



Winter Newsletter 2024

AHHAWA Member Profile

Craig Stevens and Banjo & Lowan Vale Princess Eugenie (Luna)

Back in 2020, around the middle of the year, my wife and I discussed buying a horse for our eldest daughter, who had been riding since she was about 3 or 4 years old, mainly at my cousin's property. For me this was something I was just not interested in, while I agreed to getting a horse, my only thought was, 'can we get one of those big ones, you know that pulls carts, a Clydesdale?' other than that I was disinterested in the process. My wife spent many hours looking for somewhere to put the horse for when we got it as well as what breed of horse to buy.

Many times, between mid-year and when *Banjo* arrived, she would bring me photos of horses from around Australia as well as places for him to live, I would simply look and grumble 'sounds good', which was about all the input I had for getting a horse. I didn't like them, didn't understand them and had no idea what they were like (let alone what they ate!!). My wife did eventually find a horse and somewhere for him to live, she excitedly took me to the agistment (5 minutes from where we were living) and took me for a walk over the property, I remember seeing a bunch of horses in the paddock, which I kept a very, very good distance from, there was no way I was getting close to one of those. She even showed me the ½ acre paddock the horse we would eventually get would live in. Apparently, we also needed a shipping container to house the food (heck how much do they eat!!) we also had to clear the paddock of something called 'fire weed' as it can make them sick if they eat it. So many days were spent pulling this weed up from the ground to ensure the horse had plenty of grass to eat that wasn't contaminated with fire weed.

A few weeks later my wife excitedly informed me that she had found a horse called *Banjo*, who was a Clydesdale cross (whatever that meant), she asked if I was ok with her getting him and I agreed (to what, I did not know) and she purchased him. She told me he would arrive in about a week (yes sight unseen and no vet checks, we really had no idea what we were doing). The day arrived and while I had no need to watch him arrive, because I could see him the next day, which turned out to be a good decision, as he arrived late in the evening and the kids were in bed.

Banjo arrived safely, with some skin missing from his tail, which apparently meant we had to put cream on it to help it heal, you can imagine my horror to be told I had to stand behind the horse to put a cream on his wound!! What have I got myself into? (I thought to myself)

The next morning was my time to meet *Banjo*, he stood proudly, while somewhat wondering where he was, proudly standing at about 15–16hh, (massive in my eyes), however, he had kind eyes that looked deep into you, I went from a dislike of horses to 'hey this dude seems ok' and 'this will be fun I am sure', until the paddock manager told me it was time to treat his wound. That was a reality check if I have ever had one, however, the process seemed fine and easy enough, especially when someone is doing it with you. I didn't think that I would have to do it myself the next time!



Banjo



Luna



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So, for someone who had no idea what a horse was or liking horses, my learning curve was steep, to say the least, having to learn the following:

- Sheath cleaning, (oh the stories I could tell you and the shock of realising what I had to do!!)
- Hoof Cleaning
- Rugging, now this is a debatable touchy subject, wasn't warned about this one!!
- Eye treatments
- Injecting your horse with subcutaneous injections or intra-muscular injections
- Feeding
- Water
- Vets, the list goes on!

I have never experienced such a steep learning curve as buying a horse, sight unseen I might add (Never do that!). However, we were kind of lucky, what we know now, that we didn't know then, was that he had arthritis in his rear fetlocks and should not be ridden, we wondered why he would go lame after a long ride and a few x-rays later exposed the damage. However, with proper treatment and supplements he is doing so very well and as active as any 24-year-old ex-riding pony would be. Our **AMAZING** NSW vet (George from Sothern Cross Vets in Bowral) helped diagnose the issues and set a treatment plan and how we could still ride him gently, however, at this point we choose to retire him to live the life of luxury in paddocks and be doted on by us.



This meant we were again looking for **two** horses this time, **one** for my eldest to ride western and a hack for me, my love of Clydesdales had not waned at all, in fact, Banjo had taught me how to love a horse, how to go from rocking up, giving hay and leaving, to spending on average 4 hours a day at the agistment, build two stables which both could hold two horses each and how to turn a simple paddock into a thriving horse agistment with electric fences, water pipes to make filling bathtubs and watering plants easy, to planting trees and even building my own tie up areas for washing and tacking... it was the most anyone has ever built at the agistment for their horses. I even had a drainage system, solar power, inverters and lighting systems. Many nights were spent down there with the fire going and enjoying the beauty that the Illawarra had to offer.

So the hunt was on for another horse for me, I wanted a Clydesdale, with 4 white socks and I wanted a **TALL** one (not that I understood exactly what that meant)... but the search was on, for months I looked, found horses, however, they were either not a good fit for me or they were sold before I got to speak to the owners. I actually gave up on my search, I said to my wife, 'I have looked at so many Clydesdales, and I keep ending up without one, I will look for a normal pony and give up on my dream'. I had Banjo anyhow, so my Clydesdale dream was there!!

Fast forward to early November 2022, and I saw *Luna* for sale in Victoria, she was at an ex-riding school on the coast. What the heck I thought, let's call and see when she was sold (as the add was a few days old by this time), sure enough I was now 5th on the list. Me being me, I asked if I could have a reference person call the owner to make sure that Luna would be the right fit for me, could I actually look after her properly? Was she a good fit for me?

A close friend Karen called the owner and spoke to her and talked about me and Luna, I have no idea what was said, nor how long they spoke for, but the owner called me and said I could buy Luna if I wanted her. Aware of the health issues Banjo was sold to us with, I accepted to buy Luna pending a full vet check and review, the owner agreed, and I set about finding a vet who wasn't a local, who didn't know the horse, nor the property and I succeeded... eventually. The vet rang me after the visit and his first words were 'you know she is tall, like very tall!', I acknowledged that the add said she was 17+hh, the vet again said the same words and informed me that while he had not measured her height, he believed the owner was wrong with the 17+hh measurement. Luna was 9 at this stage so her growing had finished, right? What I didn't know is that the 17+hh outlined in the ad was actually an old measurement, a few years old, to be exact! Oops, but I did dream of a big Clydesdale! He mentioned she was long and tall, he said to me to be thinking along the lines of a Shire, however I had no idea what a Shire was or how big they are... so I was still pretty clueless, I also had no idea what a 17+hh Clydesdale would actually be. Until **TRANSPORT**, I had to buy two bays to transport her, ah what? Two bays? Can you confirm this? Yes, you need two bays in the truck. Ok it was beginning to dawn on me that she may be a big horse, I mean those bays in the trucks are huge... the transport company were amazing, keeping me updated along the way and when she arrived into NSW (close to Sydney) they alerted me that the truck had broken down and they were finding someone to float her down to the Illawarra, but all the floats they had available at that point in time were too small, hmmm how is a float too small for a horse? They are horse floats and designed to carry a horse, right? By now, I was beginning to wonder what I had done, but before I could ponder this anymore, they called to say it's all ok, they found a three, **YES THREE**, horse float angle load and they could fit her into that float... just! I could not understand at all the problems they were having: I was sure I had only



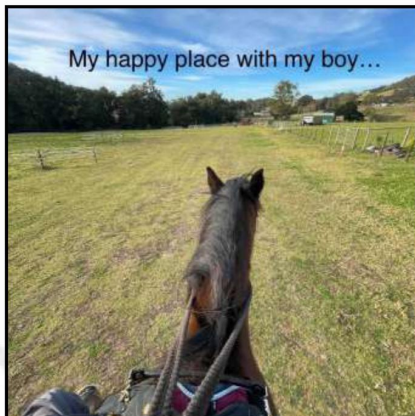
Winter Newsletter 2024

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one horse coming to me. After all, they weighed was about 600 kg, so what's the issue? The poor transport company started to realise that I had no idea what was going on or what I had bought, they saw the funny side and told me how beautiful natured she was, 'a gentle giant' they said.

To cut a long story short, the time arrived, and the transport arrived with what looked like a huge float, three horse angle, it was massive! You could fit three Banjos in there or three Fiestas (my eldest daughter's horse) and they just fit one, just squeezed one horse in there? Ok hurry up and open this darn float please, then I saw the most massive Clydesdale, who is over 800 kg and around 18.3hh reverse out of the float, full feathered legs and as fury as they come, she was **HUGE!** A huge gentle giant, a 'teddy bear', you might say. Everything I thought I knew about horses, while still relevant, just changed... again! Luna is your typical adorable Clydesdale, goofy, fun and loving. She needs a strong confident owner, and I am doing everything I can to be the best dad I can be to her, she is just another fur child in our family. We love our horses so much that when we moved back to WA from NSW, we bought an equine property (small one) so we could have our horses in our backyard, while we miss the eastern states, we love having our horses (all three of them, Banjo, Fiesta and Luna) in our backyard and sharing spaces with them. We still over do everything we can to make them feel special and loved. We are still learning about horses, their breeds and the differences between WA and NSW horse ownership (sand colic! etc...). We have found some amazing people through AHHA and learning a lot from the people we have met and will meet. Thankfully we have a great vet in Tania to replace our old vet in NSW and she is amazing, we love her passion for our horses and her strive to give them the best treatment around. I would not change a thing.





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