

Laurie Stephenson *and* Mystic



The Laurie Stephenson and Mystic story is one that is hard to imagine. This quiet unassuming man from Copmanhurst and his powerful grey stallion share a bond most people will never experience. They are not just man and horse, but great mates.

Laurie was born at Gordonbrook Station, above Copmanhurst, where his father, Charlie, was the head stockman. Laurie and his brother Kel spent all their childhoods at Gordonbrook and learnt all the tricks of the bush. They rode 6 miles to and from primary school every day and enjoyed helping with their father's picnic racehorses. They raced these horses at the local sports days and Kel and Laurie would take their ponies and go in everything, boy riders, flag races, pig chases etc.....if it was on, they were in it.

After finishing at Grafton High, Laurie returned to Gordonbrook as a stockman. At that time the station ran 8000 breeders and had 13 stockmen. Laurie recalls, "we did stockwork all day, nothing else and our horses got pretty handy". In 1954 a local rodeo was held at Baryulgil and Laurie decided to go. "It was only four hours ride to get there so I rode one horse and led another. I did no good, but I enjoyed it so the next week I paid a local carrier to take my horses to Ulmarra and I won the Open on Patty." From there Laurie got keener on campdrafting and with the help and advice of his father and his mother's unending support his career was underway.

In 1957, at the Ulmarra show, Laurie bought one of the only two horses he ever purchased. Her name was Betty and she was an untidy grey mare who was destined for the dog train. "Sid Davidson owned her and she was offered to me. I watched her run and she looked pretty good so I had a ride on her. Dad then went and purchased her from Sid for 20 pound as that was the going rate for doggers at the time and that was where she was going in the following week. Dad instantly trimmed her feet and I clipped her mane and tidied her up and I started her in the Consolation Draft that night. We won it by 12 points and won 25 pounds."

Betty and Laurie went on to be a formidable combination winning 40 Open Drafts including the Sydney show in 1959. At one stage they won 13 Opens straight, including 1 at Dorrigo. A black stallion named Abbey ran second to Betty that day and Laurie decided that he was the sire to whom he would join Betty.

November 1972 was a sad time for the Stephenson family as Laurie lost his father from kidney failure. He returned home after the funeral and that night Betty

gave birth to a black colt foal. This foal would grow into the great grey campdraft horse and sire, "Mystic".

Mystic was always special to Laurie and his wife Elaine. As a foal he was well handled and was always intelligent and quick to learn, and already he and Laurie were forming this incredible bond.

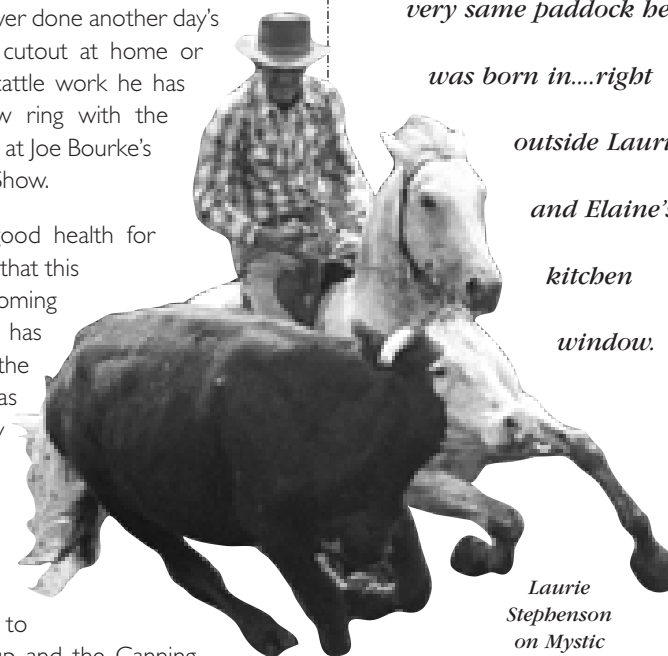
When he was weaned he was sent to Jack Smyth to grow out and he remained there for two years. Laurie remembers, "Jack rang him me one night and told me he'd broken Mystic in. I was a bit surprised as I hadn't asked him to, but he assured me he was breaking Rainbow and Radium in so he did Mystic as well. John Mainey was helping Jack and John had been riding him. It wasn't long after that when both John and Jack rang me and told me that he was no good and had no interest in cattle and that they had turned him out. I was disappointed but I didn't lose heart as I just believed he would come around. It was only a couple of months later and another phonecall when Jack said he had Mystic back in and he was a different horse. He was switched on and ready to go. 3 weeks later Jack's son Pat took Mystic to Dorrigo and came 2nd in the Junior Draft. Pat took him to 3 more drafts for a further 2 firsts and a second and then I got him back as a 4 year old. Jack's instructions to me were "This horse wont need any training. Just ride him".

These instructions were followed precisely and today at age 30, Mystic has never done another day's work, he has never done a cutout at home or been given a run. The only cattle work he has done has been in the show ring with the exception of a cutout one day at Joe Bourke's while on the way to Sydney Show.

Laurie has not enjoyed good health for many years and sadly he feels that this has hindered Mystic from becoming an even greater horse. He has only been campaigned on the Far North Coast and as far as Glen Innes, Armidale Kempsey and Warwick and Sydney Royal. From these outings he has won 38 Open Drafts, 2 seconds and 2 thirds at Sydney and of course he remains the only stallion to have won both the Gold Cup and the Canning Downs Drafts.

Two days after returning from Warwick in 1990, where Mystic made the 2nd Round of the Cup as an 18 year old, Mystic nearly lost his life to a brown snakebite. Through sheer determination and a life and death decision by Laurie, he saved his greatest friend and today Mystic lives a happy retirement in the very same paddock he

was born in....right outside Laurie and Elaine's kitchen window.



Laurie Stephenson on Mystic



Cattle Drafting Championship

Place	Competitor	Horse
1	L. Stephenson	Mystic
2	B. Palmer	Breezette
3	G. Brown	Ben
4	M. Murphy	Master Jack
5	J. Tyne	Ripper

Cutout

B. Palmer	Breezette
------------------	-----------

Judge B. Law

No. Competitors 262

Prize money \$2600

Entry Fee \$35

Winner Canning Downs

B. McNaughton Moonlight

Winner Ladies Draft

L. Watts Little Joe

Round Winners

1st Round:

88	B. Brown's Ben
87	B. Palmer's Breezette
86	J. Stanton's Personality
	S. Ross' Warrior
	K. Smith's Ace
	J. Smyth's Radium
	D. Wirth's Gay Lass
	K. Barnett's Rainbow
	P. Stewart's Greco
	B. Palmer's Easy Glo
	D. McMillan

2nd Round:

88	M. Murphy's Master Jack
87	L. Stephenson's Mystic
86	B. McGhee's Pancho

Right: Graham Brown and Ben had a successful year top scoring in the first round of both the Canning Downs and the Gold Cup. They finished 3rd in the Cup. Photo Courtesy H.L. Nott

Below: Bob McGee and Pancho competing in the final of the Gold Cup. This combination were regular finalists at Warwick, winning the Canning Downs in 1976. Photo Courtesy H.L. Nott



Below: Mick Murphy and Master Jack. 4th in the Gold Cup in 1980. Mick competed at Warwick for many years and won the Risdon Draft in 1957 with Trixie. Mick and Trixie also came 3rd in the Gold Cup in 1959. Photo Courtesy H.L. Nott



The need to "do something" with the ground at Warwick was especially evident in 1980. Weather conditions again played a hand in the Gold Cup and horses had to compete under 3 different sets of conditions. The first round was held amidst clouds of dust and a hard track. Graham Brown's Ben was the leader with 88 from Bob Palmer's Breezette on 87.

One and a half inches of rain then fell on Friday night and conditions changed to what could only be described as appalling for Saturday's Canning Downs and Ladies. By lunch time Sunday the sun shone and conditions had improved but the track remained extremely heavy.

The final, however, proved to be a scoring feast. All 10 finalists scored and 7 had full courses, with two of the sports greats, Mystic and Breezette, finishing 1st and 2nd.



Above: Keith Smith and Ace. competing in the final of in the Gold Cup. Keith only competed at Warwick twice. Photo Courtesy S. Jones

Finalists:		R1	R2	Final			Total	Place		
B. Palmer	Breezette	87	84	171	22	60	4	86	257	2nd
G. Brown	Ben	88	82	170	21	59	4	84	254	3rd
J. Stanton	Personality	86	85	171	19	58	3	80	251	
M. Murphy	Master Jack	85	88	173	19	57	4	80	253	4th
B. McGhee	Pancho	85	86	171	21	55	3	79	250	
B. Palmer	Easy Glo	86	82	168	20	56	3	79	247	
K. Smith	Ace	86	82	168	19	59	4	82	250	
J. Tyne	Ripper	85	84	169	19	60	4	83	252	5th
L. Stephenson	Mystic	85	87	172	21	61	4	86	258	1st
P. Stewart	Greco	86	82	168	20	56	4	80	248	