

Victoria Ferguson

Planting the seeds for Healthy Horsemanship!

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EQUINE EXCELLENCE



VICTORIA FERGUSON- PLANTING THE SEEDS FOR HEALTHY HORSEMANSHIP!

The guru of all things horsey and herbal, Victoria Ferguson says she is too old to remember her first horse experience.

It would have been when I was just born. Both my father and grandfather were very good horsemen, so I grew up with horses. I was on horseback from a very early age and rode in my first show as a 5 year old on a Palomino called Pasha.

A born rebel, Victoria found a sense of liberation in horse-riding, which was lucky given that she grew up on a sheep station in the Blackall district of Central Queensland, where mustering was a necessity and education was found in the home.

"I took great delight in escaping from my mother, my governess and my school work on horseback. So Dad hit on the idea of employing a governess who could ride. We did my school work in the morning and went out riding in the afternoon. The daily riding habit has stayed with me virtually ever since."

Her flare for the dramatic had Victoria dreaming of scoring a spot at the National Institute for Dramatic Art, but her passion for our four-legged friends was too great.

"When I left school I ended up spending two years training and showing hacks with Vince Corvi instead."

After the massive success of her first book, published in 2000, "The Practical Horse Herbal", which sold over 8,000 copies in Australia and 1,500 overseas, Victoria has since gained substantial extra knowledge and her second book, "The Complete Horse Herbal," was recently published by Melbourne Publishing Group.

"It's 400 pages of everything I know about herbs for horses".

But herbs aren't Victoria's only area of expertise, and having grown up in outback Australia, the enthusiastic country girl was inspired to found her own beef cattle promotion business. "I had worked with my father on our Droughtmaster Stud and had also worked as secretary for a couple of cattle breed associations, and I enjoyed the industry and doing all the advertising and publicity work. Anything to do with cattle is always fun, the people are the best."

Her work in the cattle industry granted Victoria the opportunity to travel all around Australasia to attend



Victoria on Trixie Age 5 1953

cattle shows, but Victoria's love of showjumping drew her back to horses.

"I had always wanted to jump but never had the chance so it was fulfilling a lifetime dream. Then I went to the Dressage Nationals in Sydney as a spectator and I remember seeing Erica Taylor and Crown Law and some of the other top riders of the time. I made up my mind on the spot: I am going to do that."

Purchasing a tough thoroughbred from Di Dawson, Victoria trained with George Sanna, who told her she had a hopeless eye and ought to go eventing.

"He was right, so off I went, and had a fabulous time eventing. It was so much more of a buzz than showjumping! Fortunately I had a horse (Gambit) that really looked after me."

Deciding she wanted to be more involved with horses, Victoria bought a property in the Sydney Hills District, and started another business, Horses for Courses, where she bought, sold and trained horses for the Olympic sports, and also became an EFA instructor.

"I started Horses for Courses so I could live and work with horses full time, and I really enjoyed finding the right niche for each particular horse. My working pupil at the time, Sam Heald, found a wonderful unraced Thoroughbred called Star of Erin, and he went on to Grand Prix with his new owner.

"One of my clients, Virginia Barnes, had a horse that she was convinced was going to be a top level eventer. She



Victoria with Gamekeeper

Horses make competitors successful as a rule, so it was down to Gamekeeper.

was right, and the horse, Girdwood True Blue, took Phillip Dutton to two gold medal wins. That was a great experience following the career of Jughead, as Phillip called him!"

Victoria says the best thing about Horses for Courses was that it gave her a lot of practical industry experience. "It stood me in good stead with Herbal Horse."

Victoria was made aware of the pressure put on horses at the top, particularly when she made the WEG shortlist on her talented thoroughbred Gamekeeper.

"I was asked by Rosemarie Springer to go to Germany and train with her; she took me aside at one of her clinics at Clemens and Judy Dierks, and told me this horse (Gamekeeper) could win a medal."

When asked what made her so successful in dressage, Victoria says it has a lot to do with finding the right horse.

"Horses make competitors successful as a rule, so it was

down to Gamekeeper."

But her success in the field of herbal medicine came from her determination and her many years of hands-on experience.

"I had a huge amount of practical experience with a lot of different sports and breeds, so I put that together with my human herbal medicine training. I used herbal remedies and developed natural feeding programs with my own horses for a long time before I began giving people professional advice."

Completing her Diploma of Herbal Medicine with the famous Australian herbalist and author Dorothy Hall, Victoria went on to establish her own business "Herbal Horse", which pioneered the use of herbal medicine for horses in Australia.

Annoyed with the commercialisation of the horse world today, Victoria says riders should make the health of their horse a priority.

"It would be so much better for the physical and emotional health of the horses if their owners focused on that aspect, rather than buying matching pink saddles, bridles, halters, bandages and rugs. It has really just got plain ridiculous, all the products out there which are never going to make life better for the horses. They just make the owners' wallets lighter."

Moving away from the bits and gadgets, Victoria's business, aimed at helping Australian horse owners find a natural and affordable form of health care and nutrition, quickly became a huge success.

But Victoria sold the business last year, granting her more time to work on her many other projects, and do some more riding herself.

"At present my website is being revamped so that book owners can subscribe and ask questions online, to give them an extra resource. I am also developing education programs in equine herbal medicine, privately and hopefully through some TAFE and agricultural colleges."

"I have an extension resource to The Complete Horse Herbal, so that the book owners can subscribe to the book club and have their questions answered confidentially by email, which is becoming popular. I am also offering education programs in equine herbal medicine, privately, and some short course through Scone TAFE and Tocal Ag College in NSW."

"There is a huge demand and need for professional and reliable advice on herbal remedies and preventive nutrition programs anywhere outside of suburbia."

Inspired by the French master Philippe Karl and his

I hope the books will empower readers to take responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their horses and gain some knowledge in that quest.

School of Legetete (school of lightness), Victoria's riding is now focused on training her horses correctly through the use of his techniques.

"I met him and watched him at Equitana, and have been inspired further by his books and tapes. I am now in the process of re-educating a medium level horse and am looking forward to starting a young horse from the beginning with his method."

Steffen Peters also caught Victoria's eye at Equitana, and she says he illustrated the talent of a gifted rider when he rode the black stallion in the master class.

"He showed the depth of his horsemanship on a very wayward horse in public. He went forward so dramatically in the canter down the long side at one stage that he only took about 10 strides - that was really something."

The best piece of advice the master herbalist has been given is to "live in the present, learn from the past and create your future", but her own advice is to "never get too cocky".

"Just when you think you might know a thing or too, something comes along to prove you don't, usually a horse, they are good at that!"

Although she regrets not going to Germany to train with Rosemarie Springer, Victoria is proud to pass on her



Champion Pony Hack Central Queensland 50s-60s



Victoria with Gamekeeper



Victoria with Gambit Sydney 1980



knowledge to other horse lovers through her books.

"I hope the books will empower readers to take responsibility for the health and wellbeing of their horses and gain some knowledge in that quest."

Finding great pleasure in her success at popularising herbs for horses, Victoria still says the best moments for her are riding.

"Some of my fondest memories are of riding Gamekeeper in a big paddock, after he had been retired from competition, throwing in whatever the mood moved us to – one times, pirouettes, extensions, piaffe and passage, without the restriction of an arena and a set test."

But her success was not without its hurdles, most of which came in the four-legged variety.

"Teaching Gamekeeper to canter was a nightmare, I had to do it in a hundred acre paddock with a friend riding Gambit my eventer in the lead!"

To get a greater insight into theGuru and her wisdom you can contact Victoria at www.victoriaferguson.com.au or better still buy her latest herbal bible, which is available direct from the author and from all good bookstores and saddleries.



ANNOUNCING

SCHOOL OF EQUINE HERBAL MEDICINE

Victoria Ferguson's School of Equine Herbal Medicine has been established in response to demand from horse owners, managers and equine practitioners.

The courses will provide reliable information to enable them to use herbal remedies with confidence, both for first aid and in the treatment of common health problems.

The courses will be taught personally by Victoria through a combination of distance learning and several blocks of practical sessions each year.

The course will cover the following subjects ...

- * Natural Health Philosophy
- * Preventive Nutrition
- * Herbal First Aid
- * Herbal Medicine – Equine Materia Medica
- * Herbal Medicine – Holistic Assessment & Treatment
- * Evaluating Diagnostic Techniques
- * Evaluating Body Therapies
- * Making up Topical Remedies

SHORT COURSES

Short courses will also be offered through Scone TAFE and Tocal Agricultural College in NSW.

TRAINEE POSITION AVAILABLE

Victoria is looking for a special person who is interested in training in equine herbal medicine. Applicants must be 21 years of age or over, single, and with an equestrian and/or natural therapies background.

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