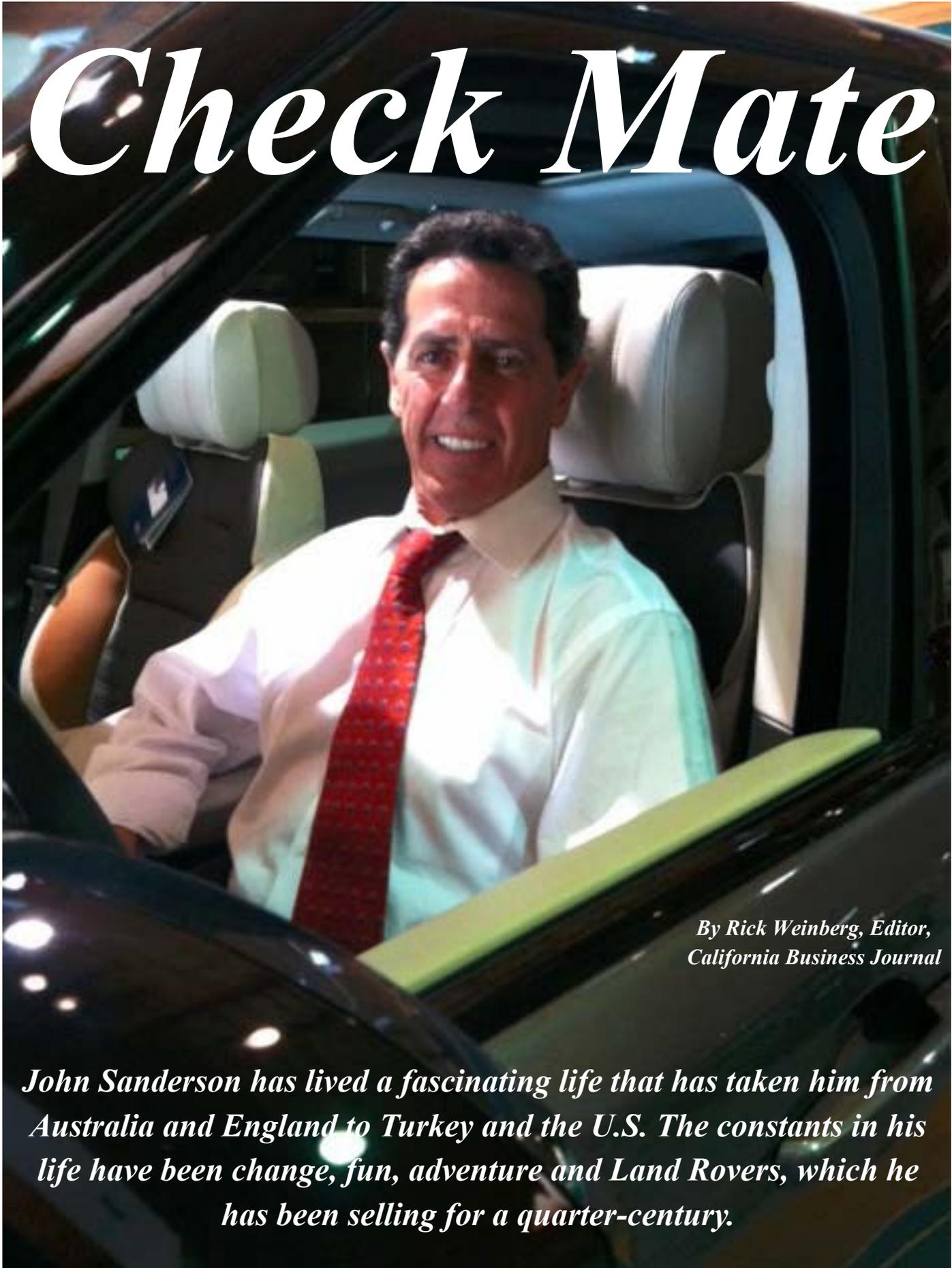


Check Mate

A photograph of a man with dark hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a red patterned tie, sitting in the driver's seat of a car. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and headrests, is visible. The background is dark, suggesting the car is parked in a dimly lit area.

*By Rick Weinberg, Editor,
California Business Journal*

John Sanderson has lived a fascinating life that has taken him from Australia and England to Turkey and the U.S. The constants in his life have been change, fun, adventure and Land Rovers, which he has been selling for a quarter-century.

Business Profile

Sitting in his Redondo Beach, California house in shorts and a tank top, John Sanderson rips open the Los Angeles Times. His eyes instantly shift to an advertisement that reads: “If you think you can sell, come to this seminar.”

The address of the seminar is, quite surprisingly, the same Marriott from which he had just resigned. He slips into his flip flops and walks around the corner to the hotel.

“I knew I had to find another job – and fast – so I figured, ‘What the heck, lemme check out this sales thing,’” he says.

In front of a set of big wooden double doors, he sees a woman at a check-in desk. He inquires about the event behind the closed doors. She looks at him quizzically as he stands before her in shorts, flip flops and a tank top.

“You think *you* can sell?” she asks, her eyebrows raised.

“I can sell sawdust to a lumber mill,” Sanderson quickly snaps back.

The woman smirks and says, “OK, here are two pens – sell them to me.”

Sanderson takes both pens from her, looks at them closely and suddenly throws one to the ground.

“That one is no good – you need this pen,” he tells her. He holds the pen skyward. “This is made by a more reputable company and it lasts much longer than the other. This is the one you want.”

The woman is taken aback. She’s impressed. She smiles at Sanderson and says, “OK, go home, dress up in a suit – and something other than flip flops -- and come back.”

The seminar, Sanderson soon learned, was for automobile headhunting groups. Before he could finish tying his wing tips, he was being



placed for a job with South Bay Nissan in Redondo Beach.

The year was 1989.

The dealership was soon bought by Land Rover – a surprising development since Sanderson, a Sydney, Australia native, grew up loving and racing the English-made Rovers.

He’s been selling Rovers ever since – for 25 years.

And on the celebration of his silver anniversary, he happened to have the most productive month of his career at Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills.

“Imagine that,” he says in his heavy Aussie drawl, “having the best month of my career at the age of 61.”

Sanderson’s life and career has been a surreal ride of thrills and experiences -- from all over the world.

And the primary constants in his life have been cars, racing and Land Rovers in

Business Profile

particular.

“Growing up in Australia, we’d drive Land Rovers on beaches and in the extreme out-back,” he says. “It is the No. 1 off-road car in Australia. It’s the most extreme off-road vehicle and the best 4x4 in the world, by far.

“It’s always been my favorite car.”

When Sanderson was 10 years old, his next door neighbor took him to see the classic 1965 American car film, *Redline 7000*, a story about young stock-car racers establishing themselves. Sanderson was hooked from the opening scene of the thrill film, which featured Daytona International Speedway, Dar-



lington Raceway and Atlanta Motor Speedway – as well as A.J. Foyt’s violent wreck at Riverside (Calif.) International Raceway.

During the film, Sanderson’s adrenalin was flowing freely. He decided then that he was going to be a race car driver. As soon as he left the theater, he sprinted to his garage and built a go kart. He’s been riding in the outdoors ever since.

“If it burns gas and makes noise, John drives it or will sell it,” Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills General Manager Sven Larson says with a laugh.

One of Sanderson’s biggest thrills is being in the driver’s seat of a Land Rover.

“The capabilities of the car are extraordinary - - and these are the greatest Land Rovers yet,” he says, pointing to the 2014 models. “The technology is so far advanced it’s staggering.”

Sanderson is a genuine authority on all things Land Rover.

“He can not only sell ‘em, he can fix ‘em,” Larson says, smiling. “He’s very mechanical. He can turn a wrench as easily as he can sell a car. He’s forgotten more about these cars than anyone of us will ever know.”

Sanderson is in a select group of Land Rover Master Guild Members. That’s akin to having a Master’s Degree – it is the manufacturer’s top-of-the-line education and training degree.

“John is a true Land Rover guy. He lives the Land Rover lifestyle,” says Jaguar Land Rover Newport Beach Portfolio Manager Moyca Gardasevich, who has worked with Sanderson. “He lives and breathes the product.”

Sanderson has competed in the toughest, most grueling Land Rover competitions, including the Trek Challenge, an international competition with extreme off-road driving at its core.

You not only need to know everything about Land Rover but you also need to be mechanically inclined to fix anything that goes wrong with the vehicle during the off-road adventure. You also have to be in excellent physical condition to handle the treacherous and dangerous nature of it as you go through an array of obstacles.

“Very few people in the country can successfully compete in the race, much less someone who works in sales like John,” Gardasevich says.

“Most of the entrants are professional athletes

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and drivers. That’s why it’s so extraordinary that John did it.”

Sanderson’s whirlwind journey from Sydney to The Rusnak Auto Group’s Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills store began on July 6, 1952, the day he was born in Australia’s most populous city located on the southeast coast on the Tasman Sea. He was the third oldest of six children, four of whom were girls.

Though his life was consumed with racing and cars, when he graduated from high school, his mother wanted him to find a trade “because it’s something I could always fall back on if racing didn’t work out,” he says.

He was offered an opportunity to drive professionally with production cars, but his parents continued to pressure him to get into a trade.

So he flipped open the newspaper, turned to the want ads and highlighted trades like carpentry, plumbing and working as a butcher.

The first call he made was to a butcher shop. The owner of the store told him to come in for an interview. When he arrived, the owner said, “Put on this apron. You’re hired.”

Sanderson was stunned. He went through with the butcher apprenticeship, yet did so reluctantly. He did it out of respect for his parents.

“When I walked into the [butcher] shop, I didn’t want the job,” he says. “It was the last thing in the world I wanted.”

But being shy and non-confrontational, he did what he was told.

Put on the apron and start working.

Every day, he wanted to rip the apron off and leave. And he always regretted his decision to turn down the professional racing opportunity.

“But that’s life,” he says, shrugging his shoulders. “That’s part of the reason where I am today.”

Nearly eight years into his career as a butcher, he went on a trip up the Australian coast and met the girl whom he would eventually marry. He moved to the coastal town of Gosford, where he and wife opened two clothing stores featuring jeans and surf wear.

Sanderson was still working as a butcher, learning every aspect of the business, and earning good wages. By the time 1980 rolled around, he was looking to shed his butcher’s apron for good. He went to England on vacation in 1983 -- a pivotal point in his life. He decided he wanted to travel the world – or as much of it as he could experience. He became friends with an English tour guide, who sug-

Business Profile

gested he apply for a job. And he did.

When Sanderson returned to Australia, the tour guide office phoned him and asked him how quickly he could return for an interview.

“As quickly as I can re-pack and hop a flight,” he says.

He got the job and spent the next three years traveling through England, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, the Greek Isles, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Switzerland and Holland. He’d go for two, four, six or eight weeks and accompany 50 people at a time.

“I loved it,” he says. “It was a wonderful and wild experience. I needed that after spending so many years as a butcher.”

After three years of driving around Europe, Sanderson wanted to get off the road and onto the sea. He applied for a position with Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. Not long after his plane landed in Miami, Sanderson received a call from Royal Caribbean. They wanted to hire to him.

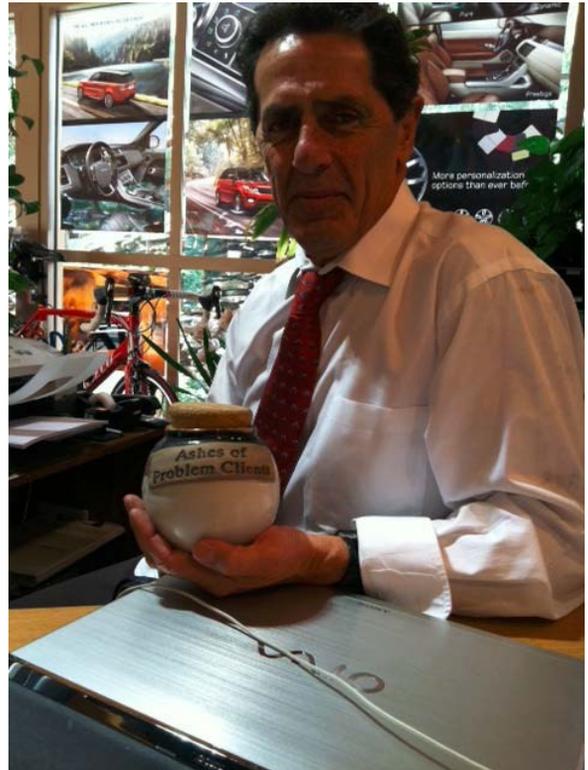
“It isn’t all that cracked up to be working for Royal Caribbean as it is vacationing with them,” he says. “You’re on call 24 hours, you can’t go ashore, you can’t be in designated areas, and you can’t associate with passengers.”

He didn’t stay very long with the cruise line. He resigned and flew to Los Angeles to visit friends from Redondo Beach that he had previously met in England when he was a tour guide.

What was supposed to be a brief visit turned into a lifetime stay.

He never left California.

Initially, he wound up working with some of his Redondo Beach friends as a bartender at



Don Jose’s. Soon thereafter, he moved on to the Marriott as a manager – and that’s when his life turned upside down and led him into the automobile business with Land Rover.

After six very productive years at Land Rover South Bay, where Sanderson continuously earned awards for top salesman, he approached his boss about a guaranteed income agreement.

“I had just gotten married and bought a house and I wanted more financial stability,” he says.

His request seemed reasonable, he thought. He was, after all, the dealer’s top salesman, moving an average of 15-20 cars a month. But General Manager Tom Van Ravensway refused to give him the guarantee.

“I kept on telling him, ‘I’m going to get another job if you don’t give me a guarantee,’” Sanderson says.

Finally, drawing a line in the sand, Sanderson did what he promised -- he left. He began -- get this -- driving an 18-wheeler truck that *de-*

Business Profile

livered Land Rovers nationwide.

Ironically, every month or so, Sanderson would drop off Rovers at the South Bay dealership where he previously worked. And every time he drove up, his former manager would tell him, “John, we need to talk.” Sanderson would reply, “You know what I want – my guarantee or I won’t come back.”

Finally, after another couple months, and after the dealership was reeling without its top salesperson on the floor, Van Ravensway folded. He gave in to Sanderson and gave him his guaranteed salary.



“I drove the 18-wheeler back to the port, parked it, took off my hat and told ‘em I was done,” he says with a laugh.

He remained at the South Bay dealer for six more years, continuing to ring up sales records and awards. Then, when the GM moved to Jaguar Land Rover Newport Beach, he asked Sanderson to come along. He did. He

spent seven years there, continuing to win accolades as top a salesman, both monthly and annually.

Then, in 2008, he landed at Jaguar Land Rover Anaheim Hills, which was owned at the time by the Townsend Auto Group.

The economy crashed -- and so did the dealership, eventually filing for bankruptcy.

Soon the economy recovered and the Rusnak Auto Group rescued the Anaheim dealership by purchasing it and rolling it under its umbrella of 15 luxury stores featuring the most marquee brands in the world -- Bentley, Rolls-Royce, Maserati, Porsche, Mercedes, BMW, Audi, Volvo and of course, Jaguar and Land Rover.

And Sanderson continues to flourish year after year with Land Rover.

When General Manager Sven Larson initially met Sanderson after the Rusnak Auto Group purchased the dealership in 2012, he was astonished by Sanderson’s quarter-century history with the Land Rover brand and his knowledge of it.

What Larson wasn’t so enamored with (jokingly) was Sanderson’s office motif – pure Australian complete with street crossing signs of kangaroos, Aussie flags, bumper stickers, posters and gear.

It’s like Sanderson just returned from a Land Rover safari and unpacked in his office.

There is even script on an urn on Sanderson’s desk that humorously proclaims, “Ashes of Problem Customers.”

Tongue in cheek, Larson says: “I made the decision early on to keep Mr. Rusnak away from John’s work space and continue to let John work in that comfortable environment he

Business Profile

created -- until we remodel the store,” he adds with a laugh. “Let’s just say his menagerie is quite contrary to the standard at Rusnak.”

Larson and Rusnak are both very particular about their office themes, but if Sanderson continues to chalk up sales records, they likely won’t care if kangaroos hop around in his office.

Larson laughs. Then he gets serious. “I’ll tell you, when I first met John, I was quite impressed because of his history, his resume, his knowledge with the brand and his passion for the brand,” he says.

Initially, Sanderson was skeptical of working for a large dealership group like Rusnak because he was accustomed to working freely in an environment characterized by little supervision and control.

“Working within the structure of a major corporation like Rusnak was almost like an oil and water mix with John, but he adapted,” Larson says. “He realized over time that Rusnak brought more positive things to the table than negative.”

Even if he has to redecorate his office one day.

Not that his customers would mind – they simply enjoy being around Sanderson, who is far from your typical automobile sales person. He doesn’t ask questions like “Are you buying today” or “How’s your credit.” Not at all. He first finds out what the customer’s needs are.

“I communicate with customers on a very personal level,” he says. “I want to make them feel relaxed and part of the Land Rover family. I help with people’s needs rather than pressuring them – that’s the Land Rover way and I’ve stuck with that approach. Toyota, Honda and Nissan are high pressure. Get in and get out. It’s only about how many units you can get out the door.

“Land Rover is more family oriented. You’re buying the best 4x4 in the world, after all. Once you get into one, you don’t want anything else. You don’t want to go down to another brand. You stay with Land Rover.”

Sanderson has a calming, pleasant persona that people gravitate to, not run from.

“I’ve seen customers instantly attach themselves to John because he’s so interesting and different,” Larson says. “He’s very comfortable to work with. He’s very laid back. People are instantly intrigued with him because of his background.”

Equally importantly is his wealth of knowledge of Land Rover, which few people, if any, can match.

“He has an excellent approach to selling,” says one of Sanderson’s colleagues, Ken Babineau, a sales manager at the Anaheim Hills dealer. “He’s very personable and people become drawn to him because of his great accent, Australian background and his sales technique.”

Babineau is so impressed with Sanderson’s selling method that he has incorporated some of it into his own approach.

“He had such a big impact on me that he made me rethink some of the things I was doing,” Babineau says. “When I got to this store and watched John work, I attached myself to him so I could learn everything there is to know about the brand. He has an amazing wealth of knowledge about Land Rover — and his experience with the brand is staggering.”

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