

horses for courses

From a stallion and a mare transported to Van
Diemen's Land in the 1820s on a convict ship
to a flourishing twenty-first century industry.



The colony of Van Diemen's Land was established in 1804 as a convict settlement. Free settlers would soon follow: many attracted by land grants and the island's temperate climate.

By the 1820s settlers were importing thoroughbred racehorses. Two of the earliest arrivals were a stallion, Peter Fin, and a mare, Edella, foaled in England in 1819 and 1822 respectively. Both were to become ancestors of that remarkable Tasmanian-bred horse Malua, which won the Melbourne Cup about 60 years later.

Reliable rainfall and rich soils enabled many settlers to become prosperous landowners. By the mid-nineteenth century breeding thoroughbreds became a fascinating diversion for the wealthy in the new colony, the quality of their bloodstock maintained by a steady flow of English imports. Four Melbourne Cup winners were bred between 1870 and 1885.

Horse-breeder Samuel Page played a vital role in the colony as proprietor of the Hobart-Launceston coach service. His biographer had this to say:

With three coaches daily each way, the service controlled most of the transport on the main road, and required 300 horses and three main fodder stations. Prices ranged from 5 s[hillings] for outside seats to £5 inside. Each coach carried an armed guard, and two when bullion was aboard.

From about 1900, however, after this promising beginning, Tasmanian breeding lapsed into a period of mediocrity that would last for more than half a century. The importation of English horses ceased abruptly after Chiron and Simon of the Spear were brought out in 1906 and 1909 respectively.

It was half a century later that the Australian-bred Melbourne Cup winner

Wodalla was brought to Tasmania. This horse was an immediate stallion success, but as he aged a replacement became necessary.

In 1964 the Irish horse Lanesborough was the first stallion imported from overseas since 1909. His pedigree was sound, although not fashionable in England, and he was a superior galloper. Buying him was one thing. Getting him here was another.

Transport of horses from England was primitive indeed. A box had to be built for him on the deck of the S.S. *Otaio*, which was scheduled to sail to the Antipodes via the Panama Canal. No one was able to say where the freighter was, however, or where it was headed. International phone calls were difficult and expensive. Word came through ultimately that the *Otaio* had arrived at a timber port on the east coast of New Zealand. That was as far as it was going. Lanesborough was off-loaded. Eventually another freighter was found for him, but it had standing room only, so he could not lie down during the 10 days' trip to Melbourne. He was skin and bone on arrival.

Lanesborough was to make his mark. He joined Wodalla at a modest 14-hectare property at Cambridge, near Hobart in southern Tasmania. The horses were managed by Bill Ryan, who lived next door with his wife Win and their children. After only two stud seasons southern Tasmania was hit by a bush fire in which 62 people died on that infamous Tuesday, 7 February 1967. The small stud lay directly in the path of the 108 kilometres-per-hour firestorm. When the flames threatened at about 2.00 pm Win Ryan threw open the door of Lanesborough's box. She then fled with her husband and their small daughter into a waterhole, throwing wet sacks over their heads,





Brion Stewart

From left: Bill Ryan, Win Ryan and Bert Wicks revisit the Pass Road stud.



Robyn Whishaw



while the fires raged above. In minutes fire engulfed the whole property. The Ryan house and Lanesborough's box were burned to the ground. There was not a fence post or skerrick of vegetation left. Lanesborough had disappeared.

The whole district was devastated. A quickly assembled party of helpers searched high and low for Lanesborough, ranging for many kilometres through the now open, unfenced countryside. He was nowhere to be found, and the search was eventually abandoned. But in the long summer evening, displaying an instinct not normally associated with horses, and treading very carefully on burned under-feet, he simply came home. His whiskers were burned off, his underbelly singed, but he was otherwise alive and well. After the fires the stud was beyond rebuilding and subsequently passed to other owners.

His oldest progeny at that time were either foals or yearlings. Lanesborough's fame came three years later, when Beer Street, which he sired, won the 1970 Caulfield Cup. Two years later Piping Lane, another of his progeny, won the Melbourne Cup, and Lanesborough was recognised as a sire of national consequence.

His legacy continues through his daughters and their daughters. One of Tasmania's most notable horseracing achievements was Sunny Lane's winning the Hong Kong International Vase, in an invitation race in which she ran against some of the best horses in the world. (The dam of Sunny Lane is Private Lane by Lanesborough.)

In the 1970s David Whishaw made a decision to convert his property, Armidale, at Carrick in northern Tasmania to thoroughbred breeding. Under the management of Denis and Robyn Whishaw more than 20 carefully selected stallions have stood with outstanding success at Armidale. Melbourne metropolitan winners sired at Armidale include Sydeston, by St Briavels, which won the Caulfield Cup and brought \$3.125 million in winnings to his Devonport owner. In recent times Weasel Will (\$713,000) and Windigo (\$537,000), by the Whishaw stallions Weasel Clause and Aliocha have won races at the highest level in Melbourne and Sydney.

Armidale stud makes an enormous contribution to Tasmanian racing. About 20 per cent of all Tasmanian fields are made up of horses sired at Armidale. The late David Whishaw, who died in 2000, was probably the most influential Tasmanian racing and breeding personality in Tasmania's history.

Armidale with 400 superb hectares and nine kilometres of frontage to the Liffey River is a highly professional operation whose practices compare favourably with the famous studs of Kentucky. Just one of its routine commitments to patrons is the fascinating foaling watch.



In 1994 Hobart resident Dr Greg Pitt bought a yearling filly in Adelaide. Racing as *Almurtes* she won four races in Tasmania as a two-year-old. He did not realise it at the time but he was bringing the family home. A subsequent study of her pedigree revealed that she is a descendant of *Edella* in direct female line through 14 generations.

In 2002, maintaining the colonial tradition, *Armidale* brought a new stallion from England called *Savoire Vivre*. His sire, *Sadler's Wells*, has dominated the European scene for the past 10 years and has sired the last two English Derby winners.

His dam *Oh So Sharp* was the English champion filly of her time. No one will be surprised if *Savoire Vivre* sires a Melbourne Cup winner.

Almost without exception, in every racing season a champion horse emerges from Tasmania to take on the best in the nation. *Meridian Star* has won \$3 million in Hong Kong. *Alpha*, *El Mirada* and *My Sienna*, together with *Weasel Will* and *Windigo*, have become names known to all Australian racegoers.

The annual high point of the Tasmanian breeding industry is the late summer sale of a hundred beautifully presented yearlings. On 25 February 2003 the sale will be held at *Inveresk*, northern Tasmania. The public is welcome at this event. You may care to try a day out with a difference – it's an education. ☐

Foaling WATCH

Midnight, Sunday 1 September. No moon, very cold and clear, a frost developing. Eight mares close to foaling. A busy night coming up. It's lonely and always cold, but I have the best job in the world, supervising the new arrivals. A four-month night-shift labour of love each year, August to November.

Mares nearly always foal in the small hours. Why? The old hands say it is because they are creatures of the wild, foaling in darkness to avoid predators seizing the newborn. By dawn the foal can canter with its mother.

Most mares deliver without fuss. Some present badly and need manual assistance. A foal is a big baby and that process can require a lot of push and shove. In bad cases, the specialist equine vet is only 10 minutes away. If called at 3.00 am he knows the need is genuine and never complains.

Then there is the weakling, the one that is delivered successfully but cannot stand up. This is the easiest contingency of all, but vital for survival. One arm under the foal's neck, one arm under its rump, and up it goes to the mare's waiting teat. It suckles. It keeps falling down, but eventually there is a magical moment when it manages by itself. All is well. On to the next mare.

The Pines Resort.



20 Self-catering Units • Restaurant & Tavern
Tennis, Volleyball & BMX • Games Room & BBQs
Pool, Spa & Sauna • Golf Courses & Horseriding nearby
10 mins to Airport • 20 mins to Hobart

Surf Road, Seven Mile Beach, Tasmania, Australia 7170
www.pinesresort.com.au • Phone (03) 62 486222
Fax (03) 62 486628 • reception@pinesresort.com.au




The Pines Resort.

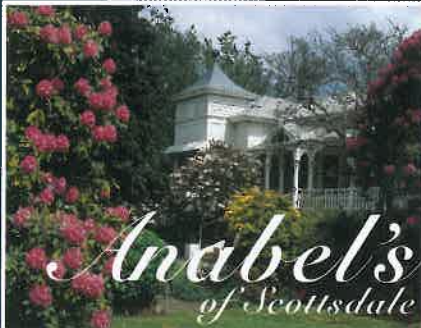


🌲 Christmas Hills
Raspberry Farm
Cafe

Country style cafe ✦ Fully licensed
Open daily ✦ We serve breakfast

Just off the highway at Elizabeth Town
30 minutes from Devonport ✦ 35 minutes from Launceston

phone: 03 63 622186
www.raspberrymfarmcafe.com



Anabel's
of Scottsdale

Anabel's of Scottsdale
Classified National Trust
House & Garden

Restaurant & Overnight Accommodation
Fully self-contained Federation-style units
46 King Street, Scottsdale
Belle Cottage now also available

Phone: (03) 6352 3277 or (03) 6352 2144