

DARDANELLE



Dardanelle, Denny to his friends, aged 10.

I first met Dardanelle in Victoria in 1989. Middle of winter on a freezing cold wet and windy day. He had come down with truck load of horses from Cordillo Downs via QLD. The load had been originally purchased by Michael Kroger, as I understand it, a bunch or Walers that were destined to be used in a trail riding venture. But Michael had a bit of financial trouble and the horses were offered back to WHSA.

I had been in contact with Peter Fischer trying to purchase a Waler, and he had promised that the next available horse would be mine. You know, you talk about these things, all in the future, the never never, I waited months then got the call. It's happening now, no time to reconsider, so with a friend Kathy Knight, I flew from Tassie to choose our Walers.

I had decided on a mare and a colt and had the money to buy another mare, courtesy of a group of concerned friends (wanting to save a Waler), Kathy just wanted a Waler. We were met by a young man at our hotel who carted us off to a farm outside Melbourne [can't remember where] but the owner's name was Buddy. We see our first Walers. There in very muddy yards, it had rained all night, were 40 horses, mares, colts, stallions, all in a truly pitiful state. Blood, rain-scald, mud, bare sore skin, matted manes and tails. It was

quite confronting. I think we spent half a day deciding which horses we wanted.

And then I spotted Dardanelle. He was standing in a corner alone. He looked to me the very essence of what a Waler should be. In fact he looked exactly like the Waler in the photo I had of my grandfather who was in the 3rd Light Horse.

I walked up to this dirty, black, matted stallion and he stood his ground there in the yard. He didn't back away, he looked out from under his long tangled forelock and watched me. There was no fear and no flight and I just knew he was the Waler I wanted to take home. I chose him. I was told to think about my choice as it was believed he was an aged horse about fourteen. We later found he was half this. I also chose a little pregnant bay mare that we named Tipperary and another pregnant mare [for the concerned Waler savers]. We called her Rose of Picadee. I had decided to give the mares names of songs from WWI. Kathy had chosen a gelding with the Cordillo brand and Peter had offered her a mare called Jedda from another mob from Jinka.

Now all we had to do was get them over Bass Strait to Tassie. Easy! I phoned up a horse transporter and waited for a date to be organized. We got a call, not what we were expecting, saying that they couldn't transport wild unhandled horses. All horses had to be tied up. Panic set in. We are in Tassie. The horses are in a small yard in Melbourne. What to do? I had a friend in ABC who had been hanging out to do the story on the arrival of the Walers. He heard of the predicament and offered to put a small paragraph in the Mercury on their plight. It had wonderful results.

We received a lifesaving call from a transporter in the north of the state, Mr. Page, who said "I know how to transport these horses, I used to help my father with the Light Horse transport in the war!" (Mr. Page was then in his 80s). We were so relieved.

They bought the truck of horses to Melbourne wharf, backed another truck with an open crate on the tray up to that, and moved the horses over. The container was then craned onto the deck of the Bass Trader and the same procedure happened at the other end.

The truck eventually ended up at our place at Gunners Quoin four hours later than expected. It had been rerouted down the Lakes Highway, due to a prang on the Midlands Highway. Our journo had kept his column going over the past few days, relating the saga so by the time the truck arrived we had a TV crew, crowds of onlookers and newspaper reporters. We were the interest story of the day.

Of course this trip was not going to get easier the closer to home that we came. We couldn't get the truck up to the yards and we had a load of wild horses to yard. A human chain was formed, connected by garden hoses and ropes forming a race from the truck to the yards, quite a spectacle. We opened the container and the horses stepped off the truck, a very tired little bunch and dutifully made their way through these interesting fence lines to the yards. All the horses that is except Dardanelle. We waited. Finally he poked his head out, looked at us, grabbed a mouthful of grass and retreated to the safety of his container. The driver banged on the sides of the container to scare him out but my boy was scared of nothing. He just stood his ground, looking at us from under that dirty forelock, munching his grass and contemplating this weird bunch of people.

Well he was my horse. So in I went, dire warnings abounding. I walked around him and told him if he didn't go out he would have to go back on the boat. That seemed to have an effect, and he sauntered out, grabbing more grass en route and made his way to his new domain. That was the sum total of this wonderful horse, so laid back, so interested in everything, so brave. A trait he has passed down the generations, a very special horse.

We spent a long time backing this stallion. Given his age he had certain ideas of his own and a touch of quiet resistance. Firstly I became the sole provider of food and water. We came to an understanding, me or nothing, but it was very much snatch and grab but don't touch me. He wasn't going to be a push over that was for sure but the amazing thing was that we had another visit from the TV crew who wanted to do a follow up story. I'm sure the day they arrived Denny decided that, being forever the playboy and loving the limelight, he would allow me to put on his head collar for the first time while the cameras rolled on. I think I cried.

So, after a few months we have a seven to eight year old stallion that will wear a bridle, allow himself to be rugged, brushed, floated, tied up, lunged and long reined but "don't ever think that you will girth up a saddle on to me." The saddle would go on and be promptly bucked off. We had actually competed him in his first two shows and all washed and trimmed he had won his led classes but the saddle was just not acceptable.

In desperation I sent him to a very good horse handler who had started a few horses for me, a very gentle horse worker with the capacity to think outside the square. He had Denny in his yard for four months. We had visiting rights. Denny was happy. Everyone loved him. Wayne long reined him down the road and over the ranges but the saddle was just not allowed anywhere near him, so he sent him home. Well at least I had a well behaved

stallion that could be taken out without any problems. I felt we had done the best we could and would just have to accept the situation.

Then one day we had a visit from a young fellow who reckoned he had worked with these horses before. He had heard about Denny and had come to have a look at him. He asked if he could have a play with him, see if he could work out what the problem was. He did the usual thing, placed the saddle on Denny's back and promptly had to retrieve it from the other side of the yard. He did this a couple of times and I was on the point of telling him not to persist when the next thing I know, he has vaulted onto the horse bareback. Denny just stood there. He jumped off, did it again then stood up on Denny's rump and then slid off over the back. Denny didn't move a muscle. He approached with the saddle. Denny bucked it off. He jumped on bareback again. Denny did nothing. He went through the whole scenario again with the same result. Then the next time the horse went to buck he gave him a solid slap up the groin area. Shock! the horse stood, didn't buck. He took the saddle off, jumped on bareback and then tried the saddle again. You could see the horse considering the situation. Denny didn't buck. He mounted the horse for the first time, no buck, he walked him around the yard, trotted him a little then jumped off, turned to me and said "your turn!"



Smile a mile wide! Jac rides Denny for the first time.

Well, I can't say my heart wasn't in my mouth but I climbed aboard. Denny didn't buck and someone took a photo, just to prove I was finally astride (I think Janet sent it to Prince Philip in the Waler album, so he knows). We went for our first ride, right then. We went from shady tree to shady tree because why else would you go for a walk? We met a motor bike and a mob of sheep, no reaction and then we met a tractor and a harvester. Denny just stood there looking and as you all know with these guys the attitude is, if it stays outside my comfort zone I'll just watch it, why exert yourself when there's no need. This was to be his mantra for the rest of his days.



Dardanelle aged 28, retired in Tasmania.

Denny led the Anzac Parade through Hobart with a brass band, the first time a horse had been in the parade since 1949. He marched with our last remaining Light horseman, 94 year old Ray Chatterton, who at the end of the march came up to Dardanelle and said "I've travelled many a mile on you old son."



Looking out for mates. Ray Chatterton, 3LH, aged 94, flew over from Melbourne to meet Dardanelle. Ray marched the entire ANZAC parade with him (Jac leading Denny).

Many have marched with horses since, and in that special commemorative year for Beersheba, his grandson Homeland Sapling did the same, but there will never be another first. That was so special. Dardanelle performed in dressage and eventing. He was a great trail horse in the early days and would go anywhere. He sired many offspring who all seem to possess that gorgeous laid back character. He lived till he was 33 years of age and he has two sons carrying on his legend, Classic Akbah and Classic Ezekiel. And no, he is not a hard act to follow because there can never be another Dardanelle. My beautiful black stallion.

Jacque Kindblad.