

Mini OLYMPIANS

Britain's fastest ever female skier, retired four-time Olympian turned TV presenter and coach **CHEMMY ALCOTT**, 36, talks to **LOUISE HALL** about her career and how to get your kids into ski racing

How old were you when you first skied and raced?

At 18 months I first put on skis, and I was three when I skied my first fun race. By eight, I was competing properly. I raced every weekend and would train on a dry ski slope six times weekly.

Tell us about your family dynamic, and how that influenced your skiing.

I had a rugby-playing father, a mother who swam competitively and two sports-mad older brothers. I got my father's glutes and my mother's lungs: I was born to be a ski racer. I became good at skiing early because my older brothers were already ripping around the mountain and I never wanted them waiting for me. I vividly remember wanting to get as good as them.

What are your earliest ski memories?

After retiring, my parents bought an apartment in Flaine, France, and took us skiing lots. I remember my mum, Eve, skiing down in front of me when I was tiny and me following. I loved being in the mountains, especially on blue-sky days. Those are the best - to be a ski racer you've got to enjoy those days. I also remember loving bumps but not necessarily hitting gates.

For years, I thought I'd won my first race when I was given a teddy

bear, aged three. Dad pulled me aside recently and said, 'You've got to stop saying that story - everyone under five was given a teddy bear for taking part!' That really burst my bubble!

A highlight was, aged 13, first representing Team GB when I raced at the World's Children's Olympics in Garmisch. I won. And from that point I focused entirely on skiing.

How did you get into ski racing?

As a youngster, I was in the slalom team in Flaine. Back then, racing wasn't gender specific. I was passionate about it. I wanted to be the best and win everything. Once, I was really upset that a boy in my age group had beaten me.

Aged 11, I was in the world's top 10. That year, I broke my neck racing, making me even more determined to succeed. I've had lots of accidents and broken 42 bones. It's part of pushing the limits. It's a dangerous sport but I love the rush. Standing on the podium for the first time, having bounced back from breaking my back to win the World Children's Championships at 13, was a life-changer. I realised then I had the talent to go the distance.

What are your proudest ski moments?

My first was winning the Children's World Championships. Then, aged 16, I won →



'I put on my first skis at 18 months. By eight I was competing'



Clockwise from top left: Chemmy at the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics; on the slopes aged eight; kids at CDC Performance; Chemmy aged five and today; with son Locki



two medals at the European Youth Olympics. And in 2006, coming 11th in the Turin Olympics [the best British female Olympic ski performance since 1968]. Sölden in 2008 was a magic moment. I was the first Brit to win a World Cup race.

And your lowlights?

Injuries! It's a major part of a ski career: learning to deal with the setbacks.

And losing my mum at 59, after coming home after she'd watched me finish 11th in the Turin Winter Olympics in 2006, which had been such a high. That was hard.

How much of your success do you owe to your parents?

There was a huge amount of sacrifice and support. Some say that my parents were pushy, and in some ways they were, but the drive came from me; it has to come from the kids. I was so obsessed with fulfilling my potential that I went to New Zealand every British summer on my own. From 11 to 19, I had set my heart on skiing for GB. My parents allowed me. I love them so much for giving me that freedom.

A huge piece of advice is: let your children fulfil their potential to do what they are driven to do. Nobody from the outside could understand that I was the one driving the ski racing. I wanted to take part and win!

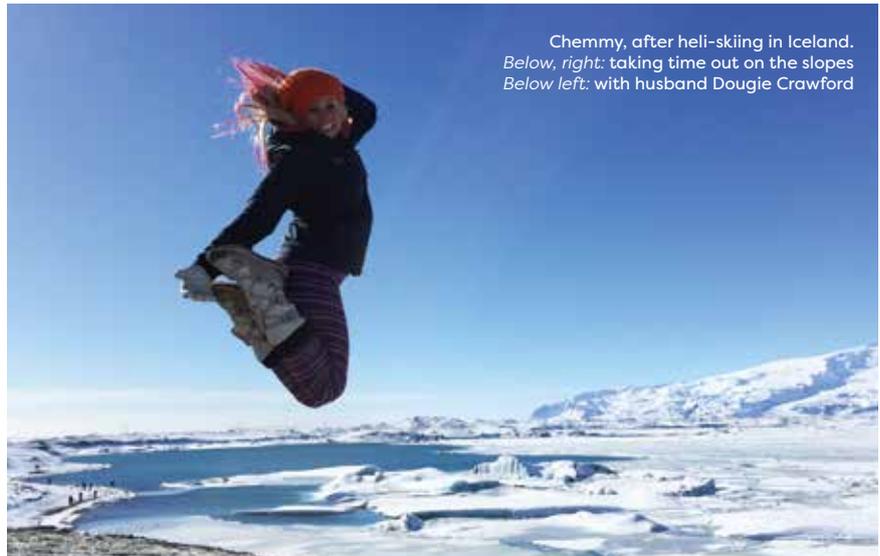
Until her death, Mum did everything to help me fulfil my dreams. She was my biggest fan. I owe 95 per cent of my success to my family; without them, I couldn't have done it. They'd drive me for competitions in Britain [on artificial ski slopes] every weekend, and sacrificed holidays.

What advice would you give to parents whose kids are showing an early ski talent?

If they're keen, get them training back home. Just because we're British doesn't mean we can't be good. The snowsport industry is small – ask around and you'll find gates where they can practise.

We've got much better facilities today – there have never been more opportunities. I trained on plastic ski slopes; now we have SnowDomes and rotating mats, like London's Chel-Ski. There are no excuses!

Create a safe environment and encourage kids to learn by pushing themselves. Sign them up for coaching camps, learning to work the terrain, not



Chemmy, after heli-skiing in Iceland.
Below, right: taking time out on the slopes
Below left: with husband Dougie Crawford



just hitting gates and freestyle jump parks. And get them watching *Ski Sunday* and seeing the real thing – the races. That was a big inspiration for me.

And now you're a *Ski Sunday* presenter yourself! That must feel amazing?

Yes, it does. It feels good to be in retirement but still passing on my passion to the next generations.

Talk us through your decision to set up CDC Performance, coaching kids.

I set up CDC Performance with my husband Dougie [25-time British Ski Champion Dougie Crawford]. After retiring, we went into kids' coaching.

Our dream is to build young people's confidence and teach invaluable life-skills through sport. Those young years are the most important of your life. Skiing is a great sport for the brutally shy: ski racing builds inner self-belief.

What does CDC stand for?

'Carpe Diem Coaching'. Carpe Diem is Latin for 'Seize the Day'. It was one of my mum's favourite sayings; she'd say it to us every day.

How do you select the kids for your camps?

We keep our camps small. Our biggest ratio is six to one, but usually it's six to two. First, we FaceTime, talking the kids through a course 'taster' before meeting them. We don't always take on the most talented athletes, but those we believe →

'Let your children fulfil their potential to do what they are driven to do'



Enjoying a CDC Performance ski camp

we can help to grow and develop as people, not just racers.

Talk us through the camps.

The kids get lots of individual attention and free ski time. We introduce racing in baby steps and ski with a buddy system. Ski racing is a competition against yourself; success hinges on being strong mentally, inside. Feeling too

much pressure can be very destructive on kids' self-esteem. We focus on fitness, balance, technique and building resilience, teaching that every mistake, every day, is a way to develop.

What's your advice to keen young kids out there?

Get in touch! Even if thinking about a camp for next year or the year

after, or they don't join, we can give advice. It doesn't have to be CDC, each club has a different culture, and there are lots out there. Research to find the best one for you.

Finally, how much has your life changed since you've had your son, Locki?

Completely! It's amazing but it's hard finding the balance. Caffeine helps! We both work as hard as ever and do a lot of coaching. Dougie is incredible, combining a lifetime's worth of knowledge gained at the elite end of racing with empathy for training.

Has Locki been on the slopes yet?

Yes, he skied in March in Flaine, aged 14 months. He loved it and wanted 'More! More! More!' It was our best ever family day.

Congratulations on the news that you're expecting No. 2!

Thanks! My due date is January 16, three days after Locki turns two, when the snow is falling and slap-bang in the middle of our winter 2018/19 season. But I plan to be back working soon! ✈

CHEMMY'S ROUND-UP OF KIDS' RACE CAMPS

TRAIN YOUR KIDS TO BE THE NEXT SKI OLYMPIANS

CDC COACHING

Run by Chemmy Alcott and Dougie Crawford.

What they say: 'We run longer summer camps (four weeks) in Chile or New Zealand, in the Southern Hemisphere, during the summer holidays, to help kids to ski race and live as part of a team dedicated to the sport. For our younger athletes we also run regular summer glacier trips. Throughout the rest of the year we support our team with on-snow camps in school holidays and participate in many of the GB races.'
From £800 for full package trips
CDCperform.com

BRITISH SKI ACADEMY

This full-time team based out of Italy's Aosta combines skiing and education and attracts the best young British talent, providing the first race experience for trainees aged 11 and under.
What they say: 'The BSA provides

a winter base with highly experienced race coaches to support and encourage junior British racers aiming for a career in Alpine ski racing. We aim for each racer to have an enjoyable stay and a valuable taste of life on the ski circuit.'

Is my child good enough to attend?

'Ideally (s)he will have skied frequently with families, done well at ski school and have a real zest for skiing fast and competitively. If the answer is "Yes", get in touch.'
From £950 (one week)
britskiacad.org.uk

THE KANDAHAR CLUB

One of the UK's most established training organisations, having trained generations of Olympians. It's great for families. Often the kids follow the parents, but no experience is needed. The club hosts events for grassroot interest all the way up to Masters racing.

The legendary Inferno Race is a big one for families in January, in Mürren, Switzerland.

What they say: 'Many of GBR's current national team are Kandahar members, and the junior training we provide boasts lots of aspiring young skiers looking to achieve their goals and have fun along the way. Our professional training programmes and top-class coaching team encourage trainees to develop as individuals as well as athletes. Our annual training programme consists mainly of school-holiday-based training camps as well as some term-time camps with academic support, which all provide structured training and competition support alongside bespoke coaching.'
Junior training camps in the UK and Europe for ages 8-18 cost from £995 per person per week
kandaharracing.com