

News

Connemaras at home in Karaka

Friday, 19 April 2013

By Anna McNaughton

Ingrid Van Hoet "retired" from a hectic career as a general practitioner to devote her considerable energies to family – two sons, a daughter and husband, Ross – and to make the most of breeding Connemara ponies.

Set on country living and a Connemara Stud Ingrid and husband Ross Norgrove first had to find the right property. They did so three years ago in Karaka; 15 acres of bare land which quickly gained post and rail fences, a purpose-built barn and horse yards.

For Ross, 'a quarter acre, comfort zone' guy, the adjustment to land and horses was a challenge but one to which he has adapted well.

However, his very busy business, selling food technology equipment, keeps him travelling throughout New Zealand so it is Ingrid who is hands-on managing the farm and her passion for horses.

Once settled on their newly acquired land, suburban life quickly gave way to a country lifestyle, with care of their burgeoning equine family a priority.

Initially, Ingrid was keen to breed Irish draught horses but mentor Lindsay Finan suggested that with a shortage of ponies, and the comparative ease of managing smaller equines in a single-handed operation, the Irish Connemara ponies would be a great option.

"And, didn't you grow up riding Connemaras?" Lindsay asked. And indeed Ingrid did.

Born and raised in County Monaghan, this energetic woman, named after Ingrid Bergman with surname indicating a Dutch grandfather, is a true Irishwoman with a real affinity for horseflesh.

On setting up the Capall Connemara Pony Stud, Ingrid with Lindsay's help, scoured Australia, where the breed is well established. She settled on Sue Clarke's Queensland-based Glenormiston Stud, from where she selected her first filly.

The sad news of Sue's terminal illness then gave Ingrid the opportunity to select from the Glenormiston broodmare band, which needed to be dispersed with some urgency. Another four mares brought in more bloodlines.

The Mungala Stud also provided a mature mare in foal. Mungala Tuar Leatha, a champion in the New Zealand show ring, is now a foundation matriarch for the Capall Stud.

With the Capall Connemara Pony Stud now home to several mares the hunt is on for a purebred Connemara stallion, the priority to add fresh bloodlines to the New Zealand herd.

Well-established throughout Europe and the USA, the breed is an ideal Kiwi pony, being able to turn to any discipline, but being particularly well suited for eventing.



A new breeder, Ingrid Van Hoet, with one of her beloved ponies. Photo Wayne Martin

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"Fresh semen can readily be flown across the Tasman, so a stallion based here can serve both markets."

Of course, the best place to source a stallion is Ireland, so plans are in place for Ingrid and Lindsay to attend the summer Clifden Show and Sale, in the heart of Connemara country, in County Galway... a trip to anticipate!

The long term plan is to show Capall's homebred youngsters in-hand, and to school all the ponies under saddle so that ponies for sale are ready to get straight into whichever discipline their new families wish.

Ingrid has attended several courses with Australian Olympic equestrian/ equine physiologist/behaviourist Andrew McLean, and plans to utilise his handling techniques with the young ones.

"Understanding behaviour patterns can avoid creating problems while handling and establishing training with the young ones," says Ingrid, who is relishing being a full-time farmer.

"After all the years of formal dressing and long, demanding hours of work, being able to dress down and work all day on the farm, is a delight."

As foundation breeders wind down or retire, new enthusiastic breeders are needed to step up, and carry on the good work.

Fortunately, Ingrid has all the requisite qualities in spades to do so.

This makes the Karaka's Capall Stud a welcome addition to the Connemara pony breeding ranks with Ingrid, quietly confident of future success.

Pioneering breed in NZ

The Irish Connemara pony, famed for its hardiness and jumping ability, arrived in New Zealand in 1978 introducing to this country a sturdy pony suited to both farm work and equestrian events.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Sir John Marshall was among the pioneers of the breed here, starting his herd by importing two mares from Australia and a stallion from the United Kingdom.

Often described as, "ride, drive and plough," the traditional pony could work on the farm all week, hunt on a Saturday and then take the family to church in the gig on Sunday.

There is even a romantic story that Spanish horses from the wrecked Spanish Armada swam ashore and inter-bred with native Irish ponies; certainly, the classic Connemara head does resemble the Andalusian!

Having been reared on the tough, rocky Connemara Hills, the modern Connemara is a bit finer-boned but still able to carry an adult and take any jump in its stride.

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Champion mare Mungala Tuar Leatha.
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