

Raising The Bar

Crossfitter. Coach. Former gymnast. Team player. Internationally acclaimed athlete. She may be able to boast a truly impressive amount of accolades, but Abu Dhabi-based New Zealander Jamie Greene is, in fact, just a friendly—and refreshingly humble—girl next door. Meet the gorgeous trainer that might just also be one of the fittest women on earth. *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*





PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN MANN

If you ran into Jamie Greene at your local Spinneys, you'd never guess that she was, according to the points-scoring system for the 2016 Reebok CrossFit Open, the fittest woman in the world—and certainly not because she doesn't look the part. Nope, it's because this friendly New Zealand-born athlete is, in fact, just an incredibly down-to-earth girl next door who'll greet you with a broad, sunny smile that belies her ability in the gym. At a petite 140lbs, her 340lb deadlift leaves most men in her wake.

Oh, and if you're really one for stats, her Clean and Jerk is 230lbs and Snatch PB is 185lbs.

Last year was a significant one for Jamie. Winning the CrossFit Open really put her on the global map as a formidable athlete, and many were looking forward to seeing her go toe-to-toe with champion Katrin Davidsdottir at The Games. Sadly for CrossFit fans, that didn't happen; Jamie had already decided to enter as part of a team from CrossFit Yas. The decision was driven by a drive to redeem the team's honour having been disqualified after taking second place at the Meridian Regional in 2015. Their third place at the Games was just reward for that effort.

Life as one of CrossFit's elite may seem a world away from Jamie's upbringing in

Dunedin, deep in the south of the majestic New Zealand landscape but, in many ways, the city helped shape her resolve to compete. As a gymnast from the age of five, she forged a fundamental understanding of the sport, and developed the kind of strength that would propel her to succeed in rugby between the ages of 15 to 21. Playing rugby in the depths of a southern New Zealand winter, where the pitch is bitterly cold and sometimes covered in snow, takes a special level of determination that few possess.

Jamie discovered CrossFit when she was 21 years old. Her mum had bought her a six-week pass to a CrossFit gym in her hometown, CrossFit Dunedin, as a Christmas gift. "For a while, it was just a bit of extra training to help out

my rugby, but when I started trying out in a few local competitions, I realised it could be a lot more [than that to me]. Since I loved being there, I upped the training volume," Jamie recalls.

"It's similar to lots of sports," she says. "Like any team sports, you get the support from your team mates, or those other members of your box, and physically you get what you want out of it. There's so many things you can do that if you want to get stronger, you can train a certain way, or if you want to get fitter, it can be slightly different. If you want to become more agile for other sports, there's different skills and training you can do—it is very varied, which keeps it exciting."

It's a very different and calm approach to the sport that's presented by CrossFit critics, who claim that it's cult-like. Jamie agrees that CrossFit communities do often wind up quite tight-knit, but in the same unruffled, easy manner in which she seems to look at most areas of life—a key to her success, perhaps, since she seems to always manage to keep a cool head on her

Once you start, you can't get enough of it
so you spend all your time there, unintentionally making it feel like a cult—but a good cult!



Beauty And A Beast

When you're a renowned athlete who spends a lot of your free time in the gym training—and a lot of the time you aren't training yourself, coaching others like your clients—finding time for long, drawn-out spa days or nights on the town isn't always an easy feat. But that doesn't mean that Jamie sacrifices her beauty must-haves: She just knows how to prioritise what matters to her the most, and what will last through her gruelling workouts, to boot. "I don't have much of a [beauty] routine because I am in the gym all day, every day, so sometimes it feels like a waste of time. But because of this, I always make sure I have my nails done, eyelashes done, and some good refreshing moisturiser and fruity-smelling body lotion on. It's the simple stuff, but it makes you feel fresh even when you've been working out, or when you've been coaching for hours on end," Jamie says.

shoulders and focus on her goal—she explains that the reputation is simply there because of the extremely strong and inclusive communities that the sport tends to bring together.

“Once you start, you can’t get enough of it, so you spend all your time there, unintentionally making it look and feel like a ‘cult’—but a good cult!” she laughs. “I think it’s because you end up spending [so much] time with like-minded people, who help you to become better at life, so why not carry this on if you’re becoming fitter, faster, healthier and happier [in the process]” she says, adding: “You also get yourself into some rough places during some workouts, so it’s nice to know that you have friends to suffer

and it’s what can take a participant to the next level. Jamie, who has been sporty for most of her life, has always thought this way. “From as far back as I can remember, all I wanted to do was something active or something outdoors. I hated sitting in a classroom or not doing something physically. I get distracted very easily if my mind has to work on its own. So from the get-go, I knew I wanted to either become a professional athlete (wishful thinking!) at anything, or coach, or teach something active. That’s why I chose to study Physical Education at university—the only degree which is 50% practical,” she says. If she weren’t a coach and CrossFit athlete, Jamie

teenager, but I never got around to it, so maybe I’d be doing something in that line of work [if I didn’t do this].”

Before moving to Abu Dhabi two and a half years ago, Jamie lived in Sydney, Australia briefly, and just prior to the Middle Eastern chapter of her life, she had spent a few months working at a summer camp in Wisconsin in the USA. “I came [to the UAE] to be a personal trainer, ended up training at Vogue Fitness/CrossFit Yas, and I ended up filling in the first female coaching role there. I enjoy the work because of the people I work alongside, and the people I get to coach. The UAE is also a good place to meet new people from different places, and live

competition. There is a time and a place later on when you can have that cake or beer, but I just have to remind myself of this. If I do need a little extra motivation, I make sure I get a nap—I’m usually just tired—or I’ll watch some sort of sport, whether it be rugby, basketball, CrossFit, or anything really, and then get back to it. But the majority of the time, [motivation and commitment isn’t] too much of a problem as I love what I do, and the people I have around me make it easy to stick to the lifestyle I have to live by to achieve what I want to in CrossFit,” she says.

And achieve she certainly does. “The 2016 Open was a bit of a surprise. It was pretty cool, but I had already decided on [going in as a] team, and I don’t think I was quite prepared for the individual competition anyway. The Open is very different to Regionals and the Games, so team was definitely the right decision. In the Open, you can do a workout as many times as you want in the comfort of your own gym, with less complicated movements that pretty much only involves fitness. The Regionals and the Games have a lot more pressure on you; movements are a lot heavier, more complex, and quite often unfamiliar, so there’s not a lot to say here that I could have done as well in this part. It’s a completely different competition,” Jamie says.

This year, she’s competing as an individual, with the goal of qualifying for the CrossFit Games. “I am now feeling more prepped and ready for individual this time around. I’m not worried, and I’m ready for anything [now],” Jamie adds. Still, her experience at the last Games, even as part of a team, will help to prepare her for what it’s like to actually be there—not to mention that it was an incredible experience making it there in the first place.

Sometimes it’s easy to lose focus, [but] you learn to decide what you want more: That night out, or a spot in a certain competition

with also; it builds mentally stronger people together.”

Mental stamina is a necessary part of CrossFit as much as any other sport,

says she probably would have ended up working in the New Zealand Army or Navy: “That was always something I wanted to get into as a

pretty cruisy lifestyle. It also makes it a lot easier to travel—New Zealand is a little far for that!” she says. As a naturally competitive person—“always have been, always will be!”—it’s unsurprising that Jamie not only found her way into coaching and competing eventually, but with her attitude towards life, it’s also clear to anyone who meets her that this is a woman who can achieve whatever she puts her mind to, particularly when it comes to training and her fitness goals. “Sometimes it’s easy to lose focus for a moment, like when something comes up that you want to go to, or someone’s having a party where there is food and drink that you may want to have, but you learn to say no. And you learn to decide what you want more: That night out, or a certain spot in a certain



Work It Out

So, how does the fittest woman in the world like to keep fit? With a smart approach that incorporates rest days and active recovery days, being kind to her body by getting enough sleep, and eating well. “I normally train for three days, then have one active recovery day (so a run or 60 minutes of steady cardio and mobility), then two more training days, and then a rest day, where I’ll swim or something. On training days I normally train twice, once in the morning for steady state conditioning, intervals or some metabolic conditioning workouts for an hour or two, then again later in the day for two to three hours of more lifting, and a skill session with few workouts also,” she says. Sleep is a non-negotiable for her health: “Sleep is number one: I can’t do anything without it, and I’m no fun to be around. Eating well is number two; your gut controls so much of how you feel, so [it’s] really important. Also, taking time in your day to relax is really important to me. If you’re always on the go and in a rush, are you really enjoying your time here? And lastly, getting outside is crucial. Nature can fix everything!” she says.

STYLING: TERESA KARPINSKA. MAKEUP: ANGELOUQUE TURNER. HAIR: SAMEL CHANI/NALICIOUS SPA. CROPPED CAMP TOP, DHSS9. FOREVER 21 AT NAMSHI. SHIRT: H&M. JEANS: H&M. SHOES: NIKE. RING: PART OF A SET, DHS499. SWAROVSKI AT NAMSHI.COM.



■ Cover Exclusive

“It was so much fun—one of the highlights was being in California, working out every day with like-minded people; [that] was pretty cool. It was also very cool to put the UAE on the CrossFit map and realise how much our members get behind us and support us. Also, the food is great there!” Jamie says.

The team’s disqualification in 2015 was frustrating, particularly given that it was on a technicality. They were eliminated after it was revealed one of their team members hadn’t been living in the UAE long enough to be eligible to enter.

“[That] sucked, but we all got over it and trained hard for another year to return, then qualify for the Games again. Then we got third place after that. So after the low the year before, we were very determined to make 2016 even better. Everything happens for a reason. My mum and sister came to watch [the 2016 Games] too, which made it really exciting for me, as I don’t get to see them much, living so far away,” Jamie says. She and her team find the support from their colleagues and members invaluable: “Our members are awesome, and [after our success in the Games last year, they brought us] ridiculously huge cakes, flowers and cards. It was a real celebration, and it was really cool. Also, we did get a lot of recognition from people and gyms around the Gulf, which was nice,” she adds.

Another great source of support in Jamie’s life is from her boyfriend, Elliot: “He’s one of the head coaches at Yas and also trains and competes in CrossFit. We met here in Abu Dhabi, right when I moved here,” she says. They do train together, but they have different coaches and follow different programmes, but they do try to train at the same time. Quite often, they’ll jump in on each other’s sessions over the weekends,



which makes for some great friendly competition. “We were both on the team for the past two years, so we are used to competing as a two-person team or part of a bigger team, which is always fun,” she says. And her athletic commitments don’t take away from the time and energy she dedicates to her relationship either—in fact, in many ways, it adds to

“

You are you, so make the most of what you’ve got and move on! Then you can get the best out of yourself and start enjoying **the little things.**

”

it: "It's very easy to spend time together because we work and train together, so that's pretty much most of the day. We also get to travel together a lot with CrossFit. Just in the last year, we've gotten to go to some pretty cool places like Switzerland, Spain, the USA, and all around the UAE, so we are pretty lucky in that respect. But yes, sometimes we do have to make the effort to make sure we are doing things outside the gym and CrossFit, so we go out for food weekly, and travel around the UAE trying to see the sights while we are here. It helps me a lot to have a partner who's also into CrossFit, since it takes up so much of your time and it's a very different lifestyle to live by (the way we do it, [anyway]!) so I would find it hard to balance my personal life and training life [otherwise]. This way it's all in one! Elliot also helps out as my coach and keeps me on track with nutrition and training—I definitely wouldn't be where I am in CrossFit without him," she says. Nutrition-wise, Jamie doesn't follow anything specific to food types or macro counts, but she does follow a nutrition plan from Buff Box nutrition in the UK, where her nutritionist writes exactly what she is to eat, and she eats that day in and day out until he says to change it, which could be anywhere from two to six weeks. "It's based off a performance goal, making sure I get enough of the right foods that will help me perform where I want to, and recover as fast as possible on a daily basis. It is really important, as recovery and injury prevention is very important in CrossFit," Jamie says. When it comes to food, her guilty pleasures are frozen yoghurt "covered in any sort of chocolates—Reece's and Whitakers, preferably!". She also recently ran a junk-free February at Yas, and her favourite recipe that she included from that

was banana pancakes. "In a blender, add 1 banana, 2 eggs, 40g oats, 10g chia seeds, a dash of milk, and then blend, then make them like normal pancakes in a frying pan. [They're] great for breakfast, lunch or a snack," she says.

This is clearly a woman who knows herself pretty well, and is very comfortable in her own skin after years spent

trying to learn that works for her. Especially in the age of social media, Jamie's attitude towards what beauty means, and its relation towards female empowerment, is a refreshingly simple yet rock solid one: "Start taking note of how good your body feels when you exercise and fuel it right. This is enough motivation in itself to stop

worrying about what people think. If you feel fit and strong, you are going to feel confident. Also, you should never compare [yourself to others online], as we all know how fake social media can be," she says. "You are you and that's not going to change anytime soon, so suck it up, make the most of what you've got, and move



STYLING: TERESA KARDINSKA, MAKEUP: ANGELOUQUE TURNER, HAIR: SAM EL CHAMI/MALICIOUS SPA, SIDE SPLIT PLUNGE BODYCON DRESS: DHS125, MISGUIDED AT NAMSHI.COM, RING (PART OF A SET OF 3): DHS499, SWAROVSKI AT NAMSHI.COM.

Cover Exclusive

on! Once you are over that, then you can get the best out of yourself and start enjoying the little things in life, which can make us all the happiest. [It's] the basics," she explains. As for the slews of people who insist that CrossFit can make a woman's body "masculine"—and thereby intimidate a lot of women into shying away from the sport—Jamie's grounded body-confident principles still ring true. "CrossFit can seem like most of the women are on the more 'masculine' side but in reality, the women you see like this are the ones competing at top level (who are actually tiny in real life if you stood them next to a normal person—they just look bigger and more jacked whilst working out on TV or on social media). But those who are your regular CrossFit gym-goers are generally more of that 'desired' womanly body type, as they are just working out for fun and improved health benefits. They don't look bulky; they eat well, train hard and can do more with their bodies outside of the gym. It takes a lot of training, dedication, and the right food choices, to look like some of the top CrossFitters. But in general, people are warming more towards the stronger woman look now, and I think this is due to women not caring what people think as much, and seeing the benefits of what functional training can do in day-to-day life," she says. Jamie has, like many in the region, also noticed the growing popularity of CrossFit in the Middle East and GCC region, and the effect it's been having on regional communities to inspire them to live fitter and more health-conscious lives, both in and outside the scope of CrossFit specifically. "I think [the popularity of CrossFit here] has boosted [attitudes towards fitness and health in the region] hugely; it's a very fun way of working out, and a good way to keep people accountable, so this is good for a relatively inactive nation.

It's just educating those who missed out on physical activity at a younger age. It's also good to see people spending time and money on things that are good for them," Jamie adds. As for her femininity, funnily enough, Jamie feels as though she's actually become more girly since becoming a CrossFit athlete, or moving to the UAE anyway. "To be honest, I'm probably more feminine now than when I used to live in New Zealand and play rugby! Those girls are the true 'badasses' but us girls in CrossFit still like to make sure our hair and outfits and so on are on point whilst working out—we have to look good while we are working!" Jamie laughs. If anyone is in doubt as to whether a female CrossFit is as feminine as those in any other sport, Jamie clearly has found a happy medium between embracing her femininity, and being a strong woman, and more importantly, one who is strong from the inside out. "[To me, being a strong woman means standing] by your morals. If you want to do something, or be something, then do it. Mentally, I believe it is not looking into things too much—if you're happy with what you're doing, and how you are doing it, then keep doing it. If you're not, then be proactive and change it. Also, the physical side to me means being confident in my abilities and being able to fend for myself in most aspects in life," she says.

When Jamie isn't training to become the "Fittest Woman On Earth", you'll probably find her playing some type of water sports—"this is a big past time for any Kiwi kid!"—or playing rugby. "I've always loved rugby and touch rugby—it's a fun team sport, and I enjoy the culture around it," she says. Otherwise, her other pleasures simple: When she's not training, she likes to relax with Elliott, whether that's going to the beach, watching a movie, eating good food, or 10-Pin bowling. "I'm really good!" she laughs. ■

