

NANTEOS AUTUMN PEACH



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WELSH DRAGONS IN NEW ZEALAND

TWO BREEDERS DISCUSS THE JOYS OF OWNING AND COMPETING WELSH COBS AND PONIES



DRAYTON TREASURE

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Welsh ponies have been a firm part of the New Zealand riding and breeding scene since the mid-1940s. Since those early days, when a small number of enthusiasts began importing quality stallions and mares from the UK, the popularity of Welsh ponies has been steadily growing. Many top notch competition ponies now have at least a splash of Welsh blood running through their veins and the purebreds are becoming increasingly sought after for in-hand showing and a vast variety of other activities.

The Welsh breeds are divided into four categories, Sections A, B, C and D based on their size, weight and type. As far as in-hand showing in this country goes, the cobs and ponies usually have to compete against each other in one class although the different types are divided at the Welsh breed shows. Ridden Welsh classes are still a relatively rare occurrence in New Zealand, although this year, the Horse of the Year Show did stage a section for under saddle Welsh A's, B's, C's, D's and Partbreds.

Tina Macnab is a familiar face on the show circuit and is well known for producing typey, beautifully conformed Welsh Section A's under her own 'Waimai Stud' prefix. She has taken the overall Welsh Pony of the Year title at the Kelt Capital Horse of the Year Show three times with her stunning grey Section A broodmare, 'Nanteos Autumn Peach.' Tina also has an impressive show record in the UK, which includes winning the Ridden Welsh championship at the prestigious Royal Welsh Show.

One of the reasons behind Tina's ongoing success is her determination to stay true to the Welsh Section A breed standard.

'I strive to produce animals with lots of pony quality,' explains Tina. 'They should have a small, well set on head with a bold eye and neat, little ears. The neck should be long and well carried with a long sloping shoulder. Forelegs should be set square and not tied in at the knee with short flat bone below the knee and pasterns of proportionate slope and length. The back and loins should be muscular, strong and well coupled with a deep girth and well sprung ribs and a nicely set on tail. Movement should be free and straight from the shoulder, with the hock well flexed, straight and under the body at the back.'

As well as their excellent conformation, another thing which makes Tina's ponies stand out from the crowd is her professional standard of turnout.

'The turnout of purebred Welsh ponies is different here when compared to the UK as many of the animals in New Zealand are also very successful ridden Show Ponies. Because of this, a lot are fully trimmed. However, youngsters and breeding stock should be presented in as natural a state as possible. We discreetly trim the head and ears, tidy mane and tail so that the shoulder can be seen. We also put in a small plait behind the ear to show off the jaw line. The aim is for them to look as natural as possible without being scruffy.'

'A well fitted in-hand bridle or white show halter is the norm as far as tack goes. A judge should not put an adult Purebred pony down if it is trimmed out and it can be plaited as long as it is competing on the same day in ridden events at the show. However, at breed shows they must be unplaited.'

Carolynn West, owner of the 'Ballytruckle Welsh Cob Stud,' in Auckland, has been in love with the Welsh breeds for over a decade. Since establishing her stud in 2000, she has built up a band of first-rate Section D broodmares and two stallions, 'Millcreek Valiant' and Australian import, 'Cwmkaren Beaufort Express.'

As well as breeding and successfully showing Welsh Section D's, Carolyn is also a highly respected judge. Her most recent appointment

Tina Macnab and her Section A grey mare, NANTEOS AUTUMN PEACH



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was at the Tasmanian All Welsh Show in January 2010, where she worked alongside Owen Jones, from the famous Nebo Stud in Wales. Like Owen, Carolyn has a clear idea of what she is looking for when a Welsh Cob enters the ring.

'The most important thing for me is the legs, as that is where it all starts' explains Carolyn. 'I want to see good straight limbs with plenty of bone and a leg in each corner. The cob should also be tracking up properly. Any dishing or plaiting is a big no-no.'

'When they move into trot, I'm looking for a big, free positive movement. I hate to see cobs trickling along. The trot is the Welsh Ds signature pace. It's what they're known for so you really have to show it off. This doesn't necessarily mean running hell for leather. The cob needs to remain balanced but should still be extending, lifting its knees and moving forwards.'

According to Carolyn, there are a number of things that can be done to improve in-hand performances:

'Running up a Welsh Cob is a real skill and something which requires a great deal of practice at home,' says Carolyn. 'First of all, the handler must learn to trust the cob and avoid clinging on to their head. Holding them too tightly will simply result in their head being turned towards whoever is leading them. This makes the neck look shorter and pops the shoulder out towards the judge. The cob will also find it impossible to trot up straight.'

'We usually start our in-hand training about a month before the show. We work with two people, one leading the cob and the other with a plastic bag on a stick. When the handler asks for trot, the other person, some distance behind, shakes the plastic bag so the first trot steps are full of vim and vigour. Obviously, if the cob is terrified of plastic bags, you shouldn't do this, but if the cob is relatively quiet it teaches them that the first steps of the upward transition must be bright and cheery.'

Although awareness of the Welsh breeds is growing, Carolyn's aim is to educate even more New Zealanders on the pleasures and benefits of owning a Welsh cob.

'The Welsh breeds have such fantastic temperaments and are so loyal. They will do anything for you,' smiles Carolyn. 'On top of that, they are incredibly tough, hardy and economical to keep as they practically live on fresh air. They can deal with anything you want to do, be it showing, hunting, endurance, eventing or looking after a child at Pony Club. We know, we have tried them all and we are always winning no matter what sport we do. That is the versatility of the Welsh cobs and ponies.'