

Aussie skill stars take on the world

NINE young adults who have achieved excellence in their field of expertise — some running their own business, others teaching people twice their age — hope to win gold for their country.

They are part of a 36-strong Australian team which will compete in the International Youth Skill Olympics in Taiwan from July 26-29.

Work Skill Australia, a non-profit organisation, has sent teams to the Skill Olympics since 1982, but still battles to win public support.

Team members have worked long and hard, sharpening skills through years of training for little financial benefit, to be the best in their trade. They aim to be company directors

By ALLY CONDREN

and small business proprietors and hope recognition of their success will change the "buffoon" tradesperson stereotype.

Scott Zeller, 21, antique restorer, competing for cabinet-making gold in Taiwan, said the public perception of the "lazy" tradesman was hard to counteract.

"We have all heard about it, but everyone here is pushing a standard of excellence," he said.

"There are bad apples in every bunch, but we train in our own time, without company sponsorship to be the best at what we do."

Each competitor has endured a try-

Hairdresser Michelle Carson with eight of her team mates



ing series of regional, State, and national competitions to be chosen for the Olympic arena, in which they will be up against 28 nations.

For most of the team, this is their only chance at Olympic gold before they reach the cut-off age of 22.

To make the team, they have endured the same rigours of training as our top sports athletes.

Michelle Carson, 21, who employs seven staff in her own salon in Griffith, in south-west NSW, said the pressure of competing was "immense".

"I bought my salon 12 months ago and with running the business — organising staff and clients — and competing, the pressure is on," she said.

"I am isolated from the industry in Griffith and training is hard because I get no feedback. I must constructively criticise my work, but it is worth it when you are up against the best and do well."

These highly skilled workers thrive on technological advances in their industries.

Tony Sambell, 22,

trade and plant mechanic for Gough and Gilmour, said the machines he worked on became "more and more technical all the time", which helped maintain his interest.

"We enter TAFE green... and come out with valuable skills — and Workskill lets us prove to ourselves and the world the quality of our work," he said.

Johnny Cauchi, 20, a CNC machinist and married with two children, said Workskill had been a major help in advancing his career.