

Trotting

Clarrie Neal

Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information gained from the Gazette, Greg Brown's book, interviews with Peter Dawson, Colin Cubitt, Charlie Wheeler in July 1999, and from an interview between Lance Strachan and Rosemary Phillis in 1994. Apologies to those people I have failed to mention.

The semi-rural character of the Riverstone and surrounding districts meant that the horse and sulky was the best way to travel around. As families could not afford the thoroughbred, it was the standard bred trotting horse that was used to provide this essential service. So as the district grew it was only natural that their interest in trotting horses grew with it.

In the late 1800s there were no registered trotting meetings as we know them today, the trotting races were restricted to the district shows, though occasionally a galloping meeting would include an event for the trotters. Sometimes when owners could not agree as to who owned the fastest horse, a two horse race would be held on a dirt road or track to decide which owner had the fastest horse, often these grudge races were held with a large amount of money at stake.

Many of the trotters that raced at the shows would be trained on the dirt roads and tracks throughout the district, or trained as they pulled the butchers, the milk or bakers cart delivering orders through the week. It is of interest to note that such identities as Richard Rouse of Rouse Hill and Phillip Charley of North Richmond often donated prizes for trotting events at these shows, Phillip Charley later becoming the president of the R.A.S.

The Hawkesbury district played a major role in the development of the trotting game in Australia with such men as Andrew Town and J.A. Buckland being prominent. Andrew Town owned Hobartville Stud for many years and later bought Prestonville Stud. J.A. Buckland also owned Hobartville Stud for many years before buying Clydesdale Stud at Marsden Park in 1919. Shortly after buying the property he built the stables that can be seen today and a trotting track, before selling in 1932. J.A. Buckland is regarded as one of trotting's greatest sons and bred, trained, and drove trotters for 45 years, driving his last winner at the age of 72 years.

George Kiss was another prominent trotting man and he owned Clydesdale from 1904 to 1919. George owned the champion trotting pony *Clyedo* and the manager at the time was Harry Wood, whose grandson Wally was to become one of trotting's leading trainers in the 1960s. 'Clyedo' was the name given to Harry's home and spelling stables in Riverstone Road, Riverstone.

Kurrajong Picnic Races were held on the banks of Redbank Creek at North Richmond in the early 1900s, often on the program was a race for trotters. The Kurrajong Trotting Club was formed in 1906, holding meetings on this track until 1912 when it moved to the new Londonderry track, just out of Richmond.

To get to this track from Sydney, supporters, trainers, drivers and their horses would travel by the steam train to Richmond, and then make their way out to the track.

A prominent owner of this period was the Reverend Howell-Price of St Peter's Church of England at Richmond where he was the minister from 1896 to 1905. He never drove at registered meetings but drove in many events at the Hawkesbury shows. One of his best known horses was *Claredo*.

It was in the early 1900s that a girl known as Constance Stephens was showing an interest in horses and trotting. Constance was born in Rylstone in 1897, the daughter of a mounted policeman. Later she moved to Rouse Hill where she married George Moulds in 1919, a man who also loved horses. Their son Laurie who later became one of Sydney's leading trainers, was born on the 11th September 1923.

George, even when crippled with arthritis was still regarded as a top trainer right up till the time of his death. The *Windsor & Richmond Gazette* reported that George met with an unfortunate accident when driving his horse and sulky along the Windsor Road at Rouse Hill. His horse shied at an approaching car. The sulky struck a culvert and overturned, throwing Mr Moulds heavily to the roadway. He died on the 5th August 1932 from injuries received as a result of the accident.

Connie Moulds continued on with her love of horses and had a lot of success with *Bay Locke*, a horse that she bred, owned and trained herself. Her stables were situated in Riverstone, just behind where the Commonwealth Bank is now located, opposite the old Olympia picture theatre. In 1924 she rode *Innisfail* to victory in the only registered race that was ever held for women. Although women riders and drivers were banned on metropolitan tracks they were allowed to participate at the Londonderry track for a short period, before eventually being banned at all meetings.

Although Connie Moulds had paved the way, it was to be the 1970s before female competitors were allowed to drive at trotting meetings. It was the same with training. Although many women trained horses, their names were not allowed to be printed in the racebook. It was 1966 before ladies were officially recognised as the trainer.

Lance Strachan and Murray Johnston were two lads who helped Connie Moulds with the trotters and the ice run during the 1930s and 40s. Lance Strachan, in an interview with Rosemary Phillis, recalls his early days with Connie Moulds: *When I was a kid I used to follow Mrs Moulds and her horses to the shows at Castle Hill, Blacktown, Penrith or where ever they were being held. I didn't get paid, I just helped her because she had such a battle to make ends meet. Blacktown was a good show because it attracted good horses. We'd take two or three horses, including the horse that we used to deliver the ice in the morning. His name was Dark Bells. He would work in the morning, then we'd drive to the show in horse and sulky, leading a couple of other horses behind. The horses might have two races on the day, and if they won they would start in the final an hour or so later. Dark Bells was a really good horse, and two others she won many races with were Derby Locke and Robert Locke.*

In those days in a trotting race you could ride the horse, so long as it had all the gear on, the hobbles and the harness; Mrs Moulds always rode. In between the shows they held gymkhanas, many on the track at Riverstone when it was located in the meatworks paddocks opposite the railway station. These gymkhanas were popular with hundreds of spectators and plenty of good horses.

In the days before refrigerators Mrs Moulds had an ice run in the town. She would pick up the ice from Les Bray's ice depot in Robinson Street and deliver it in her horse and sulky. I used to help her every Saturday and sometimes through the week.

Another thing we did at Mrs Moulds' place, Saturday we used to have the fish and chip shop near the old bootmaker's shop opposite the picture show. People would run across the road at interval to get their sixpenneth or a shillings worth, always wrapped in newspaper. Mrs Moulds would peel the potatoes all Saturday morning and cut them with a chip cutter. It was hard work, but she had to do something as she had no money. Although she had horses that won many ribbons, you couldn't eat them. She would rather make sure the horse had something to eat before herself.

Colin Cubitt recalls Mrs Moulds walking their horses out to the trotting meetings at Londonderry, and Doug Barnes running a bus from Riverstone to the meeting each Saturday. Also a popular track with the locals at this time was the small three furlong track at Katoomba where they held regular meetings and gymkhanas.

Another old time trainer during this period was Tommy Wilson who had his stables in St. Albans Road Schofields. Tommy often told Peter Dawson how he and his brother 'Sag' would go away for months at a time doing the circuit of country shows, going as far south as Crookwell and Goulburn. They would leave Schofields in their horse and sulky with two trotters following behind. They would stop for a few days or a week at where ever there was a show, it may be Liverpool, Camden, Bargo, Moss Vale etc. Tommy and 'Sag' would camp in the showgrounds at these places. Two of the horses they took on these trips were *Timothy Direct* and *Nightguard*. Tommy's wife Val was another competent rider of the day and rode *Timothy Direct* in most of his races. Tommy also had considerable success with *Jack Hope*, *Royal Childe*, and *Belford*.

Mrs Moulds and Tommy Wilson both figured prominently at the opening meeting of night trotting at Harold Park on the 1st October 1949.

Greg Brown in his book "100 Years of Trotting" wrote about this night:

Depression years saw Wilson delivering wood from a spring cart, an undertaking which enabled him to buy an eighteen year old pony of trotting extraction, Golden Machine. But age proved no bar and he showed enough ability to win thirty three races around Shows and country meetings, and the £150 required to purchase Jack Hope. This public idol of course repaid his purchase price many times.

He started odds on favourite when he won the main race that opening night.

The sentimental horse of the meeting that night was Machine Wood trained by Mrs Constance Moulds and driven by son Lawrie. Twice he was rescued from the knackery shute, on the second occasion by Mrs Moulds herself. She persuaded a friend to purchase him for £100, a fair sum at the time for a 'doggie'. The old horse repaid their kindness by winning on this historic night.

Machine Wood was part owned by taxi driver Wally Cornwall and the bootmaker Billy Hughes.

Night trotting was first tried in NSW in 1890 at Lillie Bridge and again in 1927 when A.W. Anderson (of 'Home on the Pig's Back' fame) attempted to introduce it at Harold Park. Both attempts failed to get going. Harold Park had previously been known as Lillie Bridge, Forest Lodge, and Epping before it received its present name in 1929.

The successful introduction of night trotting in 1949 began the era of the golden years of harness racing. During the 1950s the crowds at Harold Park averaged 20,000 per meeting. So strong was the support in the Riverstone district that Doug Barnes used to run a bus there each Saturday night. There were 38,000 at Harold Park to see *Avian Derby* win the Inter-Dominion in 1952 and when *Caduceus* beat *Apmat* in the 1960 Inter-Dominion it was before a crowd of over 50,000 fans.

The champions of the 1950s were *Ribands* trained by Perce Hall of Penrith and *Uncle Joe* trained by Bert Alley at Castle Hill. All races in those days were from a standing start, unlike the mobile starts of today, often horses would gallop off the mark and give their opponents a considerable start. *Ribands* usually galloped off the mark and turned in some tremendous performances to win, these feats making him the idol of all trotting fans. In those days there were up to 160 bookmakers fielding on the events.

There was always one race for the square trotters and it was often won by such horses as *Krakatoa*, *Believe Me*, and *Willie Winkie* that were handicapped to give their opponents 120 yards start. Another good trotter of those days was *Daredevil* who won at Londonderry starting off 192 yards. It was in this period that the provincial tracks at Bankstown, Fairfield, Penrith, Hawkesbury, and Menangle Park were opened.

The Miracle Mile was introduced in 1967 and many good performances in this race ensured that interest in trotting remained high. Who could ever forget the performance of *Mount Eden* in 1971 when he broke at the start, lost some 30 yards, was booed by the public for one lap, then went around the field to win running away by 15 yards.

Laurie Moulds was born into the trotting industry and drove his first winner as a teenager in the early 1940s. Laurie went on to become the most successful trainer/driver from the district winning the Sydney drivers' premiership in 1962-3. This was no mean feat as Laurie limited his stable to 20 horses while many other trainers had up to 50 horses in their stables. Laurie also made his way into the history books when he drove *Casawin* to win a race at the re-opening meeting held at Menangle Park in 1953.

His best horse was *Don't Retreat* which won 54 races from 117 starts, including 26 races at Harold Park, many major races interstate, and was named Australian Harness Horse of the Year in 1975-6. Other successful horses trained by Laurie were *Miss Josephine*, *Derby Commerce*, *Van's Dream*, *Sylvette*, *Tryax Winkle*, *Little Maori*, *Bushfire* and *Wickawack*.

During the 1930s trotters were trained around the track in the meatworks paddocks opposite the Railway Station which served Riverstone as the showground. The Show Society was managed by such members as Ben Hibbert, R.R. Ratcliff, Charley Fisher, Nelson Andrews, and Charley Knight. It was in the early 1940s that a new track was built around the football oval.

Colin Cubitt recalled the day they moved the pavilion from the old showground across the road to the present football oval. The pavilion was moved in one piece, lowered on to log rollers and slowly pulled along using trucks that were owned by Taylors Produce Store and Dick Stacey. It was a full days effort.

Mrs Moulds, son Laurie, Tommy Wilson, Charlie Cafe and Neil Young were some of the regular trainers. Neil Young would often be seen there with a mattock and shovel filling in the holes and gutters to keep the track in good condition. The track was relocated to its present site in the 1960s and is used by up to 70 horses a day.

Wally Wood was one of Riverstone's most successful trainers. His career has been covered in an article in Journal 2001.

There have been many other people from Riverstone and the surrounding districts who have bred, trained and driven trotters full time or as a hobby. The list includes such identities as:

Bill Dawson - came to Schofields from Alexandria in the early 1930s in a horse and sulky leading a dairy cow. He built up a milk run, and a few years later bought the dairy. He always had an interest in trotters and broke in and educated *Willowmere* that was trained by Tommy Wilson. It was this interest that led to his sons Peter, Bill (Billo) and Neville becoming involved with trotting.

Peter Dawson - now has his stables 'Glenwood Park' at the end of Carlton Street. Peter began his career in trotting using the reins off the milk cart horse that were two metres too long, tying them in a knot. One day at a race meeting when the knot came undone and the reins were dragging a considerable distance behind the gig, he was advised by another driver and a steward to get proper reins. This achieved, he went on to win many races at Harold Park and provincials with *Straight Ahead*, *Gamblers Dream* and *Glenwood Sunset*.

Neville Dawson - won several races with *Raiarmagh's Heir* and *Joe's Oasis*.

Billo Dawson - now has his property at North Richmond where he concentrates on breeding. Billo owned a very ordinary mare named *Gypsy Fire*, that as a brood mare has produced many outstanding pacers including *Sparkling Bruce*, *Michael Bruce* and *Blazing Bruce*.

George Watson - stabled his horses at Bert Wheeler's on Butchers Row. *Desert Scott* was one of his better trotters winning four races at Harold Park and several on the provincial tracks. *Princess Brigade* was another good performer and he also part owned *Edvane* with Charley Wheeler and Kevin Smith. *Edvane* won four races at Harold Park and 16 around the provincials - later in his career when driven by Bert Alley he won a race at Harold Park on the Friday night and backed up next day at Clarendon and won the Hawkesbury Cup.

Charlie Wheeler used Bert's stables in Butchers Row and was successful in winning races at Harold Park with *Harbour Tolley*, *New Top*, and *Toli Brigade*.

Dave Phillis and his three sons Eddie, John and Arthur have always had an interest in trotters, John doing most of the driving. Some of the horses they won races with were *Sterling Hanover*, *Molly's Best* and *Volo's Song*. John also trained and drove for Dick Stockwell and Dr Wilkie. Dr Wilkie had stables and a training track out along Garfield Road, along from Edmund Street.

Kenny Donnelly - won several races at Harold Park and the provincials with *Sandy Walla*, *Taleteller* and *Hey Presto*. He part owned *Hey Presto* with Barry Strachan, Siddie Locke and Teddie Dawson.

Tommy Cleary - had many successes with *Toby Duane*, *Eve Oro* and *Redwin*. Tommy also trained horses for Sid Randall who owned the knackery at Rouse Hill for many years.

Charlie Cafe - won several races with *The Gaffer*, *Count Arion* and *Charleval*.

Joe Fitzgerald had stables behind his home in Butchers Row. Joe was regarded as a good man with horses as besides looking after trotters he was the stable attendant at the meatworks with the draught horses that moved the rail trucks when loading. Joe always looked after trotters that were owned by Jack 'Corker' Cleary while they were spelling. After spelling the horses were sent to Bert Alley at Castle Hill to resume their racing. Their best horses were *First Again*, *Good Intent* and a champion known as *Uncle Joe*, named after Joe Fitzgerald. *Uncle Joe* had some terrific tussles with that great champion of the 1950s, *Ribands*. An interesting sidelight here is that these two champions of this era both won their maiden races at Wyong on the same day in the early 1950s.

Pilty Marlin and his son Maxie had successes with *Just Another*, *Lucy's Notion* and a horse known as *Terrigal* that they trained for Dr Carroll who practised at Riverstone for many years in the 1950s.

Dick Stockwell - won many races in the 1930s with *Dick's Minton*. Other horses he won races with were *Celtic Bob*, *Bold Fire* and *His Grace*. Hughie Mazoudier and John Phillis drove Dick's horses.

Johnny Reid with stables in Westminster Street Schofields became a full time trainer and won many races with *Sylvans Star* and also with *Gypsy Dawn* that was owned by Jack Stockwell and Gordon Alderton.

Albert Ible had his stables and own training track on Boundary Road Schofields. He did race *Glendale Grattan* but settled more for the breeding before he left to become a Steward for the Trotting Control Board. Jack Young took this property over when Albert Ible left and trained *Tivoli Lad* there.

Bill Young had stables in Brisbane Road prior to moving out to the Windsor Road where he built his own training track. Bill trained *Southern Mac*, *Moving High* and *Moving Tryax* winning races at Harold Park and the provincials with all three.

Tommy McNamara trained *Track Chief* for his brother Bill and another horse known as *Beau John*, winning several provincial races. Brian Doolan trained *Rivo Boy* and *Bar None* for Bill Mac, winning four at Harold Park and several provincial races.

Sid Gosden, his son Max and grandson Larry were another family involved with trotters. They also trained horses with Noel Dunstan who had a training track on his Grantham Farm property at the Windsor Road end of Loftus Street. Noel was involved with trotting for many years but concentrated on breeding. Max and Noel also operated the sawmill in Edward Street Riverstone for many years.

Jimmy Patterson worked as a strapper with Bert Alley before setting up his stables in Carnarvon Road. He won many races with *Jet Scott* and *Nulla Nulla*. Jimmy became well known when he used an old police black maria that he converted into a horse float to get his horses to the track.

Other strappers to work with Laurie Moulds and Wally Wood include Siddie Joyce, Ron Munnoch, Lionel Harris, Ted Massingham, Ray Merchant, Tommy Tracey and his son Gary, Ray Thompson, Darryl Hillier, Michael Van Der Kemp, and Elton Papworth who later trained *Master Findlay* to his many successes.

Bobby Allen - Became a full time trainer and won many races at the provincials and Harold Park with *Swifton Direct*, *Brigade Scott*, *Miss Overdene* and *Sunset Chief*.

Jim Castles had stables in Vine Street Marsden Park, became a full time trainer winning many races with *Kimbo* and *Southern Silver*

Others involved in the trotting game over the years include Neil Breaden who owned and trained *Rhonda Rose*, Sammy Loveday, Neville Thurtell, Ted Collins, Gordon Alderton, Arthur and Harold Munro, Ross Lloyd, Les Bastin, Lindsay Curtis, Greg Lewis, Felix Ward and his son Paul.

Trotting is still a very popular occupation in the Riverstone area. As well as people mentioned earlier Greg Sarina and his boys, Jill and David McGill, John Wheeler and Alan Brennan are just some of those carrying on this sport at the present time.