



Dux profile

Janna strikes the right note

Janna Lawson can hardly take the smile off her face since receiving an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) of 99.5, making her the Dux of Goulburn Valley Grammar School. In fact, Janna's impressive mark makes her the top academic achiever in the Shepparton region for 2016.

She went online to get her score at 6am on Monday, December 12. "I put my information in and then I crossed my fingers. It popped up on the screen. I was sitting on my bed and I jumped up and down and cracked one of the slats! Then I ran around the house screaming!"

If that recollection creates a picture of someone who doesn't have their feet planted firmly on the ground, then it's the wrong one. The Kyabram 18-year-old has had a clear goal of becoming a cardio-thoracic surgeon since she was in primary school. While university places won't be known until mid-January, it is highly likely Janna will be offered her first choice of studying medicine at Monash University with a view to specialising in surgery of the heart, lungs and other organs of the chest. "I would watch a lot of videos on YouTube of that type of surgery," Janna said. "Then in Year 7 I started obsessing about it and I would spend hours looking at how you get into it."

Janna is the second daughter of Alister, a research scientist at the Department of Primary Industries at Tatura, and Jenni, who taught at Kyabram P-12 College. Tragically, Jenni died of cancer in 2014 at the age of 49. Janna's feelings of achievement have undoubtedly been tempered by thoughts of her mother. "It has been hard," Janna said. "I did think of her, especially at graduation, and how she would have been there."

Janna's older sister Emily, 20, completed school two years ago and is studying bioscience at Melbourne University with a view to undertaking medicine later. Given her different route, she may well be graduating as a doctor at the same time as Janna. Emily is a national champion runner and has competed at the world junior athletics titles.

Younger brother Daniel, 16, will go into Year 11 in 2017 and is also a talented athlete and footballer and Rebekah, 8, a Year 4 student in 2017, will no doubt follow in some of the footsteps of her talented elder siblings.

For Janna's part, she has balanced studying with soccer and piano. In 2016 she played for Cobram in the Albury league where she was the top scoring striker. But in 2017 she will transfer to a Melbourne club – probably Heidelberg – to play in the Women's National



Janna Lawson takes time out for a coffee break in Shepparton after celebrating her excellent results.

Premier League. Earlier this year she passed Grade 8 in piano, which is the highest level achievable before a Diploma. She has been learning piano for about 10 years and is the star student of Kyabram's Glenda Butcher. "I think balance is really important," Janna said. "Year 12 would have been overwhelming if I didn't have those outlets. It still was overwhelming at times."

The three elder Lawson children made the move from Kyabram P-12 when Janna was in Year 9 and, despite the 45-minute bus ride each day, she has never looked back. Janna started off Year 12 with high hopes, but had some disappointing SACs (school-assessed coursework) during the year. SACs make up 40 percent of a student's final mark.

"I slumped throughout the year," Janna said. "I didn't finish top of SACs for any subject. At the time, it didn't feel as though I was doing as well as I should have been." She advises any student who finds themselves in a similar position, to persist. "You have to keep going because you don't know how it is going to turn out," she said.

Janna always took Fridays off study. For the rest of the week she would wake up at 6am

and practise piano for about 45 minutes before getting the school bus at 8am. The bus would bring her back home at 4.15pm and then she'd take about an hour to eat, relax and exercise. Then she'd settled in for about three hours of study. She never studied past 8pm. Between 8pm and a 9.30pm bedtime she'd catch up on social media and do some reading.

Janna studied chemistry, physics, English, specialist maths and maths methods, completing biology in Year 11. These are all the same subjects that Emily did, which was handy when it came to sharing some text books – and garnering inspiration. "She showed that you could do everything and still get a high score," Janna said. (Emily also scored an excellent ATAR over 95.)

Janna particularly wanted to thank maths teacher Ms Cheryl Garrett for her consistent support. "She told me I had a lot of natural ability," Janna said. "She really tries to understand everyone." She also thanked English teacher Ms Nicole Sleeth. "I wasn't really an English person at the beginning of the year but I was at the end," Janna said. "She is warm and friendly and very calming, which is very important in Year 12."