Unharnessed potential

Ideal Guy's track-to-hack story starts here...

by Cristina Wilkins
Photos by Sophie Barrington

In order to improve racehorse wastage statistics, Horses and People Magazine has launched an awareness and education campaign to encourage leisure and sport riders to take Standardbred racehorses from track to hack.

Racehorse wastage is the term that refers to the number of horses that are removed from the racing industry. Despite the best of intentions to find suitable homes for every racehorse, only a small proportion of surplus racehorses are being re-directed to the leisure and sport equestrian community, with many ending up going for slaughter.

Statistics have shown the wastage rate in the harness racing industry to be 38% and of those, only 4.67% are re-directed to pleasure homes.

One of the hurdles faced when re-homing a retiring racehorse is the set of behaviours they acquire during their fast-paced competitive career. While speed and quick reflexes are prized on the track, these are in contrast to the safe and controlled manners. Racehorses need to undergo thorough training and rehabilitation programs to succeed in the show arena and become safe mounts for their new owners.

The unharnessed potential of the Standardbred

Due to their affable and trainable temperament, Standardbred horses are ideal candidates for the multi-faceted pleasure and performance disciplines. More studies have shown that Standardbred racehorses have lower injury rates once leaving the industry and are more likely to go to slaughterhouses than their Thoroughbred counterparts.

The goal of this campaign, an initiative of Horses and People Magazine, is to raise awareness of the unharnessed potential of the Standardbred horse as an ideal pleasure, show and trail-riding mount, and to encourage more riders to undertake their re-education.

With this goal in mind, several key people and organisations have joined forces to showcase the story of one horse, “Ideal Guy.” A 4-year-old Standardbred who has lined up on 43 occasions for one win and a few placings, will be retired from racing, re-educated as a saddle horse and subsequently sold to a suitable owner.

Ideal Guy’s re-education will be documented and serve as a guide for riders and trainers who want to give a racehorse a second chance. The information, which will detail both the re-training and healthcare rehabilitation processes, will feature throughout 2014 in a series of articles that will appear in Horses and People Magazine, as well as being promoted to a wider audience via a targeted media campaign.

Overwhelming support

This project is only possible thanks to the support of many people who are providing services, products and funds. The Horses and People team have been overwhelmed with the enthusiasm and generosity of everyone that is involved.

Ideal Guy has been donated by owners Steven Towns and Maxine Ellison to Raising the Standards, an organisation dedicated to rehabilitating and re-homing retired and unamused harness racing horses. In partnership with Horses and People Magazine, Raising the Standards will oversee Ideal Guy’s progress and subsequent placement with a permanent home.

Ideal Guy’s re-education will be headed by leading equine behaviourist Dr Andrew McLean and the staff at The Australian Equine Behaviour Centre who are providing six months of training free of charge.

“The Standardbred horse is the most maligned,” says Dr McLean, “yet anyone who has had anything to do with this breed knows that it has the best temperament of any sport horse. It is an amazing feat of selective breeding – a horse that is competitive enough to win races, yet can mentally withstand pulling a cart (being chased by one actually). In many cases the Standardbred is its temperament and, with human injury rates in horse-human interactions so high, this project should be a huge incentive to use this breed more. I think injury rates would be a great deal lower if there were more Standardbreds in the riding horse population. Most horse riders are leisure and trail riders, and Standardbreds by far make the best trail horses.”

Harness Racing Australia are providing funds towards Ideal Guy’s accommodation and care expenses. They have taken an enthusiastic and active role in the project, proving they are serious about racehorse welfare. Harness Racing Australia’s Operations Manager Gary Kain says, “As part of our overall welfare commitment to Standardbreds we are excited to see many people taking on off-the-track horses and giving them after racing opportunities. We have seen Standardbreds make it to the highest levels in the show arena, be part of some of our states mounted police forces, and be used in a Riding for the Disabled and other partner riding programs. Standardbreds are extremely popular as an all-round riding horse. When we have taken the Standardbreds to Equitana and other high-profile equestrian events they are always popular and we have been pleased with the re-homing opportunities that has created. We will continue to partner with the State Standardbred associations to develop further opportunities for these horses and see this as a long-term commitment. The Standardbred has a wonderful nature, can be re-trained for a variety of purposes and are definitely not only suited for harness racing.”
This project is possible thanks to:

Australian Equine Behaviour Centre in Kilmore Equine Clinic, Equine Dental Vet Dr Shannon Lee from Advanced Equine Dentistry, and Master Farrier Andrew Bowers.

Kilmore Equine Clinic says, “At Kilmore Equine Clinic we fully support the re-training and placement of ex-racehorses into the general horse community. We enjoy the contact we have with these racing animals and appreciate their typical willingness to please and perform. It is great to see these horses go on to a second career as they deserve to have a wonderful life post-racing.”

Greg Grant Saddlery are supplying all the equipment Ideal Guy will need during training and will kit him out with a full show set of gear upon his subsequent sale. “We are proud and privileged”, says a spokesman for Greg Grant Saddlery, “to be involved in this project supporting the re-homing of Standardbreds and preventing racehorse wastage.”

Southern Cross Horse Transport took excellent care of Ideal Guy during the long trip from Queensland to The Australian Equine Behaviour Centre in Victoria, and did it all free of charge.

Manuka Haylage are providing free forage for Ideal Guy during the training period.

The step-by-step guide to re-educating the Standardbred racehorse will feature throughout 2014 in a series of articles written by The Australian Equine Behaviour Centre.

At the end of the training period, Ideal Guy will be sold, his placement subject to Raising the Standards to continue benefiting the Standards to continue benefiting the re-training and re-homing of Standardbred racehorses.

We have lost, heaven has gained.

Gregory Grant, his wife Patricia Grant, their daughter Amanda Innes and her husband Wroxton Innes embarked on the journey of a lifetime to attend a wedding in Delhi in late November. The four of them had the time of their lives at the wedding, which was held over three days at Neemrana near Delhi.

One wedding venue was the Palace of the Nawab Pataudi, a former captain of the Indian cricket team from the 1950’s, who also played for England. Greg and Wroxton loved visiting this palace and viewing all the cricket memorabilia.

The four worked closely together and ran the family business, Greg Grant Australia (Saddlery Trading Company), which Greg and Pat started in the early 1970’s. They had an enviable relationship, which many families can only dream of. Working harmoniously together every day and holidaying together. They even had a sit down lunch together, every day.

After the wedding, all four continued to Kanpur, in mid-north India to visit old friends in the saddlery industry, whom Greg and Pat had known for 40 years. Greg and Pat really enjoyed sharing old stories and were pleased to finally see where their suppliers’ factories were based, where the items they had been buying for all those years had come from.

The happy four then travelled to Udaipur to stay at the Lake Palace Hotel to celebrate Pat’s birthday. As they were due to leave the Palace on the morning of Pat’s birthday, they celebrated with a lovely dinner the night prior to their departure.

On the morning of the 6th December, the four of them visited the Marahana’s Palace where they were amazed by its beauty. At midday, they checked out and were told their flight had been delayed and they could wait for another hour or so.

The group travelled first by boat, then by two chauffeur driven cars, one car with Gret and Pat, the other car with Wroxton and Amanda. On the way to the airport the unthinkable happened. Greg and Pat’s car was hit head-on by a semi-trailer truck. Amanda and Wroxton witnessed the accident, which was extremely traumatic.

Greg and Pat leave behind their daughter Amanda Innes, son Barton Grant, son-in-law Wroxton Innes, daughter-in-law Jeanette Grant, and their grandchildren Sterling, Jasper, Clayton and newborn Darcy.

Greg and Pat only had one passion in life - their family. They lived harmoniously together every day and holidaying together. They even had a sit down lunch together, every day.

Greg and Pat had known for 40 years. Greg and Pat really enjoyed sharing old stories and were pleased to finally see where their suppliers’ factories were based, where the items they had been buying for all those years had come from.

Greg founded Greg Grant Saddlery in 1977 with one store located at Coopers Plains, Brisbane. At one time there were five Greg Grant Stores, however, since the late 1990’s, the two main stores at Annerley and Aspley are the flagships of the business. Greg’s role was in over-seeing the purchasing of stock and new product development. His main interest and passion had been with the family’s small band of racehorses that race under the familiar colours of green and white of Greg Grant Saddlery.

Greg Grant Saddlery is the largest supplier of horse riding equipment and western apparel in Australia and has been supporting Horses and People Magazine since its early beginnings. The team at Horses and People are grateful and proud to have known Greg and Pat Grant, and we offer our deepest sympathies to the family and staff.

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