

THE SHOW HUNTER IN AUSTRALIA



OWENDALE LEMON TWIST (Twister) misc show record:
2009 Penrith Show Supreme Champion Hunter of the Show
2009 Blacktown Spring Show Supreme Champion Hunter of the Show
2009 ASBP Show - Champion Show Hunter Pony
- Supreme Champion Ridden Riding Pony
2008 Eight Champion Show Hunter titles from eight shows
2009 Five Champion Show Hunter Titles from five Shows (to date)

Just over ten years ago, Show Hunter classes (known as Saddle Hunter classes in New Zealand) were introduced into the Australian show ring. This was a result of demand for events for those horses that were more substantial in build than the finer, prettier types now so popular in Australian Show Hack classes.

The result of this was, finally, that there were to be more open classes for the more substantial (dare I say) more traditional, heavily boned horses to compete in as opposed to their breed classes only. The introduction of the Show Hunter discipline in Australia, however, has been marred with some confusion - with riders struggling with the concept of the division between the show hack and the show hunter horse.

Australian multi-Supreme Champion Hunter Pony OWENDALE LEMON TWIST, owned by Kate Farrell, is a twelve year old part Arabian Pony gelding and also registered as a Saddle Pony, Riding Pony and Welsh Section B.

One reason for this was, that upon the introduction of the show hunter classes into Australia, little, if any, information was available to Australian competitors and judges as to the correct type of animal to be classed a hunter. Due to this, people's interpretation of a hunter in Australia today is hugely varying and often incorrect.

Some unfortunate (and incorrect) interpretations I have heard are:

- "They have to be ugly carthorses"
- "The only difference is that they wear plain brow bands isn't it?"
- "Get some more weight on him and he will be a hunter"
- "Just gallop a bit and you can go in the hunter class"
- "I usually do the open hack classes but we haven't got a hope with Jo Bloggs here today so I'll put him in the hunter ring instead"
- "I can't judge him, his head is too pretty for a hunter!"

Unfortunately in Australia, more times than not, we have entirely inappropriate types competing in the hunter ring. It would appear that people assume that by taking their failed hack, galloway or pony

and making it obese, the animal will magically then fit the hunter criteria. However, the majority of these obese horses are balanced on their fine, petite bone structure that, if made to carry extra weight, can cause undue stress to the animal's joints eventuating in possible future unsoundness.

To register as a judge with certain associations, one must firstly be a "successful" competitor in show hunter classes. This is a misnomer however as the effect of this really is to create more uncertainty if the "successful" competitor is someone who has won with an inappropriate type of animal to be termed a hunter within the currently confused Australian hunter ring. This then termed, recognised "hunter judge" in practice would not appear to have an understanding of what should and should not be rewarded. This then perpetuates further misunderstanding, not to mention frustration amongst those with the correct type of horse via rewarding of inappropriate types. It is a cyclic progression and in Australia, unfortunately we are, if anything, becoming apparently more confused in relation to what a show hunter is and what is not.

Sadly, it would appear that there is currently a notion between some that the hunter ring in Australia equates to a second chance or consolation ring if their horse has not enjoyed success as a hack. Unfortunately, as a result, so many of the horses competing in Australian hunter classes are now entirely inappropriate types and successful for entirely the wrong reason - from the finely boned but hugely overweight horses to ones with extreme, daisy cutting movement to badly behaved animals and horses which truthfully may be well loved but are not a show animal of any type or form - all have competed as hunters.

The New Zealand Scene - personally, as a spectator and judge of hunter classes in New Zealand both at Waikato's World and The Royal New Zealand Show, my point of view is that there appears a far greater understanding and appreciation in New Zealand of what a hunter should be than there is here in Australia. For example, in New Zealand last year, I remember noticing the obvious vast difference type-wise between hacks and hunters - this just does not happen in Australia.

New Zealand would appear to have the upper hand and be streets ahead of Australia. One reason for this is that New Zealand competitors are required to compete an entire season EITHER as a hunter OR a hack. This unfortunately is not the case in Australian shows where entry on the day allows competitors to decide which judge/ring they may compete in to allow them a better chance of success. Even at Royal level, competitors have been known to compete successfully and qualify in the open ring as a hack, before swapping to show hunter and vice versa. However, there are significant steps in the development of the hunter horse in Australia.

Change is in the air - it is not all bad news, however! Various Australians are now conscious of these misgivings and, as a result of widespread competitor dissatisfaction, a group has formed to take (the first of many) steps toward the development of the Hunter Horse in Australia.

The Australian Hunter Horse Association (AHHA) is a progressive association dedicated to show and working

hunter horses (and their riders and owners) in Australia. Lisa Le Provost and myself formed the Association initially and now, at only five months of age, the Association already boasts close to one hundred members in all states of Australia as well as members from New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The AHHA openly embraces our New Zealand compatriots, many of whom have been called upon to provide their expert information and also participate as valued members of the Association and are on our judges' list. As Australians we have much to learn from you!

The AHHA is a proactive Association dedicated to show and working hunter horses, competitors and breeders in Australia. We are a national organisation and our aim is to increase the profile of hunter horses in Australia and set a national standard for the judging and presentation of hunter competitors.

- The AHHA is focussing its energy on the following initiatives:
- Encouraging more hunter classes in show schedules (particularly regional Agricultural Shows)
 - Helping to promote those Show Societies who already include strong hunter classes in their schedules
 - Recognising and compiling a list of both Australian and New Zealand judges who have specialised knowledge and experience of what is correct in the hunter ring
 - Providing resources and information to Show Societies wishing to run Working Hunter classes including building, maintaining and storage of natural working hunter fences.

For further information please see the website: www.hunterhorses.com.au or email info@hunterhorses.com.au

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