Beauty beats brains

Brainy contestants fail to shine in Q&A round

By Jeanmarie Tan

W e don’t want bimbos. And it looks like bookworms need not apply either.

In a bid to distance itself from the perception that beauty pageants are only for the brainless, this year’s Miss Singapore Universe readily trumpeted its historical haul of three postgraduates.

They weren’t the prettiest girls, but everyone expected them to be the smartest.

Yet, at last night’s grand finals at the MediaCorp TV Theatre, one cracked her brains very visibly, another cracked under pressure, while the last didn’t even crack the Top 10.

Juliana Chan was the contestant most touted by the media.

She graduated from Cambridge University with first-class honours in biochemistry, and will pursue her doctorate at the Massachusetts Institute Of Technology in September. Under a lot of pressure: “I screwed up my headswirl without opening your mouth. But you also have to get them to continue looking even after you’ve opened your mouth,” she said backstage.

As for Ginnie Goh, 25, who has a Masters in Media and Communications from the University Of Melbourne, she was barely a blip on last night’s radar. In the end, none of the top three contestants had anything higher than a basic degree.

Yet they were crowd favourites and considered the best-looking of the lot. And they weren’t the worst in the Q&A.

The winner of the Beautiful Skin subsidiary award made it to the Top 5. Statuesque second runner-up Geneica Luo comes from a Mandarin-speaking background and only has a diploma from Nanyang Polytechnic.

PURPOSE, NOT BRAINS?

“I’m quite tired of hearing so much about ‘beauty with brains’, because I think the emphasis should be ‘beauty with a purpose’,” said the 23-year-old Designer-actor Ernest Seah, who is in his late 30s, said: “This is still a beauty contest, not a question on volunteerism, she replied: “I would encourage more youths and make it more interesting for them. I’ve been volunteering with the elderly, doing morning workouts with them since I was 18... Upbringing makes a difference too.”

First runner-up Jade Seah, also Miss Photogenic, is currently an undergraduate at SMU. But the sparkly Fiona Xie lookalike...
DURING THE SHOW

Singaporeans practically go at 150kmh, so I suggest that when they’re free on weekends to go a bit slower along the underpass instead of going over the limit. You don’t want to get a parking ticket.

— Ms Juliana Chan (left, in turquoise) who holds a first-class honours in biochemistry, and will pursue her doctorate at the Massachusetts Institute Of Technology in September impressed everyone with her insight on Internet child pornography laws, and her cheery sense of humour — like her quip about how local men “are perfectly fine, they just need to be trained a bit”.

Jade, 22, admitted that this year’s pageant “lost a bit of focus” when brains started overshadowing beauty, adding: “You have to be beautiful first, then you have to walk the talk.

“I’ve met some graduates who don’t speak well actually, so I don’t feel that they are any smarter than me.”

Winner Carol Cheong, also the recipient of the Body Beautiful subsidiary award, is an art director who holds a degree from Australia’s Curtin University.

The 24-year-old probably summed up the reality behind the beauty v brains battle best, saying: “Anyway, all the girls were already predicting Jade, Genevia and myself to be the Top 3.”

AFTER THE SHOW

I screwed up the question! And it was supposed to be speeding ticket, not parking ticket!

— Ms Juliana Chan on the mistake she made during the Q&A

Brains took a back seat as the beauties strutted their stuff (above), while vet, not booksmarts were what counted in the Q&A section (facing page).

In the end, (from left) Jade Siah, Carol Cheong and Genevia Luo took the top three spots.