

# PROM!!!!

By Deb Mann

I have mixed feelings about my prom. I had a really great time and everything, but I was saddled with what might have been the ugliest prom dress ever created. My aunt was very sick, and in a grand gesture she bought me a prom dress that she was sure I would love; she, of course, was wrong. And because she was so ill and no one knew if she'd survive, I wore the dress even though I absolutely hated it. My perfect prom gown would have been a dark red cocktail-length dress with a snug off-the-shoulder neckline and long sleeves that came just past the wrists – I know this because I saw it in a prom magazine. The model looked exactly like Brenda from 90210, and she had the perfect shoes and handbag and hairstyle to go with. I wanted that dress so badly. I can still even tell you where it was on the page (bottom right hand corner). But alas, it was not meant to be, and I went off to the prom in that ruffly-powder-blue-with-pink-and-green-flower-print-shiny-polyester monstrosity.

Whether it's in the form of a special issue of a favourite magazine or a once yearly single-issue publication, the prom magazine's chief function is to encourage teens everywhere to aspire and to spend. I took a field trip to the Teen aisle of my local magazine stores to see what 21<sup>st</sup> century prom magazines have to offer.

It wasn't a surprise that some elements are just as I remembered them; each of the magazines that I examined had plenty of information on hair, makeup, dresses, shoes, and accessories, accompanied with oodles of ads. Most also had segments on copying the style of

your favourite celebrity, embarrassing prom moments, and how to find a dress that matches your shape. The prom magazine's resemblance to wedding magazines is striking – they have the same style, layout, and often the same advertisers.

The magazines that I examined managed to differentiate themselves subtly though, even though much of the content was identical. *CosmoGIRL! Prom*, for example, cashed in on the popularity of the Gossip Girl books by integrating a similar storyline into one of their pictorials. *Seventeen Prom* was the only magazine to mention that old standby of proms gone by, the corsage, while *Teen Prom* gave advice on choosing the right fragrance. *Teen Prom* also came with the highly useful, if somewhat excessive, "Ultimate Prom Planner," a magazine-within-the-magazine featuring timelines and suggestions for the organized teen. *Teen Vogue's* treatment of the prom was only as a special section of their regular monthly issue, but it included a good article on how to coordinate guy and girl outfits, all the more noteworthy because the focus was not on tuxedos. *Your Prom*, a Conde Nast single-issue magazine, was mostly filled with ads and very low on content. The only noteworthy element was a fascinating shoe horoscope that turned out to be an advertisement (for the record, the stars dictate that I should wear crystal-studded sandals, which would have looked GREAT with that red dress).

Perhaps the best part of my field trip was the chance that I had to eavesdrop on actual teens as they chose their prom magazine purchases. Even though the five magazines mentioned above were displayed together, only *CosmoGIRL!* and *Seventeen* were under serious

consideration – perhaps an indication of brand loyalty – and the teens chose *CosmoGirl* after very brief deliberations. You can't ask for a better endorsement than that.

What does this mean for your library's collection? I think it's a safe bet to consider buying copies of the prom magazines affiliated with magazines you already collect and you *know* your users read and respect, such as *Seventeen* and *CosmoGIRL!* The single-issue prom magazines have more advertisements, and those same advertisers are in every magazine, so you're not missing out on content if you stick to your regular titles and forego the once-yearly titles. Bear in mind that many magazines you already collect will also include prom sections; *Bleech*, for example, ran a feature in their Spring 2007 issue devoted to do-it-yourself prom makeup and hair.

A final note – your prom magazines are going to see a lot of action in the months leading up to June. Expect pages to be torn out, dog eared, and scribbled on; you may want to consider buying multiple copies. And if you're looking for that picture that someone snipped out of the bottom right hand corner, well, perhaps we should just keep that between us.

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## FAST FACT

- Teens spend around 4% of their disposable income on magazines and comics
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