

Red carpet time again in Hollywood

by Norma Meyer

HOLLYWOOD, CA. - Best actor nominee Will Smith shouted "I'm hyped! I'm really hyped!" just a few minutes after he stepped on the train of his wife's gold gown. Lead actress nominee Helen Mirren was a bit more regal as she boasted that the hunkin' yellow diamond on the back of her glittery gown "is worth the budget of a queen."

That was right before best actress hopeful Kate Winslet yelled to bosom-revealing actress Helen McCrory from "The Queen": "Great (word for breasts)!"

It was red carpet time at the Oscars, the ultimate in celebertainment. Spray-tanned screen sirens and tuxedo-stuffed VIPS trotted down the 500-foot-long rug that was shampooed the night before for the movie-elite feet. Bleacher fans outside the Kodak Theatre screamed as the polished and primped paraded by, bedecked in presumably non-blood diamonds.

"I don't know," said a stumped Winslet, when asked if her jewels were politically correct. "They're Chopard - that's as much as I can tell you."

At least those involved with the winning global warming documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," arrived in appropriate fashion.

"We had an entire hybrid Prius caravan. Al Gore was in front of us," said the movie's co-producer, Laurie David.

The carpet ritual started out typically slow - the first nominee to arrive was "Borat" co-writer Peter Baynham, at 2:57 p.m., more than two hours before the telecast began. Baynham, who helped script that unforgettable nude wrestling scene in "Borat," quipped that if he won "I might get into a naked fight on stage with someone. Maybe Jack Nicholson."

Most kudo-cravers made late arrivals, and pretty soon it was a big-cheese bottleneck blur. At one point, the lithe, statuesque Gwyneth Paltrow bent over and shook hands with the diminutive, stout Mickey Rooney, an amusing sight. Mirren had her arms around Winslet's waist for some reason. Jodie Foster blew by and mentioned that Spike Lee "gives you big kisses" when you work with him on a film. Perennial carpet crasher Sally Kirkland twirled around in a colorful get-up of flying scarves, made by "a rabbi-turned-designer."

"It's like a football stadium," marveled "United 93" best director nominee Paul Greengrass, looking dazed by the sensory overload. Behind him, Tobey Maguire nearly bumped into the purple-tuxedoed Peter O'Toole.

Jennifer Hudson, who would take home a best supporting actress paperweight for "Dreamgirls," gasped "Oooooo! I can't believe it" as she stood on the crimson catwalk. Her flack warned that the singer couldn't talk much because she was "saving her voice." But then the ebullient Hudson started yammering about how she was so stressed all week and had to have massages and sleep all day on Saturday to chill out.

"I love pockets on a dress," she enthused, explaining why her hands were hidden inside her Oscar de la Renta frock.

Penelope Cruz, a lead actress contender for "Volver," popped a throat lozenge in her mouth. "I think I'm losing my voice," she moaned. She gathered it up long enough to gush, "I am so excited. This is huge for me."

Mirren said she too was "incredibly proud" to be at the Oscars and "I'm not bull(bleeping) you."

"You look so hot!" Anne Hathaway of "The Devil Wears Prada" squealed to co-star and co-presenter Emily Blunt.

Presenter John Travolta revealed it took him two hours to get in his tux, but "time flies when you're preparing." Wife Kelly Preston, in a leopard-print Dolce and Gabbana sheath, said in a throaty growl, "I've become a little wild."

"This is the mother of all carpets," chuckled James Taylor, who was going to croon a nominated song.

After the awards show, the celebs partied at the Governors Ball, where they downed a specially made Red Carpet Reserve Cab surrounded by gold orchids flown in from Holland, a giant rotating Oscar statuette, and pergolas made with climbing flowers cut in the Louisiana Bayou.

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