



American adventure: Gemma MacDougall of St Ignatius School is off to Akron, Ohio. She is pictured with the school's soapbox team who all contributed to the school's win at the nationals in April. Photo: JASON OXENHAM

Gemma ready to roll

By CATHERINE HEALY

IT WILL be the trip of a lifetime for 10-year-old Gemma MacDougall of St Ignatius School.

Next week she departs for Akron, Ohio, United States, to represent New Zealand at the 75th All-American Soap Box Derby. St Ignatius won the national event held at Stonefields in April. Each soapbox crew is made up of drivers, a pit crew and cheerleaders but only the fastest driver from the win-

ning team goes to the US.

Teacher Christine Lawson says the team of 14 has been incredibly supportive of Gemma.

"When she won they were crying with excitement.

"We've been practising after school in Stonefields. Some of the kids will come down to support her and help us drag the car back up the top of the road."

St Ignatius competed in the Pak n' Save Glen Innes Eastern Suburbs Soapbox Derby for the first time this year.

"We were shocked to win. We just did it for a bit of fun really," Mrs Lawson says.

It was the school's caretaker Joe Rehu who suggested the idea after hearing about the derby at a Rotary meeting.

A soapbox car has no engine. They are released from the starting blocks and drivers must hold a straight line while gravity does the rest.

"You have to look straight ahead, be confident and try and get down low, just leav-



ing a little space so you can see," Gemma says.

Her two weeks in the US will be action-packed. The itinerary includes a welcome parade for drivers through the main street of Akron, a

pancake breakfast, a trip to see a baseball game and all the pageantry that surrounds the race day.

"It's serious stuff. Once Gemma and the mechanic go through the gates, no-one else can go with them," Mrs Lawson says. "The car will be locked away until it's time to race."

St Ignatius' soapbox car has already departed for the US. It takes six weeks to be freighted there. It was originally decorated with the school values but has had a

slick new paint job and now sports a silver fern.

Gemma has been told the event will get a lot of media coverage in the US and she should prepare for television interviews. Her classmates have been making pamphlets about New Zealand that Gemma can give out.

The Rotary Club of Auckland East organises the regional soapbox event for east Auckland schools. Any schools interested in taking part next year should contact Sam Mukhtar on 520 0439.