

Pageant

If you think pushy parents are shoving their long-suffering kids to talent contests and Cinderella pageants, you're wrong. These Type A, hyper-driven, over-achieving kids are signing themselves up — and taking charge of their own image. ERI AKBAR reports

ELIZABETH Quek is a 10-year-old beauty queen who is well ahead of her years.

The Primary 4 student who has scooped a total of eight tiaras — from International Cinderella Cover Girl Award 1999 to International Photogenic Cover Girl Award 1999 — does not need her mum to remind her to take care of her looks.

Every morning, before she skips to Nanyang Primary School, she puts Hazeline Snow on her face.

If she has a physical education class that day, she slaps on sunblock.

Never mind that she doesn't have to worry about crow's feet.

You'll expect her Emporio Armani-clad mum to be propelling her daughter towards glamour.

But no. Mrs Diana Quek, 46, lets her daughter call the shots.

Elizabeth decides which pageant to join, what to wear and what to perform at the show.

The girl is part of a growing breed of kids on the kiddie pageant circuit — highly driven and in control.

In short, Type A girls who're addicted to success.

Small wonder that Elizabeth floored the judges at the Little Miss Singapore pageant, which marked her debut three years ago.

She pestered her aunt to sign her up after seeing the contest form in Motherhood magazine.

Elizabeth said: "I wanted to try it out because it seemed fun.

"It's nice to wear beautiful dresses and share my talent with others."

Elizabeth also seeks out new challenges.

Learning ballroom dancing from scratch, she blazed to the top of the 15th Singapore Lion City International DanceSport Championships earlier this year, after merely eight months of lessons.

And when a Chinese opera troupe performed in her school a year ago, she was smitten with the costumes.

She's now in shows organised by the Chinese Opera Institute.

Her housewife mother and businessman dad don't even share her passion, except for the occasional karaoke session.

Said Elizabeth: "I don't feel

nervous when I perform on stage. I tell myself to be confident."

And she needs no nagging to study either.

"When she comes home, she'll greet me and announce she has lots of homework to do and she'll go straight to her room," said Mrs Quek.

Every week, she spends an average of six hours attending English language, dance, Chinese calligraphy and opera classes.

If she's tired, she'll sleep in the car (while she's chauffeured to classes from her semi-detached house near Sixth Avenue).

I feel happy when I step on the dance floor. After winning the championships, my friends congratulated me. They wish to dance, too, but they couldn't find a dance partner.

— 10-year-old Elizabeth Quek (left), on why she's attracted to the limelight