

WILSONS' WINNING WAYS

South Taranaki couple Harvey and Ann Wilson sit very easily between the worlds of racing and equestrian, and just as easily between the northern and southern hemispheres.

With Harvey a three time New Zealand Olympic rep (Montreal, Seoul and Barcelona) and Ann the British ladies national show jumping champion of 1978, you would assume they'd be more accustomed to elite World Cup tours.

But you'd be wrong. Despite being the first husband and wife to win the Olympic Cup for NZ Showjumper of the Year, for years this down to earth and totally approachable couple have been just as likely to be leading out the Egmont – Wanganui Hunt pack, helping fundraise for Wanganui RDA, running the Waverley point to point, or working their team at the track each morning. Between them they've also spent years picking up showjumping rails at horse events around the North Island, they've mentored young riders and covered thousands of kilometres in their distinctive yellow and black liveried horse truck.

Although it's racing which now occupies their space, it's clear that first and foremost the Wilsons simply love horses. Despite Harvey's permit to train and a full house in the yard, this is never going to be just a business.

Back in the day, firstly at Waitotara and then on their current rolling hills property outside of Waverley, Harvey's initial motivation when he looked at a thoroughbred was to see if it might show jump. The first contender was the handy Ah Ha and he set the standard for dozens to follow, including Cadge who'd won 9 races for Ray Verner, including five over hurdles, before he turned his hoof to the showing.

"Thoroughbreds were the main horses around back then. It was them or a farm hack. They're the easiest horses to train, with lots of brains,

but at the same time, we pretty much had to try everything that came along, and while some made it, others didn't."

Years after Harvey courted Ann during a showjumping trip to the UK, she too became hooked on Kiwi thoroughbreds with Surprise (a brown mare by Staff Sergeant) and Imperial (another mare, this time by the cracking jumps sire Brilliant Invader) helping dominate the New Zealand Grand Prix circuit of the 1980s and 1990s.

All of Harvey's top jumpers – the likes of Old Smuggler, May Day, Wishful Willie and Crosby – had thoroughbred lines somewhere close up, even when crossed with hardy East Coast blood.

When the time came to look more closely at the racing game, Harvey and Ann were part of a successful racing team which included trainer Kevin Myers and Kevin's partner Angela Illston (another top showjumper in her own right). Harvey was keen to learn more about the gig and asked lots of questions, so many in fact that it wasn't long before Kevin suggested he train their last horse, the aptly named Barcelona by himself.

He successfully did just that, with more than an occasional piece of advice from KTM ringing in his ears.

Angela, a former national champion herself, speaks for the many in the equestrian community – both people AND horses – who've benefitted from the Wilsons' experience.

"They're always willing to pass the knowledge on. They helped me hugely when I was growing up, most winters they took on a working pupil and I was lucky enough to be one of those. I learnt so much from watching them at shows, Ann and Harvey set the standard high in horsemanship, turnout and competition because as a youngster if you could beat them, you were achieving."



Ann Wilson in British Competition

The likes of Lonely Road, and more recently the 2015 Te Rapa open hurdle winner Venerate have kept the Wilsons in the winner's circle, and far from throwing them off stride, a potentially heartbreaking flood on their farm in 2004 only strengthened their ties to racing.

That damage brought about time for a refocus and a decision to step away from the grind of the show circuit. Now they've got the permitted six in work at home, with an allowance to train one outsider. Young local Hana Bognuda comes and helps with the morning work, but Harvey and Ann still ride out alongside her, and do all the evening stables and turn down by themselves.

"Hana takes four, I'll do a couple and Ann has her one," says Harvey.

The Wilson horses – and their well groomed owners – are consistently immaculate, yet they're far from mollycoddled show ponies. They simply look fit for business and always ready to race each time. Feed and conditioning has always been hugely important to both Harvey and Ann whose jumping team was for years sponsored by Mitavite, They're still counted as "Ambassadors" for the company because they're totally professional when it comes to what goes in the tank.

"We are a little bit fussy," says Harvey. "Always like to have them looking nice."

Life members of Egmont – Wanganui Hunt, Harvey was for years the Master and subsequently continued on the committee.

"We still take the race horses hunting – they love it."

Along with their two children Guy and Sarah, and now three grandchildren, horses have been a constant in the lives of Harvey and Ann Wilson. Along the way they've consistently gained the respect and admiration of those they've competed and worked alongside

Yes, they walk with ease in both worlds, with Ann's British spit and polish offsetting Harvey's Kiwi 'up and at 'em attitude. It's been a great ride so far, and with Venerate and company gearing up for winter 2016, there should be more to come. – **Charlotte Gendall**

Venerate fencing at Te Rapa



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