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Pictured: The late Thady Ryan, with half-bred Irish Draught x TB youngsters in South Canterbury.

Irish dreams...

Irish Draughts have been an integral part of the New Zealand horse breeding scene since the first two purebred Irish Draught stallions arrived in the country in 1987...

Laughton's Legend, imported by Glyn and Edwina Morris of Wynyard Lodge and Kingsway Diamond, son of the legendary sire of sport horses King of Diamonds, brought to New Zealand by Irishman, the late Thady Ryan and his New Zealand-born wife, Anne, introduced a whole new dimension to the sport horse scene here.

These two were followed shortly afterwards by Coalman's Touch to widen the gene pool, and it quickly became clear that they crossed well with the quality thoroughbred mares already in the country, leaving progeny renowned for their natural ability, depth of bone, durability, strength, speed and athleticism.

Thady Ryan always maintained that, if he could have afforded to, he'd rather have imported a selection of mares with differing bloodlines, to put to TB stallions. He did bring, as well as the stallion, a champion full Irish Draught mare and a ¾-bred Carnival Night mare...sadly neither was a prolific breeder. He always believed that it wouldn't be until the breeding programme came down to the ¼-bred (¾ TB x ¼ Irish) that the biggest successes would be achieved – like Kate Lambie's international eventer Alibi (Aberlou-Kingsway Diamond mare) - although there were some very useful ½-bred horses, including the show jumping/eventing stallion (later gelded) Kingcroft Wicklow, show jumping stallion King's Ransom, and the Japanese Olympic show jumper Te Mania Jolly.

Irish Hunters can now be found competing in a whole range of

disciplines all over the country. The best known at present include the 17.1hh Irish gelding Complete Kaos, (Kingsway Diamond x Imperial Seal), a Grand Prix dressage horse campaigned until recently by Karen Anderson. Talented Irish Sport Horse Coleraine Coaltown (Coalman's Touch x Noumea) is breaking into Advanced level eventing this year with his rider, Jessica Fieldes, and in the show ring, the 2010 Saddle Hunter of the Year Glentulloch also boasts a fair dose of Irish Draught blood, and the eventing/show jumping stallion Mighty Heights is a son of the half-bred Wynyard Agile.

Internationally, the Irish horse has long been successful at international level in both eventing and show jumping and, of course, they make fabulous hunters. At the Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials last month, New Zealander Caroline Powell rode Irish Sport Horse, Lenamore, (Sea Crest RID x Karinella) to first place. There were also three other Irish-bred horses in the top ten placings. It seems the Irish horse can turn its hoof to anything.

Scott and Barbara Dobson, owners of the imposing five year old 17.3hh grey Irish Sport Horse stallion, Northwood Jetstream, (Coalman's Touch x Croftlea Amazon) and founders of Northwood Stud, have been Irish Draught fans for some years. In fact, carefully selected Irish Draught bloodlines now lie at the heart of the stud's breeding programme.

'I became a fan of the Irish horses after purchasing my mare,

Northwood Jet-Stream



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Wynyard Affair, a ¼ Irish Draught by the dark bay Irish Hunter Sport Horse stallion Wynyard Agile, exported to the USA, explains Barbara. 'That mare excelled in a number of disciplines, consistently giving 110%, with show hunter classes and show jumping being her forte. She is semi-retired now, and has given me two amazing foals.'

Barbara decided to stand her own Irish stallion after identifying a need for quality Irish Sport Horses here. She wanted to share their adaptability, even temperament and sheer talent. 'After a significant amount of research, and our own successful breeding programme using Coalman's Touch, we became aware of a niche market for quality ¼-bred Irish Hunters,' says Barbara. 'So we set out to breed a ½-Irish, ½-thoroughbred stallion capable of producing top notch ¼-Irish performance horses.'

'We carefully considered qualities that would be required of a top breeding stallion in order for him to be influential and contribute to an already competitive and expanding sporthorse market.'

Jet boasts top international bloodlines, from both his sire and dam. His sire, Coalman's Touch, is by Touch of the Blues from the Colman mare Warrenhouse Blackbird. Jet's dam, Croftlea Amazon, is by Zabalou, son of the great thoroughbred sire Aberlou, who has sired some of the world's top eventers, including the world champion Messiah, from a Sir Bart mare (Sir Tristram). Sir Bart is well-known as the sire of top jumpers and Croftlea Amazon herself has a half-brother competing at Grand Prix level show jumping in the US and another shortlisted for the Australian eventing team.'

Despite his youth, Northwood Jetstream is already showing the impressive versatility and ability that has made the Irish horse such a popular choice among sport horse enthusiasts.

'Jet has won multiple supreme champions in-hand, and has also been started under saddle,' says Barbara. 'He was introduced to jumping in July, which he took to like a duck to water. As part of his training we introduced fillers and liverpools early on, which was of no concern to him, as Jet is not typically spooky or suspicious of new things. Even at this early stage, Jet is demonstrating talent on the flat and over jumps, so we don't want to restrict him to one discipline.'

Tracy Crossan, promotions officer with the Irish Draught Horse Society of New Zealand is just one of many people who are deeply passionate about both the Irish Sport Horse and the purebred Irish

Draught. As well as riding, competing and spreading the word about them, Tracy also breeds Irish horses under her own Trevalda prefix.

'I really believe that there is a horse out there with Irish blood to suit 95 percent of New Zealanders,' smiles Tracy. 'They are a truly versatile breed, and are excelling in every discipline. At the 2008 Olympics, four horses in the top 14 had Registered Irish Draughts (RID) in their bloodlines. There are Irish Draughts competing in Grand Prix dressage and show jumping. They are well known throughout the world as being great field hunters and a huge percentage of show saddle hunters in the UK have Irish blood. They have the temperaments to suit granny as a weekend hunter, but are equally suited to an ambitious teenager going on to their first hack.'

'I love that every one of my Irish horses would happily live in my house with me if I let them, and that I have never had a problem catching one,' she adds. 'They are always pleased to have company and attention. They are also super-good doers. I live in a remote area, and therefore need a horse that can do a bit of everything. I bought one of the first Irish horses bred in this country 19 years ago and have always had at least one in the paddock ever since.'

Being involved with the Irish horses for such a long time has given Tracy a solid understanding of what the ideal representative of the breed should look like.

'A good quality Irish horse will be upstanding and proud, handsome rather than pretty. They should have a kind, generous eye, good bone, and ground covering movement.'

They should also have a great constitution, be easy care, gentle natured and have a calm, sensible temperament. On top of that I personally like the big ears that many of them are blessed with!

Tracy adds that there are now a number of showing classes, specifically for Irish Horses, where many of the above qualities can be observed. The Irish Horse can also be found in many of the regular A&P sporthorse and under saddle classes.

'There are classes and Irish Breed Championships, at both North Island and Canterbury Breeders Shows,' explains Tracy. 'The Canterbury one especially is usually extremely well supported and is a great spectacle. Many shows throughout the country provide classes for registered Irish horses and sashes are sponsored for these by The Irish Horse Society. The Society also runs an In-hand and Under Saddle Performance competition, with special emphasis given to those horses

demonstrating versatility and that excel in one or more disciplines. There are no special requirements for Irish horse turnout, although I believe that a good quality bridle with a thick noseband will complement the strong features of the Irish horse. In most instances they are competing against sport horses of all breeds and therefore should be turned out as such.'

Like many ambassadors of the Irish horse, Tracy believes that the future is bright for the breed and is doing her best to convince others of the multiple benefits of owning one.

'There are some wonderful breeding programmes in place, and those involved are truly passionate about maintaining and improving the breed,' Says Tracey. 'There has been some careful consideration of bloodlines, and each country is trying to improve its gene pool. With modern technology, it is now easier to transport, store and use

imported frozen semen, and we will soon start to see the benefits of this in New Zealand.'

'I am very excited for the future of the Irish horse, both here in New Zealand and throughout the rest of the world.'

'Some very dedicated New Zealanders are also looking to import more quality purebred Registered Irish Draughts into this country and that will create many more opportunities for breeders. There are some wonderful young Irish horses competing currently in New Zealand that are just knocking on the door of stardom, and when they do shine, I'm confident that interest in the breed will peak.'

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	Croftlea Amazon (TB)	Zabalou (TB)	Aberlou	Half Breed
			San Mateo	Blackbird
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