

For Bret Michaels, diabetes hasn't stopped the show—it's just added an extra chord to the loud, exciting, pyrotechnically enhanced melody.

Born in Butler, Pennsylvania, the 39-year-old Michaels was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when he was 6 years old. More than three decades later, he can be found onstage nightly several months a year, belting out power ballads and rock hits as the lead singer of the band Poison.

Michaels is grateful that his music has given him an outlet for the emotions involved in dealing with diabetes—and with life in general. Many of his songs have special personal meaning, such as "Something to Believe In," written after the death of a close friend.

The 4M Strategy

After 32 years of living with diabetes, Michaels has devised a "4M strategy" to cope with the disease.

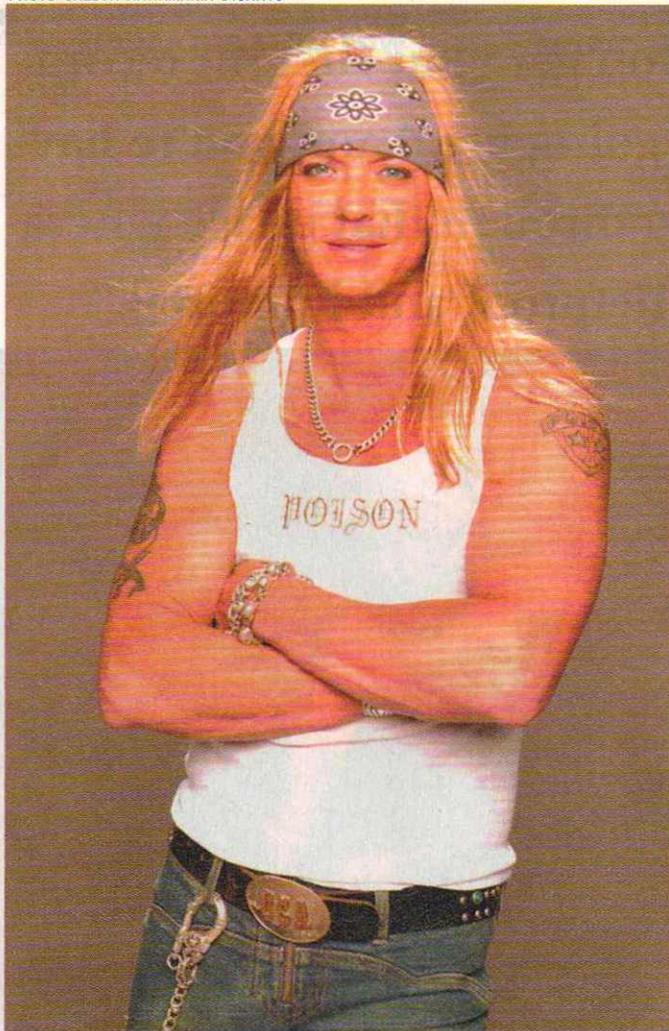
"It's basically mind, muscle, music and motorcycles over matter," he says.

Michaels prefers to focus his energy on the positive things in his life rather than on the negative aspects of his health condition. In addition to his work with Poison, he has released several solo albums and has written songs for television shows and movies.

He has also been involved in writing and producing several movie projects.

No Longer the Risk Taker of Old

In a business where alcohol and drugs often run ram-



ROCK ON!

Diabetes Can't Stop the Music for Bret Michaels

BY BOBBI DEMPSEY

pant, temptations abound. Michaels admits he has succumbed to those pitfalls on occasion and has also struggled with the emotional stress of having diabetes.

Michaels concedes that he has taken risks in the past—daring his diabetes to take him on. It was a dare he didn't always win. On numerous occasions, he partied a little too hard or

got too careless with his diet and exercise regimen.

"Sure, when you get your first hit record and things are going great and you're having fun, you go through that phase where you feel bulletproof and immortal."

His penchant for fast machines hasn't exactly improved his prospects for staying safe, either, although

Michaels does a quick check of his BGs midway through every concert, which lets him know if he needs to grab some carbohydrates or tame his onstage antics.

a serious car wreck a few years back has caused him to be more careful.

Time to Start Taking Control

Michaels quickly realized that he risked becoming a one-hit wonder if he didn't start taking his diabetes seriously, becoming more disciplined about diet and exercise and controlling his partying.

Fatherhood has also helped Michaels to make his health a top priority. With his girlfriend, Kristi Gibson, he has a beautiful daughter, Raine, born May 20, 2000, and he wants to make sure he's in good enough shape to keep up with her.

Through constant vigilance—and a routine that includes insulin shots, glucose tablets and blood-glucose checks at least eight times a day—Michaels has managed to keep his A1C levels "pretty good—usually around 7%." He has managed to avoid major complications.

Balancing Stardom and Diabetes

Despite a sometimes enviable job, in which drugs, alcohol and sex are never in short supply, it hasn't always been "Nothing But a Good Time," to quote the title of one of Poison's early hits.

During the band's overseas tours, Michaels must cope with drastic changes in altitude and climate and

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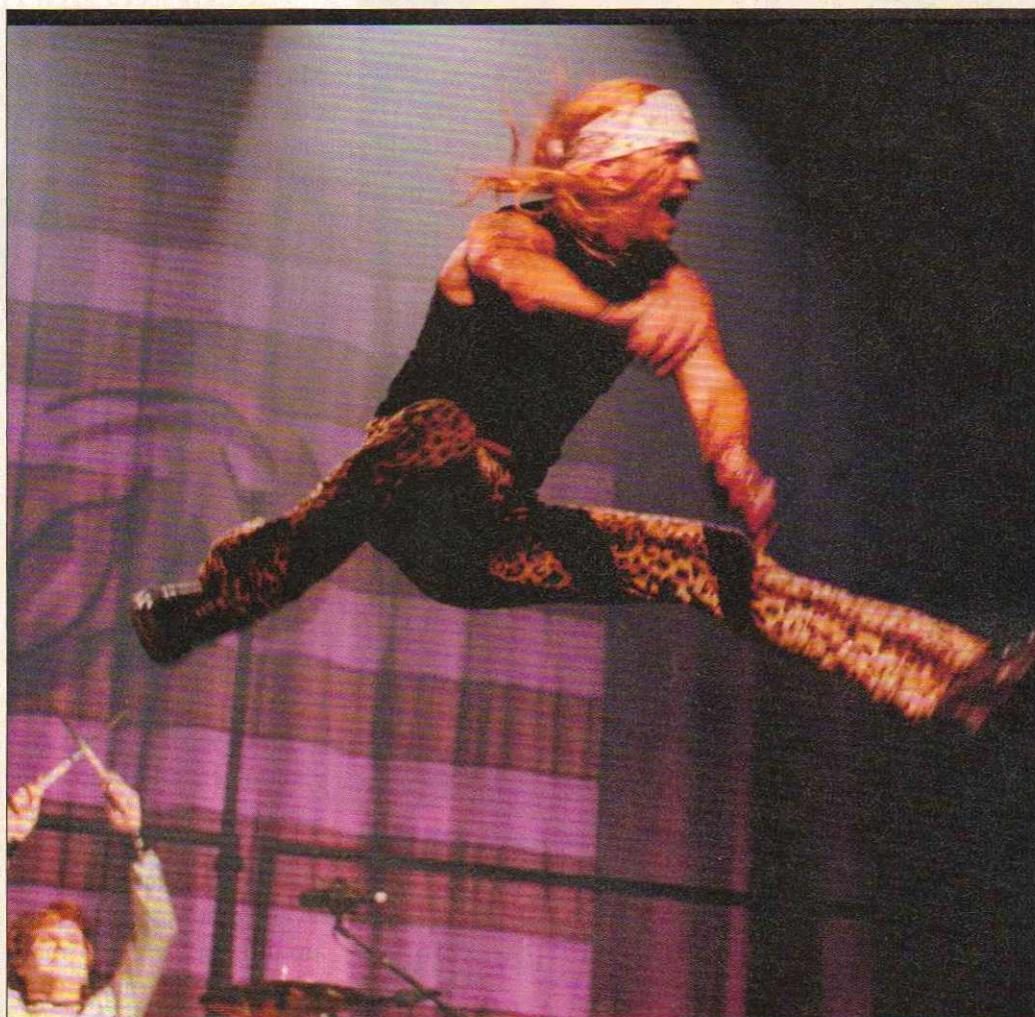


PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTIN TANK

"Rock On!" continued from page 35 other environmental factors that take a toll on his stamina and energy levels. Even travel closer to home presents its share of obstacles.

"The big thing with tours in America is not so much the climate, but the food," he explains. "That's a really big problem."

Everyone—not just those with diabetes—should pay close attention to the food

they eat on the road, researching the ingredients and method of preparation, he says.

"A hamburger you make at home on your grill may not bother you at all, but it could be a whole different story with a hamburger you grab on the road."

Michaels benefits from the great catering companies the band enlists while on tour—staffed by people

who provide an ample supply of healthy food choices. He also makes sure to pack a stash of protein bars and other "standby" supplies, just in case.

It's obvious to anyone who has overheard female fans gushing over his "great abs" that Michaels makes staying in shape a priority. He works out every day—even on the road—although dancing around on stage for

hours every night provides more than enough exercise.

In fact, Michaels retreats to a dressing room midway through every concert for a quick check of his blood-glucose levels. The reading lets him know whether he needs to grab some carbohydrates or tame his on-stage antics.

Michaels's touring strategy is basically to maintain his at-home routine, with everything shifted ahead by several hours.

"I usually don't get to sleep until about three-thirty in the morning when we're on the road, so I'm waking up around ten. I just grab my breakfast, exercise, try to do everything I would normally do—just a little later in the day."

Surviving With Style

Although he supports various diabetes-related organizations and has appeared at numerous diabetes fundraisers ("I really give lots of kudos to Mary Tyler Moore, for all she's done to help the cause"), Michaels says he enjoys interacting in a more personal way with other people with diabetes. He regularly treats fans who have diabetes to special backstage events and one-on-one meetings in which he shares his own story of living with the disease.

These days, having balanced diabetes with rock stardom for more than 15 years, Michaels pretty much has the routine down pat. He happily reports that he's not just coping with diabetes—he's "surviving with style." ■