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INTERVIEW WITH AUSTRALIAN SHOW JUDGE DAVID CALBERT

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Show Circuit: How did you become involved with horses?

David Calbert: I was 9yo. I sort of fell into it! My father had bought a horse through the influence of my brother-in-law, who was an amateur jockey. My parents decided I was riding Ringo every given moment after school, so they bought me a horse also. He was a quiet older horse called Mr Ed, with a sway back. Horse floats were not common, and we took turns and rode him home! Living in the western suburbs of Sydney, there weren't a lot of people with horses, so I became familiar with a few kids in the district who also had horses. We banded together riding everywhere, though suburban streets, around Rookwood Cemetery perimeter (largest in the southern hemisphere), and back and forth to pony club every second week at Bankstown trotting track, which was about 20ks from home. There was **MR ED; CHIEF**, a white Anglo Arabian who was a good jumper; and **GYPSY**, (who could also double, so four of us could go!) Looking back, it was more like one of those boys' adventure story books. If you tried to do that now you'd

be ripped off the horse, mugged, and the horse stolen. It's a shame those days seem to have disappeared for kids now. Eventually I moved on from Ed and bought another, and so on and so on. That was how I started changing horses and improving without really realizing it at the time. As adventurous kids we went to Sydney Royal Easter Show one year, and I was asked to lead a Shetland in the Grand Parade. I was hooked. I think I've either ridden or shown in hand or owned a horse at every Easter Show since! Virtually I was self taught in my earlier years.

SC: What has been the highlight of your showing career so far?

DC: These days I don't ride (although I'm thinking about it again). I have competed and shown at Royal and HOTA Level for over 30yrs. I must say how lucky I am to have been in the position I have been in, as I have experienced many top class horses, led and ridden, over time. I think my biggest thrill was when my friend Kim Durante won Champion Hack on our horse **REGAL REGINA** at Sydney Royal in

2000. Or was it her daughter Sabrina winning her rider at Sydney Royal for the first time on **MORNINGSIDE STEP AHEAD**, a pony I bought for her. I am blessed I have been involved with I suppose over 50 Royal Show or National Champions in one way or another. I gain great pleasure in watching the success of people I know and respect. Knowing that I have been part of their achievements is very humbling. So I suppose every horse with every win that I'm associated with is a highlight, it takes years to own one like that and I have owned, ridden and been associated with many.

SC: What do you look for when judging a horse or pony class?

DC: A horse with presence who I'd like to have in my own backyard for starters! A straight going horse with good clean legs, no splints or off set cannons, a horse who goes forward freely and shows expression through the bridle, one that makes you feel like you want to pull the rider off and jump on board yourself.

SC: What do you prefer to judge, horses or ponies?

DC: I have no preference as I have shown all types and breeds of horses.

SC: What grates on you when watching horses and riders competing?

DC: The most glaring for me is, when in the ring, horses walk toward you or out from a line up, and they can't walk a straight line due to rider incompetence or lack of concentration. There also seems to be a trend for heavy eye makeup lately, I abhor it! As I do riders under 18 who wear stocks, for me this is not appropriate. I don't mind a bit of bling, but only tasteful bling. I don't like browbands that take away from the horses head instead of enhancing it. I don't like those cut away jackets with the colour showing, as it also takes away from the animal. You are showing your horse first not yourself! The emphasis should be on the animal, and it should be simple and tasteful, not garish.

SC: What are some tips you can offer riders when competing?

DC: Ride the whole workout area, ride into corners, and remember your workout (concentrate when being told it!) Don't take forever if you get a free workout, walk in straight lines and remember to smile - but not too fake - look like you are enjoying what you are doing - or at least try! Accept the judge's decision gracefully, don't backchat because you think you are better than what you really are, be gracious in defeat and NEVER approach a judge and ask "why didn't you like my horse?" You are not in pony club now; that is amateur, not to mention rude.

SC: How do the NZ horses compare to the Australian ones?

DC: It's the same I'm sure in both countries. After the first few in a line-up, it gets harder to sort them out. I would not draw a comparison between horses in different countries, as it also depends on the level of knowledge of the person showing the animal. A good horse is a good horse no matter where it is.

SC: What is the funniest thing you have seen as a judge?

DC: I was judging at Cloncurry Show, in remote far north Queensland, and at the end of the day one of the classes was best presented. I would be looking for grooming, neatness, presentation, etc. To my astonishment I had standing in front of me a horse wearing a straw hat, and the handler wearing a balaclava. I cracked up. I don't think I will ever forget that moment!

SC: What tips can you offer our judges here?

DC: For me, honesty, integrity, a belief in yourself and what you stand for, should always be uppermost for all judges. Unfortunately there isn't the depth of true horse people there were 10 to 20 yrs ago, and honesty and integrity seem to be lacking a lot these days - no matter where you are from.

SC: Which other judge(s) do you respect the opinions of?

DC: The only Judges I respect the opinions of are honest ones, and they know I know who they are!

SC: Tell us about the horses you have in your stable?

DC: These days, I live and own a restaurant on the banks of the Hastings River in Port Macquarie and do not have time to run a stable. I believe its 24hrs or nothing at all when showing professionally. I have been fortunate enough to have horses in partnership with Kim Durante, and we bought **MORNINGSIDE STEP AHEAD** for her daughter Sabrina, who has now progressed on to another horse, **WILLOWCROFT REGAL WINTER**. Kim also has a new hack **ENCHANTE**, who I bought in a dressing gown out the front of my house one morning! You see they swim the racehorses in front of my home, so the binoculars get a workout! I spied her as she walked across the car park, she is one of the best mare hacks I have ever seen, and she went on to win The Qld EFA Newcomer Hack title this year. If she was a racehorse I'd tell you to be on board cause she's a corker! **MORNINGSIDE STEP AHEAD** was Large Pony of the Year in Western Australia, Victoria, and Queensland. He also won at Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane Royals. **REGAL REGINA** was Champion Hack at Sydney Royal, and only shown lightly before dying suddenly from a bout of colic. It was tragic; she was just hitting her straps. **WILLOWCROFT REGAL WINTER** (Current National Champion Galloway), probably the most prolific winning Galloway of all time. He has won at Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra Royals, each on more than three occasions, along with the Grand National Title three times. He is still a relatively young horse, and perfect for Sabrina to go on with.

SC: Which have been your favourite horses of all time and why?

DC: **TOUCH OF CLASS, FLYING HERCULES, LORDS, OCCASION**, and more recently **GILT EDGE** all had classic Thoroughbred qualities and exceptional presence. All of these horses looked like they could explode at any moment, - but didn't, and all won major championships during the 70s and 80s. There are not a lot of horses like them, and never will be again. I believe a hack should have basic training in dressage as a hack but should not be a dressage horse/ show hack. For me it is one or the other, there is a difference - still.

SC: Some NZ showies are lucky enough to have won your lovely garlands, how did you first get into making them?

DC: I worked in retail and also moonlighted doing window display, which not only led to making garlands but decorating some of the horse area for the Sydney Olympic Games. I had a love of flowers, and a friend suggested I make some garlands so I did. Like my horses I compete each time against the last to make them better, and I'm lucky people like them and appreciate the hard work that goes into making each one. My garlands are made with passion, and I believe it shows. I only make for selected show societies such as Barastoc and Sydney and Melbourne Royals. In my book the big 3 will do me. It gives me great pleasure to look back and know the kid who first led a Shetland in a grand parade all those years ago now makes and sponsors the Garryowen and Pope Cup in Melbourne and the Pope Cup and Crane Trophy in Sydney, as a kid you were in awe of these classes and the beautiful horses in them. How the wheel turns!

SC: You have recently judged at the Premier Show in Hamilton, a penny for your thoughts?

DC: Most competitors were a delight, pleasant and courteous. That show has improved tremendously since I last visited. It is a credit to the people running it, and it can only keep getting bigger and better. I look forward to returning and seeing the progression. Hard working non-political committees are hard to come by. All New Zealand showies should support this show. The moral of the story is: follow your heart, never give up and always better yourself, keep raising the bar and you will be successful in whatever you choose. You make your own destiny.