

MRS MURIEL DAWKINS

Muriel Dawkins had long held a desire to run Connemara Ponies on the rough hilly property she and her husband Alec owned in the foothills of the Darling scarp outside Perth. Her vision of these hardy ponies from the rugged hills of Connemara being suited to the country and being a useful cross to the thoroughbreds for jumping and pony club was also fuelled by her passion for all things Irish. She bred Irish Terriers for many years but was never an enthusiast of the dog show scene.

When Alec and she moved from the suburbs to live at 'Melaleuka', their small farm also near the foothills, in 1970 they set about making the dream a reality.

An arranged meeting with Dr Fred Wiltshire resulted in an order being placed with Ann Hammond for two mares in foal to be shipped to Perth. Clonkeehan Charm and Little Lark of Abbeyleix duly arrived in Fremantle in 1971 and Charm gave foal whilst in quarantine to a filly foal. Coomel Prima Donna (the stud name was an amalgamation of the two properties Cooliaberra and Melaleuka) was a beautifully conformed filly and mare, out of a Dublin Horse show winner and by a champion sire, who became the Supreme Champion Connemara at the Perth Royal Show in 1974 but unfortunately was not a good producer and had very few foals. Little Lark also had a filly foal which died early in life. Both mares had their next two foals by Connemara Park Kenneth and this proved a successful union in terms of performance and breeding.

It was a conscious and important decision to import mares and not, as was usual, a stallion as the mare numbers in the state and the country were low and the upgrading process slow. They also wanted bloodlines that were not already in the country and had some evidence of performance. As it turned out, Little Lark who was quite inferior to Charm in looks, turned out to be the better producer of quality fillies and colts for breeding and for all round ability. Mrs Dawkins was also one of the first breeders in the country to geld a pure bred colt as she thought this would be advantageous for the breed in general for a purebred to out and about in general work.

Coomel Malarkey had along and useful life and was a credit to the breed.

When Geoff and Wiggy Harley put their imported stallion Inis O'Hara up for sale in early 1975 the Dawkins seized the opportunity to secure this large solid pony with a magnificent jumping pedigree. He was never going to win many prizes in hand but he the type of pony Mrs Dawkins had envisaged as being a producer of versatile handy tough ponies.

Mrs Dawkins consistently wanted the ponies out and being used and if they were not sold they were given away or lent and never returned. She kept breeding right up until a few years ago and a big striking purebred gelding, called Tally, out of one of Inis O'Hara daughters is currently catching the eye at the Brook Hunt near Perth.

The contribution to the early establishment of the breed in WA by Muriel Dawkins was significant, primarily due to the introduction of pure bred mares with good bloodlines, and also her insistence the ponies were for 'doing things' rather than being looked at in show halters. As time moved on, Inis' and Lark's offspring went across the country and had a major influence on the breed in general, her contribution has been more widely felt.

Contribution by Sue McTaggart and Dawkins family