



Picture: Adam Armstrong

A chip off the family block

Woodchop champion Emma Maxwell is competing in six events at this year's Brisbane Ekka, and this time she's unleashing a new secret weapon – daughter Chloe, 14, who will compete at the Ekka for the first time, writes Leanne Edmiston

EMMA, 40: When I met my husband Shane, we went on a trip out west to Roma, Mitchellton, Chinchilla. He was competing and I was just sitting there one day, and one of the old woodchoppers said to me 'Get up and have a go. (you) can't sit there all day', and it just went from there. I've been doing the sport now for about 21 years. It would be 17 years we've been married.

(The attraction) was just enjoying the company of a sport that, back then, the two of us could do together and, later on as things progressed and we had a family, that now the children can do. So we've got Chloe, who's at the age to compete, and Jacob, he's 11.

It's a family-type orientated sport but it's also the other competitors, they're all great people and they all become your friends. We go to shows nearly every weekend. I know for Shane, it's a big stress releaser from his work. For me, it's more of a fitness side of things, it's kept me slim and fit.

We train five out of seven days. Pretty much sawing – we do single-handed sawing, double-handed sawing, we've got standing blocks and underhand blocks in the backyard for woodchopping, weights and running, with a bit of bike-riding to break up the running, which is strenuous on the body. We're going through about six logs a day. Part of the training for Shane is he splits it once it's cut, and it's just a matter of loading it up for family and friends. (Our fireplace) could pretty much go 24-7.

I manage the administration and running of a podiatry clinic. I do three days a week with them, Monday to Wednesday, and leaving me Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, which are our four main days for training and preparing for weekend shows.

(People) look at the size of me and say, you can't possibly be a woodchopper. And I say look, I might be on the more petite side if you put me up against a Kiwi or a Tassie girl, but I'm very fit. I think sometimes that's where I get the edge over some of the other female competitors, because I've got my endurance and my stamina. If you're sawing a piece of wood or chopping a piece of wood, you've got to have stamina to get through from the start to the end. No matter how hard it is.

I've been in the Australian women's team now for five years, and I'm the only female representative in the Queensland team. Last year, I won one of the most prestigious women's titles – single-handed sawing in Adelaide at the Royal Show. I'm going back this year to try to retain it. And the Ekka this year, it's pretty exciting for women of the sport, because this year will be the strongest team of female competitors outside the Sydney Show. There are seven members at the Ekka this year from the women's team.

It's very rewarding in a way to know (Chloe's) enjoying participating in a sport that both Shane and I have been

Chopping together keeps you together. We all help each other with setting up to compete and when you're out there, whenever you're chopping, you hear them cheering and that's the thing that keeps you going

Chloe's always been a confident girl, I would have to say that, but she certainly fits in very well with the sport, she understands how it all goes, where it can lead her to.

CHLOE, 14: I'm in Year 9. I've always had the idea of being a lawyer or accountant or something like that, because I'm very good with my school work.

I do netball, a lot of horseriding, running and swimming, and stuff like that.

I guess when you go to the shows every weekend with the family, you make friends through the sport (woodchopping). One of my other friends, who I have through the sport, we decided we'd start chopping. I just saw the way Mumm was going, and how she got to go to Sydney and Adelaide and go to the Ekka and compete in shows, I thought that would be something I'd like to do.

I like that you kind of have another family. You've got the family of all the woodchoppers you see every weekend and you make friends through the sport. You get very fit and that helps you at school, with the sport you do at school. It helps you in many different ways. With woodchopping, you get your thinking time while you get rid of any anger or something from school. You relieve the stress, especially exam week. I'll go out (to practise) and when I come back in, I'm not stressed anymore.

I'd ultimately like to be in the Australian women's team one day, follow Mumm through that and continue with my chopping. I guess in a way, Mumm's quite an influence. You see how much she gets out of the sport, how she stays fit and makes friends through the sport.

Chopping together keeps you (the family) together. We all help each other with setting up to compete, and when you're out there, whenever you're chopping, you hear them cheering and that's the thing that keeps you going.

edmistonle@gnp.news.tld.com.au