

# Her Product Is A Puzzle

**Popular demand has persuaded Noela Edmondson to make 3000 jig-saws a year!**

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PICTURES BY EARL BUCK



Left: Mrs Noela Edmondson painting the designs on her puzzles, which are noted for their bright colours and clear outlines. Drying rack in the background holds some that have just been painted.

Below: Teamwork ... Mrs Edmondson cuts her puzzles while son Grant sands the individual pieces. Good equipment makes possible Mrs Edmondson's puzzle output.



**C**HILDREN all over New Zealand are now enjoying the hand-painted, wooden inset jigsaw puzzles made by Mrs Noela Edmondson, of Hamilton.

Mrs Edmondson started making puzzles six years ago for her children and their friends. Today she is turning out around 3000 a year, in response to orders from all over the country.

A former primary school teacher, Mrs Edmondson has always been interested in making play equipment. She made her first puzzle after she bought a wooden one for her children, and it proved popular.

She was soon making more, and these disappeared quickly, mostly to other people's children. Four years ago Mrs Edmondson realized that her

hobby had virtually become a full-time business.

She still works from home, however, preferring to be there while Grant (10) and Karen (8), are at school.

Mrs Edmondson's puzzles are gay and distinctive. Her designs are painted on to pine plywood, then varnished, cut and glued on to a backing board.

Designs have probably made the puzzles so popular with the young. Mrs Edmondson has more than 100 different designs, ranging from a simple two-piece ice-cream puzzle for beginners to more complex 32-piece puzzles.

All portray — as simply as possible — objects, machines, toys and animals that children are familiar with.

Choosing from the catalogue

of designs can be a difficult business. Elephants, ducks, buses, telephones, trains, trucks, astronauts, dogs and cats abound. More complex designs include the cycle of the Monarch butterfly and other nature themes which are appreciated by older children.

Mrs Edmondson uses fast-drying, water-based paints and her colours are bright and dense. Each design is outlined in black for clearer definition.

The puzzle designs are a joint effort by Mrs Edmondson and

her sister, Mrs Bettina Smith, of Nelson, who has a Diploma of Fine Arts. During Christmas holidays Mrs Smith comes to Hamilton and the two get together to design.

One of the most popular puzzles came not from Mrs Edmondson and her sister, but from Karen Edmondson, who at the age of four drew a simple, child's-eye-view of a man which her mother made into a puzzle. This proved enormously attractive to young children, and Mrs Edmondson still makes it.

**Right: Karen Edmondson tackles one of her mother's puzzles . . . surrounded by some of the wide variety of puzzle designs which Mrs Edmondson makes.**

Mrs Edmondson's working set-up has been streamlined over the years to turn out maximum puzzles with minimum fuss. She buys plywood in large sheets and her husband helps her cut these to the measurements of the four sizes of puzzle that she makes.

She traces designs on to the ply from a carbon copy, paints them, then leaves them to dry in special racks which have been set up in a unit in her hall. The ply is then varnished and the pieces are cut on a Dremel jigsaw cutter which Mrs Edmondson has set up in her workroom.

The puzzles are mainly cut into simple geometric shapes which are easy for children to manipulate.

Each piece is sanded — this job has been taken over by a neighbour, Mrs Ngaire Smith. She uses an electric sander set up in Mrs Edmondson's workroom.

The finished puzzle is glued to its backing board and pressed in a special press made by Mr Edmondson.

Mrs Edmondson finds no part of the work tedious, and thoroughly enjoys it. She has stream-lined her style of opera-



tion by doing the work in stages, spending, say, one day painting, another cutting and a third delivering orders. This stops the work from becoming muddled, as it would if she was jumping from one part of the project to another.

She shares her interest with her children, who both enjoy designing, painting and cutting their own puzzles. They are almost as adept with the jigsaw cutter and other tools of the trade as their mother is.

**Left: Karen Edmondson competently uses the jigsaw cutter during work on a small project of her own. In the foreground are some examples of her mother's puzzles. The puzzle design on the left was adapted from a picture Karen drew when she was four. It has proved popular with young children.**

Mrs Edmondson feels that the educational aspect of the puzzles is most important, teaching manipulative and co-ordination skills at an early age. She said children could be started off playing with puzzles when they were only a year or so old.

She has known children who have been playing with puzzles since they were tiny, and were able to manage complex 32-piece puzzles by the time they were four.

Mrs Edmondson sells her puzzles mainly through the Waikato Play Centre Association's shop in Hamilton. Centres all over New Zealand send in orders. She has also sent a large number to Vietnamese orphanages, through the Red Cross.

She has been grateful for the constructive criticism which play centre shop personnel have offered over the years, and feels that her work benefited from this. •