

HEADLINE: The crown of beauty

SUBHEADLINE: Lukkana Watthanawongsiri \_ Supermodel of Thailand 2000 \_ today faces 40 other beauties competing for the world title

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Remember this pretty little face. In no time you will see it popping up everywhere, as one of the jewels of Thai beauty and perfection.

It is the face of Lukkana Watthanawongsiri, nicknamed Aum, aged 17, M6 student at Bodindecha Singhaseni school, who was recently titled ``Supermodel of Thailand 2000" during a contest organised by Ford Models, Inc and Traffic Jam model management at the Sheraton Grande Hotel in Bangkok.

Today in Puerto Rico, the young beauty is running for the title of ``Supermodel of the World", facing contestants from over 40 countries, all picked up by Ford as part of a huge search for new faces \_ the world's largest and most prestigious.

Founded in 1946 by Eileen and Jerry Ford, the company is now one of the most recognised and respected modelling agencies in the world with offices in Los Angeles, Miami, Scottsdale, Toronto, Paris, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. Since 1995 and the take-over of Katie Ford, the Ford Models headquarters have been located in the fashionable Soho district of New York.

It expanded into the Chicago and Cleveland markets in 1999.

Ford Models' divisions include, among other things, women, men, celebrities, sports, classic, commercial print, children and teen as well as talent and music management.

The company's annual international Supermodel of the World contest is in its 20th year.

Somewhat ahead of its time, Ford Models had launched an international model search in 1980, inaugurated at the Sporting Club in Monte Carlo under the name ``Face of the 80s".

Throughout this decade, the search culminated in various cities in the United States including New York, Los Angeles, Orlando and Dallas.

In the 90s the search evolved into ``Supermodel of the World", its international finals attracting top models, first-class celebrities and recording artists.

The overall winner of the beauty pageant receives a \$250,000 (11 million baht) modelling contract with Ford Models.

Whether Lukkana will take over Australian Alyssa Kealy, 20, Supermodel of the World 1999, or not, remains to be seen.

But whatever the outcome of today's finals, the student has already secured herself a firm place in the fashion and beauty industry of Thailand \_ if not, of the world.

And her life has already been turned upside down by this new vocation. From the moment the representative of Ford Models saw the teenager's photographs from head to foot and

without make-up, he knew that out of the 17 contestants, Lukkana would be the winner for Thailand.

Her winning the national competition in a lavish reception held in the poolside area of the Sheraton Grande, in the presence of Rojjana Phetkanha (Thailand's first Supermodel of 1994) set the thing going, fulfilling her long-time dream to become a top model.

Photo sessions, interviews, parties followed each other at good pace. After having received permission from her school, Lukkana Watthanawongsiri flew to the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico about 10 days ago, in order to prepare for the heated competition, in the company of Ivan Walsh, the managing director of Traffic Jam.

``I have no expectations whatsoever. I am sure all the other models are tall and gorgeous. I am already so glad and proud to be able to represent Thailand and to be in a position so enviable," commented Lukkana rather shyly, the day before her departure.

``I am still slightly in a state of shock after having won the national contest although I am very happy. It is amusing to see how \_ from somewhere totally unknown \_ I am becoming a society person.

``This is a very new experience for me and it is nice to be able to make new friends in an entirely different circle," Aum said.

She modelled once in a fashion show at the Emporium to present leather goods. She says her father saw the ad in the newspaper for the beauty contest.

``I give my daughter all my support and blessings but at the same time I don't want her to expect too much out of it,"commented Lukkana's mother, who has two other children besides Lukkana.

Lukkana's 166 centimetres and 48 kilogrammes of classical Thai beauty should again bring her into the limelight, thanks to a love story with the camera lens which is only just beginning.