



Johnstons set impressive tally

GRAEME JOHNSTON, of Tabulam, and his registered ASH mare Regent.



Australian Stock Horses and the Johnston family at Tabulam are developing a partnership which soon may take some topping in New South Wales.

Firstly, there was Kevin Johnston who has spent 25 years riding and breeding stock horses.

As a camp drafter he has run up scores of wins from the smallest country show to the Warwick Gold Cup.

As an ASH breeder he has been one of the most successful in the State.

Then came Graeme, 13, his son.

Graeme has his own stable of horses for pony club, hack work and camp drafting.

His favourite mount is the mare, Regent on whom he has put together an impressive tally of wins.

Regent is by Dark Secret but of Riverview Regent a full sister to the 1976 open campdraft horse Gift, owned by Kevin Johnston's

cousin Mr. Ken Vary, another well-known North Coast ASH breeder and competitor.

And finally there is seven-year-old Gay, Graeme's sister with her ASH mare, Goldie Girl.

The two combined to make something of a hole in the list of trophies at this year's Tenterfield Show.

The names of Mr. Johnston's horses read like a little who's who of ASH breeding on the North Coast.

He bought Lookout in 1955, won a draft at the North Coast National on him the next day and was third in the Warwick Gold Cup the following week.

In the next two years Lookout and Mr. Johnston won 20 drafts and were placed on 22 occasions.

Flirt, another of Mr.

Johnston's favourite horses won 18 drafts, was placed in 16 and was third in the Gold Cup. One of her foals later made the finals at Warwick.



Top: JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH (wild buck 02/secret 08)

Bottom right: Theo Hill on STARLIGHT STUD ANCHOR - HSH (JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/floodlight mare 02)

Bottom left: Newspaper clipping of Graeme Johnston (Kevin's son) and KAY JAY REGENT (JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/idaho mare 02).

Foundation Sire

JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH

ASH Reg: 9909

This versatile sire produced top hacks and campdrafters. His good mares and colts were used by some influential breeders, allowing the line to continue into this century with ongoing success.

Article by Lindsay Ferguson

The far north coast of New South Wales is home to a number of superior horsemen from the early days of our breed - and also of yet another Foundation Horse. During the 1950-70s the keen campdrafters in that district included Fraser Ramsey, Frank McNamara, Peter Grogan, Ken Baker, Laurie Mills, Earle Cardow, the Varys and Laurie Stephenson.

JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH owes his status as a Foundation Stallion to another of these horsemen - Kevin Johnston, a foundation Member of the Australian Stock Horse Society, a Classifier and a committee man of the Far North Coast Branch.

Kevin spent most of his years on the family beef property located between Tabulam and Bonalbo. After a move to Glen Innes, he later retired to Casino. With the help of good records and a good memory,

Kevin was able to provide interesting detail on the story of his horse. He recalls, 'My dad, Alan Johnson, always had horses and always had a stallion. We had all breeds over the years including ponies, thoroughbreds and draft horses - the lot'.

Born in 1935, Kevin started riding as a toddler, and competed as a five year old at the Bonalbo show in 1940. Both Kevin and his late wife Jan (nee Reeves, formerly of Kyogle), had considerable success showing hacks both before and after they were married. Jan's show debut was as a five year old at Kyogle in 1949.

One of the family's pony stallions was Shannons Pride. He sired the gelding Shannon, who took Jan, already a champion lady rider, to win the Champion Pony Hack at the 1958 Royal Queensland Show.

Starting as a 16 year old in 1951,

Kevin had a successful campdrafting career spanning 25 years, only giving it up due to ill health in 1976. In his first year of competition he won his first Maiden campdraft at Urbenville, and his first Open campdraft at the Lismore show, picking up 30 pounds in prizemoney for the latter.

It is no wonder that he had some early success, as he used to knock about with some of the best horsemen from the northern rivers. 'Dad never competed, but he educated Laurie Mills and got him started in campdrafting. Laurie was a neighbour and also a great mate who is the same age as me', Kevin said. 'Herbert Vary (father of Roy and Ken), is my uncle and he helped me get going.'

Kevin was able to shed some light on the local bloodlines that are integral to the background of our Foundation Stallion and his progeny. He explained that Bruce Alexander brought the thoroughbred sire Floodlight (AUS 1944) up to the local station 'Old Bonalbo'. [As an aside, the very good horseman Albert Waller came from 'Old Bonalbo'.]

Floodlight left a lot of good stock, including some that clicked very well with JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH. Floodlight was by Trademark, who was by Hall Mark. When you consider that Hall Mark won the Melbourne Cup in 1933, then you can see that he was quite well bred.

Kevin grew up with Fraser Ramsey, who was also a successful campdrafter. Fraser placed in the top three in the Warwick Gold Cup three times, and also won the Canning Downs campdraft in 1975. On two of these occasions, Fraser rode the Floodlight horses, Flashlight and Searchlight. Flashlight was out of a mare by the stallion Orient, who was a top sire of station horses at Old Bonalbo. Laurie Mills's great horse Sandy also goes back to Orient. 'In the early days we used to enter our horses under the name Johnston & Ramsey', Kevin said.

In 1962 Kevin won the ABCRA Championship Campdraft on Snip, a six year old Novice horse by Floodlight. He was two points ahead of Harry Ball on ABBEY - FS HSH, who finished second. The campdraft was one of five national titles decided before a crowd of about 4,500 at the Woodenbong rodeo grounds.

Kevin campdrafted at the Sydney and Brisbane Royal shows and is well-known

JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH

Colour: Brown **Height:** 15.1hh

Lifespan: 20yrs (1955-1975)

Breeder: unknown

Performance: Lightly campdrafted

Progeny: 38 registered progeny, the most notable being the mares CHEX and VICKIS FLIGHT, and the stallion STARLIGHT STUD ANCHOR - HSH.



Sire	wild buck 02	spearfelt 02 - WH	spearhead 02
			lady champion 02
Dam	secret 08	chamois 02	derween 001
			chamade 01
		mr maitland 02	historian 001
			darween mare 01
miss frisko 02	mount frisko 001		
	unknown dam		

for his 'bridesmaid' record at the Warwick Gold Cup campdraft. Despite not taking home the Gold Cup, his performance in only four years of competition at Warwick is highly commendable - three thirds, a fourth and a fifth. He came third on Lookout in 1955, third on Butch in 1956 and third again on (Johnstons) Flight in 1958. He also placed second in the Risdon Cup in 1957 and 1958.

JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH was a dark brown thoroughbred born in 1955 on the north coast of New South Wales. Kevin said, 'We were looking for a stallion in about 1960 and tracked him down. We don't know who bred him but he was a six year old who had proven himself at stud with some quality progeny. Ward Rippon from Alstonville used to show one of these - a 10 stone hack called 'Stromboli'. He had a lot of success at shows around the coast, including wins at the Brisbane Royal Show. We bought the stallion from a butcher on the coast and paid 150 pounds for him, which was a good price at the time. We had him classified many years later when the Society was formed.'

Kevin describes him as a very good thoroughbred type standing at 15.1 hands high. In conformation he had a lovely head and good front. 'He was very quiet', explained Kevin and emphasised that point, 'he was very, very well natured. His wonderful nature meant that anyone could ride him - you could even put beginners on him. My young kids all rode him. The previous owner's kids used to take him down to their waterhole and jump off his back.'

'He was a lovely horse to ride. When my father-in-law visited, he was the only horse that he would ride. We called him "Old Darkie" and despite the fact that he had never raced or done much, we took him to a few shows, exhibiting him as a thoroughbred. It was not common to draft stallions then, but we took him to a few drafts - competing in Maidens where he won a few places. Most of his time he was used as a paddock stallion for our few mares and a few locals.'

Kevin's daughter, Gay remembers "Old Darkie". 'As a five years old I had my heart set on riding him and one special day I was promised a ride after school - unfortunately that was his last day and he died before I got home', she said.

The sire of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH was the thoroughbred Wild Buck, a brown horse born on the north coast of New South Wales in 1942. He won a big race at the Grafton racing carnival known as the Ramornie Handicap. More than that, he won the QTC Group 3 St Leger in 1946 and was second in the QTC Group 2 Moreton Handicap in 1947. Wild Buck was well bred, being by the champion racehorse Spearfelt - WH, winner of the 1926 Melbourne Cup. Spearfelt - WH is also seen in the maternal pedigree of other Australian Stock Horses from northern Australia, such as TOOMBA SNIP - FS HSH and CINDERS MELODY - FM HSH.

Wild Buck was his dam's only registered foal. She was the unraced mare Chamois, by Wyvern (GB), who was the sire of two Queensland stakes winners. Both Wyvern's sire and dam produced stakes winners in England and Ireland. Wild Buck sired only one other registered Australian Stock Horse, the mare LARNOOK TRICKSEY. The Australian Stock Horse Stud Book shows that she has been used by Mr B Christopherson to produce three mares, one of which, TURQUOISE, has currently bred on to the third generation.

Unfortunately, few details are known about Secret, the dam of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH. She was by Mr Maitland (AUS 1944), a brown, unraced colt by Historian. She was out of the unraced, brown thoroughbred mare named Miss Frisco (1938) who was by Palfresco, out of an unregistered mare by Blue Star. Before ASH days, this Frisko (Australian Stock Horse Stud Book spelling) line of horses was known around the district as being good stockhorses.

This Foundation Stallion sired only 39 registered progeny, but many more in total. 'He left a lot of good stock horse types', recalls Kevin. 'With our progeny, we used to campdraft the mares and sell the geldings. At first we used the prefix "Johnstons" but that



Kevin Johnston and Snip after winning the 1962 ABCRA Championship Campdraft at Woodenbong, New South Wales. Harry Ball on ABBEY - FS HSH finished in second place, two points behind.

clashed with another prefix, so we then used the prefix "Kay Jay".

From the many newspaper clippings in Kevin's folio on the horse, we see that some of the best known of his progeny on the coast included JOHNSTONS GAITY, KAY JAY BONITA, SECRET AGENT and DRIFT. Progeny of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH dominated at the 1978 Far North Coast Branch Show, with Kevin's group of three progeny taking the honours from Fraser Ramsey's group of three.

Kevin bred JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH to his good mare Flight, the Warwick Gold Cup placegetter. Listed in the Australian Stock Horse Stud Book as 'Autumn Edge Mare', she produced VICKIS FLIGHT and Sailor. Also listed in the Stud Book as Johnstons Flight, she produced the gelding JANS SECRET, that topped the gelding category (\$2,400) at the Tamworth combined agents sale in 1973.

The following year, at the same venue, the first Australian Stock Horse Approved Sale was held and the Johnstons topped the sale again at \$1,200 with a two year old filly JOHNSTONS MISS DENVER (JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/Lucky). Another good sale was the colt, JOHNSTONS CATTLEMAN that went privately to Col Barrett for \$3,000.

Of all the homebred horses by this Foundation Stallion, Kevin ranks VICKIS FLIGHT as one of his best. 'She was a good mare that won a lot of drafts. I was so confident of her ability that I put her into an Open draft on her first day out. We had to go early in the final, but I got a good score and kept in the lead, winning the draft', said Kevin. This was a bold call for Kevin, since in that draft he was up against Laurie Mills on his mounts Gypsy and Baldy, who had twice won the Warwick Gold Cup.

VICKIS FLIGHT has had four foals, including the mares KAY JAY UNDRRESSED and RONOLA FLEX, both of whom have bred on. Like the rest of the family, Gay Johnston was also a successful competitor from a young age. She took up breeding



Above left: Graeme Johnston on VICKIS FLIGHT (JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/autumn edge mare 02) after winning the 1980 Junior Campdraft at Red Range. Above right: COMARA JESSICA - HSH (JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/COMARA FLIC FLAC - HSH), winner of the Australian Stock Horse Society's first National Maturity in 1985, ridden by Charles Hill

and had success with her 1998 brown mare TOOKALOOK DRESSED YET, who has a double cross of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH through her sire KAY JAY SECRET and her dam KAY JAY UNDRESSED. Gay has bred this mare twice and currently has a young gelding by KNEIPPS CONRAY - HSH.

One of the best known progeny of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH was a mare born in 1969 named CHEX, that won a lot of campdrafts with Bruce McNaughton. Bruce explained how CHEX came about, 'Mr Dunn of Casino had a lot of campdrafters and I was lucky enough to be given one of these mares, Sateen, by his family when he died. Sateen was a good campdrafter, so I bred her to improve that even more - and CHEX did much better at campdrafting than her dam'.

Bruce broke her in, trained her and subsequently won many campdrafts, including the World Championship Campdraft at Sydney Royal Easter Show. The competition was tough; Bruce and CHEX were up against the likes of Laurie Stephenson on BLUE MOON MYSTIC - IS HSH and Glen Gough on YALLATUP RIVOLI REX - IS HSH.

CHEX also won the ABCRA Open Campdraft Horse of the Year in 1975 and 1977. In 1977 she won the Cut Out at the Warwick Gold Cup and also won the Ladies campdraft that year. 'In total she won 50 Open drafts', said Bruce. 'It is a real

shame that she slipped down a steep creek bank and drowned in her prime, just when I was about to breed from her.'

Sateen produced a full sister to CHEX the following year. This brown mare was registered as BROWN SECRET - HSH. She was sold as a two year old and campdrafted successfully. She then produced 12 foals for Bryan Reilly of the Hallmark Stud, who crossed her with BLUE MOON MYSTIC - IS HSH a number of times. Another successful cross with this mare was with AUSTOCK BERANGHI - HSH to produce the mare HALLMARK STUD TOP SECRET - HSH, that has foaled 15 times.


Fraser Ramsey has bred many horses and a few of those are by JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH. These include some reliable campdrafters such as ROXBY PARK LIMELIGHT and ROXBY PARK SATELIGHT.

The male progeny of JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH have perhaps had the biggest influence on the Australian Stock Horse breed. One of these sons is GLEN ELGIN DART, bred by Ben Wirth, with 24 foals.

The son that has reached greatest prominence as a sire is STARLIGHT STUD ANCHOR - HSH, with 76 progeny. This horse was a JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH/Floodlight cross. He was bred by Alan Parish, out of a Floodlight mare which Kevin reckons was one of the best mares ever put to his stallion. He was sold as a two year old and trained up for campdrafting by Athol Bryant, but

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Inset: JOHNSTONS MISS DENVER sold for \$1,200 in 1974, at the first Australian Stock Horse Approved Sale in Tamworth.

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never had a run. He was later sold to John Smith who registered him with his Starlight Stud prefix, and then sold on for a good price to Theo Hill of the Comara stud. Julie Tonkin (nee Hill) explains that her father was looking for a genetic outcross and liked the look of some of the mares produced by JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH. As Theo used to often run into Kevin at campdrafts, he had plenty of opportunity to observe the qualities of the stallion's progeny.

STARLIGHT STUD ANCHOR - HSH had 30 foals for Comara, including the mare COMARA JESSICA - HSH, ridden by Charles Hill to win the Society's first National Maturity in 1985. As Theo had used the stallion extensively, he was sold to Longreach Pastoral College for the modest sum of \$1,000. John Arnold, the College's Senior Skills Instructor, recalls, 'He was a typical station sire and a good 15.3 hands high. We were using him as a paddock sire to improve the horses we had here at the time. Unfortunately he broke his shoulder in the paddock and we had to put him down after only one season.'

While at Longreach he only sired a few mares, but they have had many foals. 'Those horses have proved to be excellent broodmares and a number of their progeny have topped the sales – especially at the Toomba sale where we sell most of our stock. Through this horse, the JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH blood is now well-spread around the upper half of Queensland', said John.

One of his sons was COMARA TRILOGY - HSH, out of the ABBEY - FS HSH mare TRY ME - HSH. Ridden by Peter Howard, who was a student at the time, he won the Widgee Futurity in 1989, and produced a lot of good horses in the central highlands of Queensland while standing at Emerald Pastoral College. Another of his sons was COMARA FUGITIVE - HSH, sold to the Ardno stud in Victoria. Amongst some successful show horses, this stallion has sired ARDNO TOPSHOT and ARDNO QUALITY, winners of the Gippsland Campdraft Association's Victorian Championship Campdraft Open in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

Kevin benefited from the generosity of Herbert Vary in a very good deal, whereby he was lent a good Idaho mare, RIVERVIEW REGEANT. The condition was that he return her in-foal, and only after he had bred a filly foal out of her by JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH. The first foal was the colt DRIFT that Bruce McNaughton rode. The filly he was waiting for was born next and registered as KAY JAY REGENT. Kevin's son Graeme took her through pony club, showing and on to win many campdrafts. These bloodlines are still in the Johnston family today in the form of the colts KAY JAY DOUBLE UP and DOCS REBEL. RIVERVIEW REGEANT was returned in foal to JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH to get the gelding RIVERVIEW GIFT, on which Ken Vary won the ABCRA North Coast Horse of the Year in 1976.

Kevin's horsemanship was not defined solely by stockwork and campdrafting. From 1965-70 he turned his hand to training gallopers with his father. He trained horses such as Sun Region, Lightfoot and Idas Gift, and won races including the Lismore Cup, the Casino Cup and the Jacaranda Cup at Grafton. 'One good sprinter Joybridge, bucked when we first got her. She got a dose of 12 months stock work, then went on to win many races', said Kevin.

Kevin eventually had to give up riding due to illness, but kept on breeding horses and still follows the campdrafts today. In looking back on the Australian Stock Horse scene, Kevin said, 'I did not think there would be any great financial gain in the breed. We just had a lot of horses in work and going well. For some time JOHNSTONS DARK SECRET - FS HSH was the leading Australian Stock Horse sire on the far north coast, and we were lucky that he was always a sound horse. One day he was cantering towards me in the paddock and just dropped dead – a heart attack I suppose.'

In Kevin's words, this stallion was 'just a paddock horse – not advertised'. His legacy of 1,009 descendants (to date) is proof of his enviable recognition as simply a good horse and a good sire. 🐾