

World Crabbet Convention, Toowoomba, Australia 2005

Anne Brown reports from Toowoomba for "Crabbet Journal"

The World Crabbet Convention last November offered a glimpse of the vast wealth of Crabbet stock in Australia. The quality, versatility and elegance of Crabbet and high percentage Crabbet Arabs impressed us all. The gene pool is in safe hands down-under.

Held in steamy Queensland, the Show and Parade also attracted entries from hundreds of miles away in New South Wales and Victoria. Visitors have to be grateful to breeders like Leon Bennett from Pevensey Stud and long-time colleagues Rob and Yvonne Day from Moonlite Stud for bringing their top-quality pure Crabbets so far, for which they were well rewarded - read on! The long trip was equally satiosfying for Larry and Maryllyn O'Dea and their Inshallah Arabians. And the traumas suffered by Bernadine, making the long journey from Sydney with Bonn and Magic Prophecy and the team from Anneka Arabians, resulted in the ultimate accolade.

With the advent of frozen semen, we could be re-establishing these lines long since lost in Britain. Even familiar strains from Mesaoud and Skowronek have evolved in a different way, as was evident from the inspiring Parade groupings on the Sunday of the Convention.

The line-up in the ring on the Saturday for the World Crabbet Convention Show, sponsored by Calga Arabians, stretched judges Brother Peter McIntosh (from South Australia) and Diana Whittome (from the UK) as they worked through the youngstock and in-hand classes. Like kids in a candy shop, we just didn't know where to feast our eyes next. For outside Toowoomba's excellent arena, proud adult horses were gathering. And in the barns, yet more stamped and whinnied their presence.

The Cameo Stud of Coralie Gordon, a doyenne of Crabbet breeding in Australia, provided both the Female Youngstock winners: the Championship went to the pure Crabbet yearling filly Cameo Violetta, now owned by Judy and John Hasteed; and the Reserve to the smaller 3-year old Cameo Silver Halo. Both are by Cameo's senior stallion Hallelujah. The ethereally beautiful bay Inshallah Impression won her mare class and the Reserve Mare Championship for the O'Deas.

But Bernadine, the tall, majestic white grey mare by Arabian Park Phaeton x Priscilla won our hearts and the Pure Crabbet Championship - and the Somerled Memorial Trophy - with her style and ground-covering movement. This especially thrilled owners Anne Maher and Kevin Beaumont of Anneka Arabians as travelling companion Bonn had injured a hock on the journey, so couldn't enter the Stallion class.

This left the way clear for the extremely typy dark bay Prince Benay (Sarafire x Veridan Za'aria) to dance away with the male Championship. However, the long journey and communal stabling had

done him no favours. He was sadly in no shape to appear in the ridden classes, and these were very ones he had come to compete in, as he is currently in dressage training.

Prince Benay's below par state of health did not prevent him and his full sister Zoe Benay (also bay) from winning the progeny group, a great credit to the joint breeding programme of Leon Bennett and Rob and Yvonne Day.

Nevertheless, it must have been a hard decision for the judges as the gay bright chestnut Prince Rasheyd (Silvern Idyll x Princess Rubi'a), bred by our own Rosemary Archer, took everyone's breath away in the many classes he won in hand and under saddle, to win the High Points Championship of the show and the Reserve Male Pure Crabbet Championship.

Most of the high percentage Crabbet classes were equally impressive but the one that stays in my memory was the huge Liberty class where Roxborough Ricochet literally trotted the socks off the competition in a heart-stopping display of Crabbet action. A well-deserved win!

The Roxborough horses of Ken Coombe, who had ably headed the enthusiastic Convention committee, rightly took many of the top awards. His lovely chestnut stallion Roxborough Bandoleer, who was to open the following day's Parade ridden by Rebecca Vuillermin in Stockman's gear, finally saw off all competition by winning the overall Crabbet Related Grand Championship and the Gadebrook Shield, which I presented.

Roxborough Banquette, Bandoleer's daughter, then capped it all by winning the Crabbet Related Filly Championship and an exciting bay colt, Roxborough Rivalry was Champion Crabbet Related Colt. Finally, 18-year old Roxborough Barrera was made Reserve Crabbet Related Champion mare - a satisfying reward for Ken's commitment to the breed.

The pure white Mt Carmel Nicholas demonstrated the versatility of these fine horses by winning the Crabbet Related Reserve Championship in hand, then delighting the crowd with a faultless display in harness during the following day's parade. Coralie Gordon's erudite commentary on the wonderful horses parading before us proved invaluable as her knowledge seems encyclopaedic.

The outstanding quality of the horses parading before us, their elegance, style and extreme refinement of neck-set and head impressed us hugely, as it is sadly missing from many of our Crabbets in Britain. During the Sunday Parade, their versatility amazed us - one minute performing a dressage display, the next tolerating whips cracked around their ears without flinching. And although the applause put Snow 'n' Fire off his stride in the ring, back in the stabling area, this fine stallion performed to perfection. The weekend also allowed us to catch up with ex-patriots who have settled in Australia such as Jennie Thompson, the Dands and Joan and Dick Culnane.

The Parade concentrated on the influence of the all-important Skowronek and Mesaoud lines and sub-groups of Rakib, Stefan, Zenith 11, Rikham, Prince Rasheyd, Greylight, Riffal, Sindh, Grand Royal, Silver Minstrel, Silwan, Crystal Fire, Royal Domino and Count Manilla - all imported from the UK except Zenith 11. The male line of the tall bay Riffal (through Oran, Silver Vanity and Sindh) has certainly proved one of the most influential in Australia and has been particularly valued by the endurance and performance fraternity.

The Sindh son, Banderol, sired Arabian Park Phaeton, the sire of Supreme Champion Bernadine. Another Banderol son, Bandom was the grandsire of the Crabbet-related Champion Roxborough Bandoleer, and a third son Tommie, whom we had admired at the O'Deas' Inshallah Stud, sired one of the winning mares, the supremely elegant and feminine bay Inshallah Impression.

Most of the horses on show came from Queensland, illustrating the wealth of Crabbet blood which permeates local studs. But visitors were very privileged to also see horses (including Supreme Champion Prince Benay, Pevensey Safari and Zoe Benay) which the Days and Leon Bennett had brought the huge distance from their studs, and the Anneka horses (Supreme Champion Bernadine, Bonn and Magic Prophecy) that Anne Maher and Kevin Beaumont had brought from New South Wales.

Coralie welcomed some wonderful veteran stallions such as Karen Johnson's 26-year old Maf-Ue Sultan, Calga Stud's 25-year old Crystiya Count Mileno and Kerry Jones' 25-year old Blue Bead Altaf (by Sindh) spanning generations of breeding.

The family group presentations were interspersed with dressage displays by two of Australia's leading performance Arabians - Tennessee ridden by Sharyn Hungerford, and Prince Rasheyd ridden by Nieta Norman. Then Leondon Nichifa paraded in costume, and Mt Carmel Nicholas snapped round the ring in smart harness driven by Trevor Andersen.

The evening dinner at the Burke & Wills Hotel, sponsored by the AHSA, concluded with spirited bidding for the 13 life-size paintings of legendary Crabbet stallions by artist Jill Vanstone - one or two even flew off to America.

For those of us unable to afford such a treat, the excellent Souvenir catalogue will always remind us in pedigrees and pictures of those wonderful horses in warmer climes.

An intense programme of valuable lectures filled the Monday of the Convention, led off by a doyenne of pure Crabbet breeding in Britain, Caroline Sussex of Binley Stud, who spoke encouragingly of the value of Crabbet blood in today's endurance and performance horses.

In words and slides, Caroline almost overwhelmed the audience with the vast number of pure and high percentage Crabbet successes bred in Britain. These include Hachim, the current World Endurance Champion, Magic Domino, now a Living Legend in the USA and Crabbet Horse of the Year 2006, the current British Endurance Champion, Vlacq Khamul, Tequila Gold (interestingly bred from Bremervale Emperor, an Australian import to Foxbury Stud in Gloucestershire), Muzonomy, the Supreme Ridden Champion at the national show and the current overall Horse of the Year Ridden Champion, Lutandorvici, and of course, the amazing young stallion PHA Silvern Risalm who has swept all before him in ridden classes and dressage to be awarded the first-ever WAHO trophy for the UK in 2005.

Catherine McAlpine from Splitters Creek Arabian Sport Horse Stud, outlined the old Blunt and Colonial horse breeding that she and a few others preserve, based on very early imports. Dick Collyer spoke on the Australian Endurance scene, commending the Australian Silver Team medallists at the 2005 World Endurance championships and their previous team Golds in New Zealand and in Spain. We were later to see these horses at the Tofts' Bremervale Stud, three generations of a family who have had such a positive influence on the performance horse scene with their Crabbet-based programme.

Lesley Maxwell Dowey reminisced on the early Australian show scene, then equine reproduction specialist vet Prof Reg Pascoe captivated us all with his witty, succinct and highly informative talk on Artificial insemination. He stressed the problems we face with collecting and shipping frozen semen halfway round the world and the subsequent difficulties with insemination. Nevertheless, it initiated a desire for dedicated breeders to attempt the procedure in the very near future.

A video show high-lighting many of these accomplished horses in action around the world followed a Gala supper. The enthusiasm generated at events like this promise to sustain pure Crabbet genes well into the future. With the likelihood of another World Convention in the States and one in Britain, the Blunts can rest easy in their graves knowing their valuable lines live on.

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