about this Silicon Valley native as well as the humble genesis of GoPro: how a young surfer from California had an idea to create a mountable camera for recording himself and his buddy surfers during a trip in 2002. Obsessed with the concept and the possibilities, he subsequently barricaded himself in his dad's house in Sausalito, working non-stop, 18-hour days, drilling and assembling pieces at night, calling China for parts for his prototypes and testing them while surfing religiously before dawn. Together with his girlfriend, Jill Scully (now his wife), he raised seed money for GoPro by selling bead and shell belts and living in his VW van. On June 26, 2014, Woodman took GoPro public, and now Forbes estimates his net worth at approximately \$2.2 billion. And Woodman captured the whole event with a GoPro in his mouth.

Just prior to that exciting day, however, SV was afforded the privilege of time with Woodman at the GoPro headquarters in San Mateo. Once inside headquarters, it's impossible not to be blown away with stunning GoPro user-created footage dominating the massive lobby walls with the greatest live-action art you've ever seen. If you realize your jaw has dropped and you take the time to

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look down, you'll notice the fast and impressive “toys” on display, including the company's first racecar. Waiting for Woodman to arrive (just weeks before taking his “baby” public) was akin to waiting for celebrity arrivals on the red carpet, with the requisite advance team making introductions and explaining protocol, fueling the air of anticipation that somebody and something very big was coming.

Still as energetic and charismatic as ever (we've known him since childhood), Woodman is accessible and unchanged by his impressive achievements. He readily attributes his success to the GoPro team and their creations that continue to ensure an ever-growing league of avid enthusiasts. When asked why everyone is so excited

by GoPro, Woodman answers, “It's because of the mojo that the brand has built up based on the experiences world-wide with a community that is part of making the company what it is today.”

More than one media outlet has described him as “huggable” and this is true. The Gentry team was met with a big group bear hug. So, as he casually leaned on the edge of his racecar, stunningly displayed in the lobby of GoPro headquarters, our interview began. It soon became clear that this man can make all investor and consumer dreams come true. Woodman's passion, coupled with his intellect and drive, has been honed to precision.

The Idea—Making the Camera Invincible

Woodman is well aware that the human desire to document our lives is nothing new. Yet he has stretched the idea beyond that by realizing a need that seemed incomprehensible and unacceptable only a short time ago. “If we went on a fun river rafting trip, we'd have a photo in the parking lot before and after, but no footage of us rafting,” says Woodman. “That just never made sense to me.”

Woodman anticipated an ever-growing world of awareness operating under the concept that if it's worth doing, it's worth having a record of you actually doing it. Being a spectator or tourist with a camera may be enjoyable, but limitations exist. Says Woodman, “Before GoPro, most people never had any footage of themselves doing anything. If you wanted any footage of yourself engaged in your favorite activities, you needed not only a camera, but another person who had some camera skills. So one of the very simple, yet very powerful, things we did at GoPro was empower people to turn the camera around on themselves and self-docu-

ment the experience, no matter what it is.” Now GoPro arguably enables people to capture themselves and the world in a more engaging and immersive way than ever before.

Woodman's genius is advancing the technology and pairing it with durable accessories that allow us to experience the same freedom and creativity as adventure and extreme enthusiasts achieve in their most extraordinary moments. As Woodman explains, “People are now able to capture and share their experiences in a manner that makes the audience feel that they are actually right there having that exact same experience.”

The wearable accessories heighten the footage by maximizing the human body's ability to move. You and the camera are one.

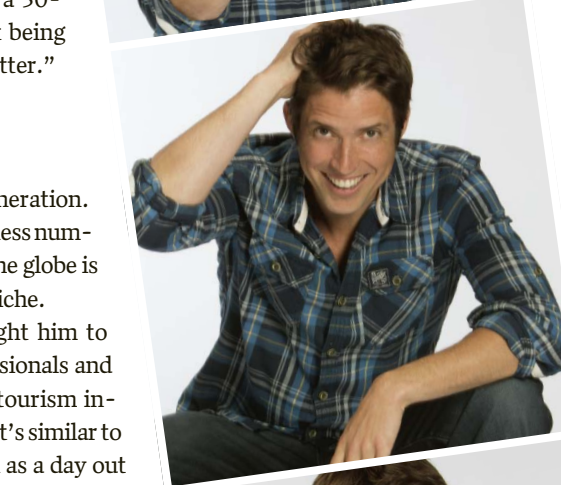
After conquering a key consumer battlefield with his wearable technology, Woodman arrived at the idea to mount the camera on other places/things as well. “Normally your investors aren't going to be too keen on you buying a racecar and going racing, but that's the type of thing we've done with GoPro,” he says. “I was in racing school up in Sonoma and strapped my GoPro wrist camera onto their racecar. It just looked like it was meant to be there.”

High adrenaline sports and adventure activities, such as surfing, racing, snowboarding, sky diving, and countless others, create strong emotions and the opportunity to experience extraordinary viewpoints. The key to seeing them for Woodman and GoPro was to build a camera that could handle just about any stress sent its way. “Going racing and mounting the camera on our racecar as much as we did led me to break all of our cameras,” he recalls, “because they weren't designed to be used on a high-vibration device. So, racing forced us to re-engineer everything so that our cameras, mounted, could survive a 30-minute race. We can honestly say that being involved in racing made our products better.”

The Platform—A New Kind of Communication

This is not a passing fad of a certain generation. The diversity of the footage and the limitless number of ways the camera is used around the globe is proof enough that GoPro is no longer a niche.

Woodman's natural passions brought him to achieve, organically, what many professionals and academics in the billion-dollar global tourism industry spend entire careers analyzing. “It's similar to how a day out skiing alone is not as fun as a day out skiing with friends and family,” relates Woodman. “Similarly, having an experience alone, but then sharing it with others and getting their feedback is hugely rewarding to people, which is exactly why Facebook has done so well. The need to create and provide these ‘real’ experiences taps into our identity as consumers.”



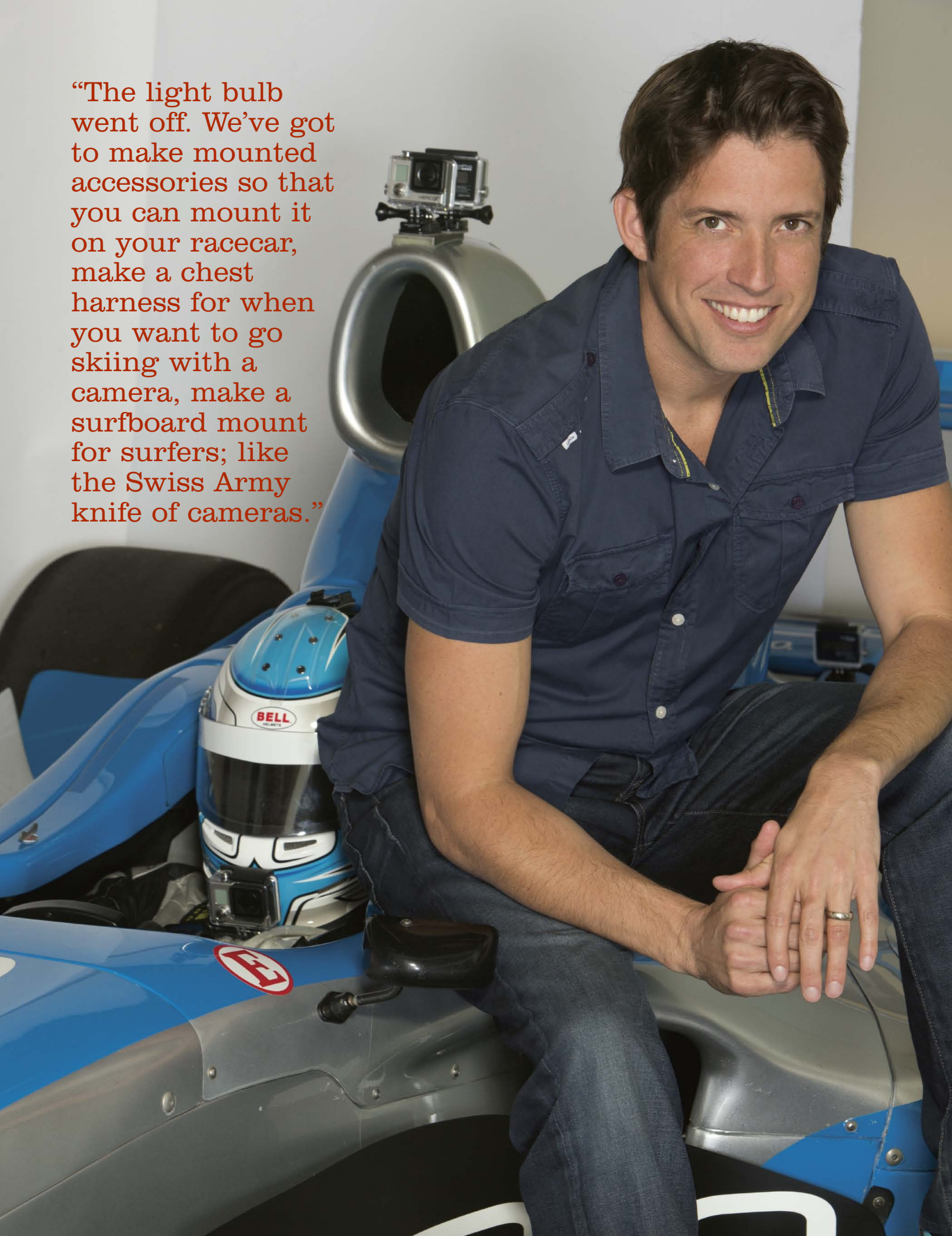
Sharing awe-inspiring, jaw-dropping, breathtaking footage is thrilling, eagerly anticipated, and well received within a passionate GoPro community. The feedback is addicting. As Woodman explains, “To that extent, it becomes clear why GoPro has been so successful, because when the world captures and shares itself on your platform, the result is all of this feel-good communication and experience-sharing. People are actually transferring experiences to each other. It's natural that the company and the brand that facilitate that will benefit from that. Everybody's feel-good excitement and passion about these experiences, and the resulting content, infers that the passion gets infused with our brand.”

The popularity of the GoPro will continue to extend as this new form of communication further transcends the adventure crowd and prompts passionate debate across industries and academics that obsess about human behavior.

The Challenge—Be A Hero

GoPro may have begun as specific to the all-action sports and racecar crowd, but today it continues to evolve as people further understand that it is a new kind of powerful storytelling. And the GoPro user is the hero of each visual tale. “You can really help people express themselves. It is ego-driven to a certain extent, but it's more of a healthy ego. People want to see themselves engaged in their passions and their pursuits,” notes Woodman. With GoPro's challenge to “Be A Hero,” Woodman has anticipated our need for every great story to have a hero, and thus a healthy competition exists within the GoPro community to create one. “We turn people on to a creative side that they either didn't know they had or just didn't appreciate,” Woodman continues. “We always hear about people who were never interested in video before, or in creating visual art before. Now,

“The light bulb went off. We’ve got to make mounted accessories so that you can mount it on your racecar, make a chest harness for when you want to go skiing with a camera, make a surfboard mount for surfers; like the Swiss Army knife of cameras.”



because of the payoff and being able to be captured and engaged in their favorite activities and passions, they’re learning to create content like this and getting totally stoked on it.”

Woodman is aware that possibilities for the brand are limitless as he describes how “being a hero” is uniquely personal and constantly open to interpretation. No judging; only the challenge to generate a story about whatever you are passionate about now. “Now that I’m in full-on dad mode,” he says, “I went from trying to be a surfing hero, to now being a hero every chance I get with my kids, and filming them as well. Now I’m Dad-hero. I filmed the births of two of my boys with it on my head. The middle one, I did with the chest, but then I realized that the head was way better. The first four hours of their first time out of the womb is magical. And as a dad, I’m like, okay, that was my hero moment.”

The Brain—Hard Thinking, Backwards to Forwards

For the countless numbers who go to bed in Silicon Valley dreaming of vast start-up success, it pays big to think hard and dream backwards to forwards. Woodman’s love of vivid story-telling translated into other aspects of his life and had him thinking differently very early on about his own life’s journey. “So I had this trick where I imagined myself an old man looking back at my life and what I would want that story to look like. Think very long term, and then just work backwards. Solve that for long-term vision.”

Far from just a career, life is an important story that must be carefully planned so it can be told with perfection. Woodman’s dreaming backwards ensured he kept his head down working hard in his 20’s to become an entrepreneur and the master of his own vision, with freedom and time enough for surfing and family built in. “I was also terrified of going to work for anyone else. I didn’t even know what having a job meant. But I knew I’d always been really passionate even as a kid working on various projects. I would stay up all night building my radio control airplane or working on some other project. I was all-in and very focused and passionate about it. When I thought about spending that much time at my job, I thought I might as well be working on one of my own ideas if I am that type of person. I should be spending that time to work toward my own vision as opposed to realizing someone else’s vision. That drove me. I had to invent a business that allowed me to plan my own future.”

The Place—SV

Woodman’s thinking, combined with his exposure to business and innovation growing up in Silicon Valley, is also hard-wired into his DNA. He remembers being surrounded by entrepreneurialism and its infrastructure growing up in Silicon Valley. “It is a little bit easier to get into the startup mindset because that’s what everyone around you is doing while you’re growing up,” he recalls. “A lot of the lifestyle is focused around business and becoming an entrepreneur. You see that it’s okay to take risks and it’s not necessarily seen as negative to fail. It may be similar to a kid growing up in a

racing family and it’s just natural for everyone in the family to become a NASCAR driver. I just grew up thinking that was something you could do, so that made it easier to take the step to go do it, because it felt natural.”

Trying and failing is not only natural, it’s critical. Woodman’s first attempt at his venture FunBug is not a regret. He considers it a key learning experience and essential to his success. As we discuss the general IQ buzz in Silicon Valley and our love for this place with limitless attitude and an expectation of success, Woodman acknowledges he got lost temporarily in the pressure to perform. “I didn’t know it at the time, but I was still on the conveyor belt of Atherton,” he says. “I didn’t think for myself yet. On my SAT, I wrote that I would either be involved in international business or be a lawyer, because that’s what everyone did, but I didn’t even know what either of those things meant.”

Woodman can trace his success in business and life to his pursuit of passion. The word authentic has often been associated with Woodman, and he equates being genuine with staying true to the pursuit of one’s true desires. “Going to UC San Diego,” he says, “I recognized that following one’s passion helps you figure out fulfillment. For me, the first time I had the chance to follow my passion was when I chose to go to UCSD to fulfill my love of surfing. It was the best school with the best waves.” There, he found a love for visual arts, acting, and writing, which he had never really been interested in before. He ended up majoring in Visual Arts and minoring in writing and surfing. Woodman explains passion as “unique, like a fingerprint. If you pursue your passions at a personal level, you’re following your path.”

The Luck—Jill Scully Woodman

Where Woodman’s luck fits into this perfect storm is that his passions led him to meet his wife Jill during those college years, and this further cemented a story that would ensure career and family bliss today. “I thought the only way life could get any better was if I were surfing with my family,” smiles Woodman, “looking over at my little kid getting up on a little wave and then spazzing out. ‘Dad! Dad! Did you see that?!’ So I thought, okay, if I want to go on little surf trips with my kids and play with them after school, I have to make sure I’m not just “grinding” or “working for the man.”

It’s clear that “spazzing out” is authentic Woodman, and he still loves to tell a captivating story as vividly as ever. Over time, he has enhanced the landscape to include their home in Woodside and his Gulfstream V. The plot now has heroes like Jill and his kids and surf stars like Kelly Slater. Woodman may not immediately associate himself as an academic or “the man” he once dreaded working for, but Woodman’s impact and GoPro’s effect across cultures and industries is still rippling and will be indefinitely. The world of possibilities and firing synapses are constants with Woodman and it’s exciting to be there when his mind is on fire. Some will underestimate and let Woodman’s style and flashback vocabulary fool them. Don’t risk it. Not only is it genuine, it’s razor-sharp. ✱