

Hazel Pither - O.A.M.

With a mixed farming venture in the Great Southern Region of W.A. in the early 1970's, John and Hazel Pither felt that decreasing wool prices and uncertain seasons meant that diversification was in order.

Many local farmers were turning to cattle, but John and Hazel felt they should stick with what they know - horses. Hazel had grown up with horses and had ridden with a mounted reconnaissance unit during the war years, so had a good solid background in basic horsemastership, but had also had a number of years occupied with family and farming without any horse involvement.

With 5 school age children, all showing an interest in riding Hazel had began collecting ponies and horses of various levels of experience and type, and each child had a wonderful selection of hand-me-down experienced ponies!

So - when it became obvious that a new farming venture was necessary, and possible, and that finding suitable Pony Club and EFA mounts for her children was difficult, Hazel set about finding the ideal pony to not only produce pure-breds, but to breed a larger cross as a competition horse for teenagers and young adults. She had been very impressed with the only Connemara stallion in W.A. at that time, Connemara Park James owned by Marie Thompson, bought from Fred Wiltshire. James had been put to a range of mares and had left his stamp on all his progeny, and some very capable riding horses were being produced.

In late 1971 John and Hazel tackled the trip across the Nullabor and visited Fred Wiltshire at Connemara Park. They fell in love with Connemara Park Kenneth, the first pure bred Connemara foaled in Australia. Along with Kenneth, they bought Connemara Park Rita, a 3/4 classified mare, as well as a first cross gelding, Connemara Park Sir Charles. A Barolin mare, with a foal at foot and in foal, plus 2 big thoroughbred mares, and a new float completed the purchases, all in one week!

With that core group to establish the stud, John and Hazel developed a breeding program using classified pure bred, APSB mares and thoroughbred mares to produce a range of progeny under the "Oakdale" banner.

After the 1972 visit of Ann Hammond of "Millfields" in the U.K. Hazel sent her daughter Jenny to the U.K. and subsequently bought Millstream, a lovely true dun by Mervyn Storm. Milly had a foal at foot, and was in foal again. Milly threw her 'black to the knees' and lovely dark dapples to both her progeny, Millfield March Winds, and Oakdale Fanny Hill.

Sadly Millstream was lost when she was five months pregnant to Kenneth. Colic claimed Milly, but March Winds (Alfie), became the second sire at Oakdale, as the back-up, and alternative to Kenneth.

However, many years of producing successful performance horses at all levels and within all disciplines proved that Hazel's original concept, based on good planning, and dedication to maintaining true to type pure-breds, and scopy and intelligent part-breds was well founded.

Hazel was instrumental in the introduction of Connemara classes at Perth Royal show by 1972, as well as Riding for Disabled in Western Australia. Pony Club Association of WA Zone, then State, then National Delegate involvement followed, as did Equestrian Federation (WA Branch) at the same levels. She became a committee member, a classifier and judge for the Connemara Breeders Society, an EFA National Delegate, SJ Judge and Course Designer at International level, plus took on dressage and saddle horse judging, as well as being on the panel for most of the WA breed societies.

Whatever it was, Hazel seemed to be involved, and in 1996 was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (O.A.M.) for her 'service to Equestrian Sport'. This great honour was also followed by Life Membership of the EFA.

Hazel's commitment and dedication to not only the Connemara Pony Breeders Society, but the Equestrian world in general, has been a source of inspiration to her children, her peers, and up-coming generations of riders and breeders.