**The Australian Waler**

There is a strong connection between Australia’s wild horses, the brumbies, and our heritage Australian breed, the Waler. The Waler is the Australian equivalent of the American Quarter Horse, a breed developed to meet the diverse needs of early settlement.

Horses arrived in Australia with the First Fleet and ‘over the following years a large number of horses were imported ... [and] ... from this widely diverse pool of horses, a distinctive type started to emerge, ... shaped by the unique Australian environment ... only the strongest and toughest survived the trip ... [and] the developing Australian horse breed was based on the very toughest genes’ ( Pickerel 2011 p.105).

The breed became known as Walers, a term being used in 1840s, meaning a horse bred in the colony of NSW, and was used in reference to horses sent overseas as remounts for the British armies in China and India, and for Indian regiments in British India. Advertisements for Australian Waler horses can be found in newspapers of this time from this part of the world, *The Pioneer 1877* and *The Civil and Military Gazette 1886*, for example (Allen, 1977). Walers were highly regarded throughout the world as a ‘superior saddle horse ... [with a] great reputation as a cavalry remount’ (Ballantine 1976 p. 27). Thousands of horses were exported during these years with 169,000 used in World War 1 alone. The 4th Light Horse Brigade’s charge at Beersheba, one of the last cavalry charges in warfare, is well known (Ballantine 1976). The export trade flourished from the 1840s to the 1930s with thousands of horses leaving Australia each year. Many properties were devoted to horse breeding, with owners choosing to run their horses in the wild as brumbies, through this process developing the toughness and intelligence for which the breed was renowned.

Throughout Australia, Walers were the all-purpose horse. The saying was that a Waler would work the stock, pull a plough, carry the children to school and pull the buggy taking the family to church on Sunday. They played an essential role in the development, history and cultural identity of Australia and ‘the horse is owed a debt’ (Ballantine, 1976 p. 7).

When horses were no longer needed, they were released into the wild and became ‘brumbies’. The Australian Waler is now classified as rare and endangered but we are fortunate in that the breed has survived in the brumby population. Since the 1980s efforts have been underway to re-establish and protect the breed with particular focus on preservation of the foundation bloodlines. Extensive and ongoing DNA testing through the University of Texas as part of the Global Equine Genome Project is being used to confirm the status of the breed as ‘the old bloodlines of the Waler cannot be reproduced once these have been lost’ (Khanshour, Juras & Cothran, 2013 p. 357)**.**

Brumbies remain key to the re-establishment and preservation of the Australian Waler because ‘we cannot recreate the Water with modern blood’ (Crispin 2011 p.6). **All horses recognised as Foundation Walers have been wild caught.** That is, they were running as part of a mob of brumbies and, to quote Janet Lane, a leading authority on the breed, ‘sourcing old bloodlines from wild populations would greatly assist in securing a future for the types we once had’ (https:// walerdatabase.online/).

**Bibliography**

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***If you are interested in learning more about the Waler horse, the Waler database is a valuable resource. It lists foundation horses and their offspring, provides histories of the stations from which the foundation horses were sourced and much more. If you think your brumby may be a Waler, please get them DNA tested. All the information that you need to do this is on the database. The more evidence we have of the Waler/brumby link, the stronger our case will be to preserve our beautiful wild horses.***

https://walerdatabase.online/

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