

My friend was in the market for a new horse. I gave her a hand, and searched on the internet in the South Australian classifieds, and found an advertisement for a gorgeous brown Connemara called "Rupari Baronia". The moment I saw her picture I was convinced that this pony was for me. My friend eventually bought a thoroughbred, and regrets overlooking Baronia's ad to this day!

I was drawn to Baronia by her kind nature. When I first rode her, she was challenging to ride as she had only ever done endurance riding – it seemed she'd never turned a circle or jumped! However, she was a very quick learner and eager to please. She went to Scott Keach for some education and only two months after I started riding her she was placing at dressage days.

Despite having little or no jumping education, I found Baronia was a natural jumper. She'd jump anything I'd point her at. She had one Achilles Heel, however – and that was an aversion to water. We were eliminated at the water jump at our first event in 2006!

Unlike many other horses that never overcome their fear of water jumps, after only a few practices at pony club grounds, Baronia was bounding into water with enthusiasm. The more I rode her, especially in cross country, the more I found she trusted me and I trusted her. Apart from two refusals at water early on, we have never had a stop at a jump until a Grade Three cross country training day a few months ago. I was trying to ride her through an ABC combination with very sharp turns – but she kept running out at the third element. I was confused, and frustrated at her sudden stubbornness. After calling it quits for the day, an adult rider who was also a friend, praised Baronia's intelligence. He said the ground was slippery on the other side of the first jump (which I had failed to notice) – and she was thinking for and looking after the two of us. Like any decent person would, she forgave me easily!

For several months I rode Baronia in Grade Four ODE's to build up experience between the two of us. At the State Championships ODE at Mt Gambier in April, we were the crucial combination of my pony club team that was victorious in Grade Four, as Baronia was one of the minority of horses that went clear in the cross country phase. We also attracted attention in our show jumping round. Baronia has only ever had clear rounds in show jumping. After completing a clear round and leaving the ring, the commentator commented how we'd "set the benchmark for everyone else". This truly demonstrates 'Jump on a Connemara'!

At the State ODE especially, I had many people coming up to me, asking what breed she was and admiring her not only honest but flashy jumping. I'd proudly respond that she was a Connemara, and they'd always be surprised – as many thought Connemaras were only grey!

The jumping height was proving to be far too easy for her, so we moved up to Grade Three. At an EFA cross country competition in the Introductory class at Grand Cru in June, to my delight we came third. In July this year we competed at Port Augusta Horse Trials, our first Grade Three event – and won it! This was a fantastic achievement for both of us – and shows what a wonderful pony she has become.

A friend of mine who is a male 6 foot tall pony club member was concerned that he would be over mounted when he rode my “pony”, Baronia on a trail ride in the winter. To his surprise and others on the day, he looked terrific on her. He was very complimentary about her movement and said,“...” she could jump like an elk!” At the end of the day another family wanted to take Baronia home.

This all sounds like Baronia has no vices. Like all Connies Baronia loves her tucker. Food is an obsession for her. Recently Mum brought home a bag of chaff and left it temporarily on the ground outside the paddock she was in. Baronia spotted it reached over the fence managed to bite a hole in the bag and was stuffing herself when Dad rescued the situation.

Rupari Baronia has gone from being a green endurance horse to a winning eventer! This could never have been done without Baronia being such a quick learner, sure footed, an excellent jumper, trusting and trustworthy and so willing to please – she truly is a shining example of a Connemara pony.

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