

KAITAKE SPORT PONY STUD - New Zealand

Submitted by Stud Principals Jim and Brodwyn Wrathall

During the period that our children were competing on ponies in all disciplines, we were fortunate to see a small selection of very good premium ponies out competing, mainly in the jumping scene, with only a handful that could compete successfully in all three disciplines of dressage, show jumping and cross country.

We were extremely fortunate to be made aware of a pony with this capability that was for sale when our eldest child was only ten years old. Typically ponies of this talent were not advertised and it was only through 'word of mouth' that we were made aware of him. We purchased this wonderful 13 year old gelding by the name of Guess What II (Laddie). He took our daughter from 10 years and under pony club competition (60 cm - and winning all the way) to open eventing (105 cm) within two seasons of owning him. He had a fantastic nature and work ethic, coupled with being both clever and brave. He was not a pretty pony (more sturdy and handsome) nor very large, standing at just 14hh but he had a huge heart, a very clever mind and sharp eye. Our daughter was reserve to the Taranaki Champs team within 3 years on this very special pony, when Taranaki was unbeatable as a province for the NZ Pony Club Horse Trials Championships. At this time the Tompkins sisters were the mainstay of the Taranaki and National eventing and the mounts in the team were typically intermediate level eventers.

As our daughter had grown and we had a younger daughter to hand Laddie over to, we needed a replacement. So began a search for another larger pony with the same attributes. We were never really able to source such a mount but came close with Laddie's niece who was a full 14.2hh (life certified), had been an open eventer and was currently a Grand Prix show jumper (up to 135 cm). We could not believe our luck and snapped her up even though she was 17 years of age. Our older daughter then proceeded to go on and compete at Grand Prix level show jumping in an extremely safe manner with this once again, very sturdy, clever and sensible pony type. Our daughter may not have been the most experienced or skilled rider on the circuit by any means but these ponies gave her a chance to compete repeatedly with the top echelon of the pony eventing and show jumping scene. She gained immense experience, confidence and did not once get into any real danger of injury. She is now hooked for life in the equestrian world, although still searching for a horse with the attributes of Laddie and Pebbles with their incredible heart, steadiness and skill.

Out of interest we researched Laddies and Pebbles lines back to a sire by the name of What's Wanted, an English Riding Pony who was a major input into the Wardendale line of ponies. We found through talking to various people in the sport, that this was a very good 'old line' and decided that after the experiences we had during the period our daughters were competing on ponies, that it deserved to be continued.



Pebbles at 20-21 yo jumping Grand Prix with our daughter, Elsa



Pebbles at 22 yo jumping with our younger daughter, Leila

We retired Pebble's from competition at 22 years of age and did more research on the pony sires available in New Zealand that could maintain or improve the attributes that she had displayed. This proved to be a frustrating endeavour as predominantly the pony sires available were of a 'show pony' type. We discovered that there was really only one pony stallion we would consider breeding Pebbles to. That of course was Davidoff, who was the only stallion in New Zealand that had the proven performance bloodlines that would provide the consistency which we believed was missing in New Zealand Sports Ponies. It was our belief that whilst there have been a few studs in New Zealand that have bred successful performance pony lines, they have been based on individual stallions so there has not been sufficient repeatability passed on to successive generations. Two such well-known lines are the Ridgewood and the Gold Dust; both of which produced superb show jumpers and in the Ridgewood case, successful pony eventers.

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The outcome of the Willowburn Pebbles/Davidoff mating was, to our delight, a colt, called Kaitake Tuatahi. Had the foal been a filly, we may not have been in the situation of operating a stud because Pebbles gave us only that one foal, despite our persistent endeavours to get another from her. As Tuatahi grew into a yearling we saw in him the characteristics that we believed we were looking for and decided to leave him entire.

This started a whole new adventure of agreeing to a set of criteria and finding mares that we would breed to him. We decided that, firstly we would look for correct conformation, not pretty but sturdy and straight as there is no such thing as the perfect horse. The mares needed to look like they could go the distance as there is no way that you can train, compete or enjoy a mount that is not sound.

Secondly, they needed to have a good temperament; this was not easy as in the most part temperaments had been affected by the experiences the mares had been exposed to. However, this was what we believed to be important and it was something we looked for when evaluating potential mares. Thirdly, we looked for mares with a previous performance background and a history of achievement. The problem associated with this is that mares competing at GP show jumping or National Dressage level are not normally available until they are past their best breeding years as they are too valuable as competition mounts.



Kaitake Tuatahi free jumping 1.45 metres

We have been fortunate to have accumulated 4 brood mares that fitted our criteria and have bred them to Tuatahi over the last 2 seasons with the result being 2 fillies from last season and so far a colt and filly this season. In December, 2 more are due. The reason for only 2 foals the first season was the age of the other 2 mares; 1 being too young to breed that first year and the other being difficult to get in foal due to being in excess of 20 years old.

We have also bred to outside mares including hacks via AI and natural service. The AI aspect is something new to us but was deemed necessary to provide for the larger hacks and to reduce the difficulties facing mare owners that may not live locally. This involved a very steep learning curve for all involved; Tuatahi, ourselves and our local vet who though very interested, had no experience in this aspect of equine breeding. We have successfully managed to prepare the facilities required, train the stallion and impregnate mares this season.

The demand for the type of pony we have decided to produce is always high but there is a limited number of people who are either willing to breed themselves or purchase very young stock to bring on. It is also something that takes experience and patience, which is not always prevalent in the current equine situation where a substantial section of the market requires ponies to be at a reasonable level of training and performance. This means that predominantly breeders are left with the responsibility of the initial development of the champions of the future and the prices will no doubt reflect this input of energy and resources. Another aspect, particularly in our case, is that with a limited land area available for mares and young stock, there is a ceiling on the numbers that may be bred, therefore less numbers of progeny in the field. The days of pony herds in the hundreds running about semi wild are rapidly disappearing and the smaller, boutique breeders will be the future of Sport Pony breeding in New Zealand.

There is also a ready market for accomplished New Zealand ponies overseas, mainly those which are either currently or have the potential to perform at national level in either the show jumping or dressage disciplines.

New Zealand has an active pony dressage competition right up to national level and FEI pony showjumping in NZ is a keenly fought competition.

In the absence of a Sport Pony Society in New Zealand, Tuatahi will be assessed in March 2007 by a panel for stallion classification as a Licensed Stallion in the New Zealand Warmblood Stud Book. The panel will include an expert examiner invited from a Warmblood Association in Germany and we are preparing Tuatahi for the assessment at the present time. He will be the first New Zealand bred pony stallion to undergo assessment for the Warmblood Stud Book. His sire, Davidoff is already assessed and licensed.

Tuatahi's training for the assessment, along with his servicing duties has restricted his opportunities to compete this season, but as there is an active winter dressage competition here, we will be targeting those competitions for his first outings.

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