

Vegas Seven

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SEVEN QUESTIONS

Sammy Hagar

The Red Rocker spouts off on retirement, how Vegas put a bulge in his pants and those paranoid Van Halen brothers

By Matt Jacob

Sammy Hagar enjoyed moderate success for the first decade of his music career, but it wasn't until 1984—when he flipped the bird to law enforcement across the land with the fast-driving tune “I Can't Drive 55”—that he really hit it big. Little did Hagar know the song would become a metaphor for the rest of his life, as he hasn't slowed down since. His accomplishments over the past quarter-century include fronting one of the biggest rock bands in history (Van Halen), helping to turn a sleepy outpost at the tip of Baja Mexico (Cabo San Lucas) into a popular tourist destination, launching a second successful solo career and becoming a brand unto himself with his award-winning Cabo Wabo tequila company (80 percent of which he sold in 2007 for \$80 million), his Sammy's Beach Bar & Grill airport restaurants (from which 100 percent of the profits are donated to local charities) and his Cabo Wabo Cantina franchise, the most recent of which opened a year ago at the Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood on the Strip. Despite all the success onstage and off, and despite turning 63 in October, don't look for the Red Rocker to slam on the brakes anytime soon.

You're as busy as you've ever been in your life. Ever going to slow down?

I've considered myself retired since the day I picked up a guitar. Retirement? I'm in it. What do you do when you're retired? Everything you love to do, right? Well, I'm doing the things I love to do. The fact I can play music, get paid for it, make people happy and then help in a charitable manner or build a brand by playing music around it, all at the same time? Hello! That's better than retirement.

You tried for years to bring a Cabo Wabo to Las Vegas and finally landed at Planet Hollywood, but it was in a bad economy. Any hesitation to open when you did?

No. Cabo Wabo is one of those bullet-proof brands—and it's not because I'm arrogant. It's really priced right and it offers a lot of bang for the buck. Besides, even in a bad economy, people still gotta party and they need a place to go! So I knew it would be OK.

What about Las Vegas resonates with you?

Ah, Vegas is the party capital of the world, dude! Cabo San Lucas is way down on the list compared with Vegas. This is it. It's the real deal. It's like New York—if you



can make it in New York, you've won the race. Well, if you can make it in Vegas, you can go to New York, too. Plus, there's so much to do here. You run out money a lot quicker than you run out of things to do in this town!

Favorite Las Vegas memory?

Years ago I was at Sunset Station looking at a potential location for a Cabo Wabo, and there was a fight that night between Felix Trinidad and Bernard Hopkins. I put \$10,000 on Hopkins at 3-to-1, then went back to a restaurant where I was having a steak dinner with Toby Keith, who I met that night, and watched

the fight. In the 12th round—BOOM!—down goes Trinidad, on the canvas, count to 10. And I go, “I'll be right back, I'm gonna go get my money!” I don't care how rich you are, you walk into that place and they hand you \$30,000 in cash ... I had it stuffed in my pants—I had the biggest bulge in my pants that night you've ever seen! I went back to the restaurant and I told Toby and everybody, “Guess what? Dinner's on me, and so is the rest of the night.” And we went all night and we had a great time.

Better rock 'n' roll feud: Van Halen or Aerosmith?

Oh, Van Halen kicks everybody's ass there, because Eddie and Alex [Van Halen] can't get along with anyone. ... I love the guys, I loved being in Van Halen. But those guys are impossible now. When they were younger, it was OK. But as they get older, they get more and more paranoid and harder to deal with. And they're not even demanding. They're just so distrustful that if you go, “Hey, how are you doing?” they go, “What do you mean by that? Why, do I look weird?” And you're just like, “Get outta here!”

Still can't drive 55?

Oh, yeah. In fact, I got off my plane here, and I had a guy waiting for me with a new car called a Talon. It's a three-wheeled vehicle that's zero to 60 in under four seconds and does an eight-second quarter-mile. It's just a mean, crazy, wild-ass thing. So I was scooting around with that, and it was just a prototype that was here for a show. But I've got 'em making me one!

You're one of the rare rock stars who makes a point to be extremely fan-friendly. Why is that?

It's just how I was raised. I believe that without the fans, I'm nothing—they're totally responsible for all my success. The only thing they're not allowed to do is come to my house and beat on my door. I have children, I have a wife, and we don't need guys coming over and going, “Hey Sammy, let's rock! Let's do a shot!” Other than that, they find me out on the street, I'm theirs. That's how it's gotta be. I heard a guy say something recently and thought it was the greatest thing I've ever heard in my life. He goes, “You know, if you find a turtle on a fence post, chances are somebody helped him get there.” Well that's me. My fans put me here, and I love 'em. ■