

STAR CAROUSEL

The story of Nonda Dottie Papunya and her illustrious dam, Star Carousel, is also the story of two influential Australian horse breeders whose paths crossed for the first time in the early Spring of 1983.

Heather Brown bred horses on her family station Nonda Downs in North-West Queensland.

She had developed her own family line from a mare called Nonda Cuddles, a foal from a station mare she was given by her father when she was a little girl of seven.

When Heather was nineteen, she bred a beautiful colt called Nonda Native Son (Skywatch: TB.) from Nonda Cuddles and she decided she needed to find a new mare family to breed him to.

Heather discovered the horses bred by highly respected Grafton breeder Ventry McLennan completely by chance when she attended the Sydney Royal Show in 1983.

Heather and Ventry McLennan eventually met in August 1983 when she flew down to inspect his horses and ended up purchasing four of his beautiful bay fillies.

The next year, in 1984, she purchased another filly – this time a distinctive black one - from the core of his own breeding program.

While Heather and Ventry would become great friends, the descendants of these five fillies bought by Heather and placed into her breeding program would literally become a river of genetic gold.

The events won by their descendants include the Willinga Gold Buckle, three separate winners of the Cloncurry Stockman's Challenge, Champion Polocrosse Horse of Australia, Royal Show winners, the JHS Barnes Memorial Trophy, the Highest Scoring Horse of the Triple Crown Camp Draft Series, Champion Cow horse of Australia, the prestigious Widgee Futurity and so on...

This is a story for the ages – and it's a story that will inspire many Australian breeders.

Star Carousel was purchased as a yearling by Heather Brown in 1984.

She was a black filly with a distinctive big blaze face by **Star Black Minstrel** from the mare **Glenna's Daughter**.

The Glenna family was one of the wonderful deep families that had been developed over many years by legendary Grafton breeder Mr Ventry McLennan.

Heather saw the family for the first time when she was attending the Sydney Royal Show with friends and watched Bruce McNaughton compete on his beautiful black mare **Yarranoo Music** (Star Black Minstrel – Star Glenna's Daughter)

Heather later walked up to the show stables to inspect **Yarranoo Music** and Bruce McNaughton told her how he had purchased her from Ventry McLennan, a much-admired breeder from South Grafton.

Heather later contacted Ventry McLennan and some months later she arranged to fly down to Grafton to inspect his broodmare band in August 1983.

Heather had developed her own Nonda family of mares and she was already using her sire **Nonda Native Son** over her own station mares. She realised she needed to find another significant mare family to use as outcross blood to give her sire the best opportunity she could.

A tragic twist of fate, however, meant that the plan to travel to inspect the fillies almost didn't happen.

Heather's father, Reg Brown, had planned to travel down to Brisbane with her around the 12th August to see Heather's young station mare **Nonda Whimsey** – trained by Ian Francis - compete in the prestigious Station Hack at the Brisbane Royal Show.

Nonda Whimsey was by Nonda Native Son and Heather had broken her in and done all the work until she become an accomplished young camp mare and Ian had added the finishing touches.

Heather and her father had then planned to fly down to Grafton the day after the event to meet Ventry and Mrs McLennan, inspect their broodmare band and look at several fillies they had for sale.

Sadly, Reg Brown passed away suddenly working cattle in the yards in late July.

After the funeral arrangements were finally over, Heather was faced with the heartbreaking decision of whether or not she should still go ahead with her plans.

She eventually decided that she should do what her father wanted, so she cancelled his seat and flew down to Brisbane without him.

On a cold, wet Brisbane evening **Nonda Native Whimsey** won the Station Hack in front of a large crowd. As the mare was being sashed with the ribbon, Ian turned to Heather in the crowd, raised his hand in salute – and pointed his finger up to the sky above.

There were many tears shed that night.

The next morning, Heather caught the early flight down to Grafton.

She often said later that seeing the mare win – the first horse from North-West Queensland to win in a Royal Show ring – felt like an omen, a sign from above.

Ventry McLennan met the flight at Grafton airport, and after a cup of tea and scones made by his wonderful wife Lenore, they wandered down to the green river flats to look at his horses.

Heather described the goosebumps moment of seeing ten horses in each paddock that were all identical to each other, all beautiful, feminine types that simply floated over the ground.

She knew instantly that she had finally found the great breeder and the superb Australian genetics that had been so intricately and carefully interwoven with the Thoroughbred genetics that she had been searching for.

She suddenly felt so confident about her future breeding program she made the decision to purchase all four fillies on that one day.

The visit was also the beginning of a wonderful friendship between Heather and Ventry McLennan, the kind that was based on the mutual respect of good breeders.

In later years, McLennan became so impressed by the horses that Heather's stallion Nonda Native Son was producing he stood the sire at his own Grafton farm for a season.

One of the horses bred that year was **Woodbridge Gazelle** who later won the Barastoc Horse of the Year in Victoria.

Nonda Native Son later returned to stand in Queensland and McLennan later lamented that he wished he had continued to stand the stallion at his farm.

Sadly, Nonda Native Son died several years later. He was only 14 years old.

The four fillies that Heather purchased in the paddock that day all came from the **Widden Lass** family.

Three were full sisters while the fourth was a three-quarter sister.

The full sisters were:

- **Yarranoo Ragtime** (1980 - Star Black Minstrel – Yarranoo Charm),
- **Yarranoo Reggae** (1982 – Star Black Minstrel – Yarranoo Charm) and
- **Yarranoo Rhumba** (1982 – Star Black Minstrel - Yarranoo Charm).

The fourth filly was a three-quarter sister in blood:

- **Yarranoo Bethena** (1982: Star Black Minstrel – Yarranoo Bracelet)

In terms of breeding, the dam of the three sisters was **Yarranoo Charm, who was** by **Yarranoo Glencoe** from **Yarranoo Bangles** and her three-quarter **Yarranoo Bracelet** - by Coolum Simmer from Yarranoo Bangles – was also from the illustrious **Widden Lass** family.

Ventry McLennan had bought the mare **Wongle** (by The Dart from **Widden Lass**) from the Haydon family of Murrurundi.

Widden Lass (Prodigal – Unknown dam) was considered a champion camp draft mare of her time and won many of the major drafts during 1920's and 1930's.

They had purchased their original mare from the Wormwell family when they had seen the mare being ridden while they were up in Queensland droving cattle.

Interestingly, **Yarranoo Charm** was by **Collum Simmer**, a son of **Glenna**, the other illustrious taproot broodmare that was owned by the McLennan family.

Her dam **Yarranoo Bangles** was by **Young Valais**, who was a Thoroughbred.

He was by **Madagascar** from Princess Cadena who was by the great sire **Valais** himself.

As it turned out, the family was an absolute genetic goldmine for Heather.

- **Yarranoo Ragtime** went on to produce **Nonda Bebopaloopa**. She was by Heather's own sire **Nonda Native Son**, and she later went on to become Champion Polocrosse horse of Australia.

Her daughter **Kildare Belle** (Kyabra Cattle Baron) later went on to win the prestigious JHS Barnes Memorial Trophy.

Another daughter of **Yarranoo Ragtime** was **Oaks Melody** (Docs Freckles Oak) who produced **Woolerina Rhythm** who won the 2012 Cloncurry Stockman's Challenge.

- **Yarranoo Reggae** won the prestigious Widgee Futurity and was Reserve Champion Junior Champion Working Horse of Queensland.

Interestingly, the Champion Junior Working Horse that day was Heather's own home-bred filly **Nonda Night Bird** who was a full sister to Nonda Native Son.

N. Night Bird would later become a champion broodmare in her own right and three different daughters of the mare would produce horses such as

Nonda Southern Cross – Denzel (winner of the Nutrien Open, Warwick Stallion Draft etc),

Nonda One Dark Night – Darkie (winner of the ACA Superquest and the Alpha Top Ten) and

Nonda Let's Talk Later (winner of the Warwick Gold Cup).

Tragically, **Yarranoo Reggae** – who both Heather and Ian Francis considered to be the loveliest and most talented of all the 'four sisters' - would suffer an untimely death when she was kicked by another mare at the troughs while she was rearing her first foal.

The force of the exterior blow tore her liver internally and she haemorrhaged internally and died within minutes.

- Heather then mated **Yarranoo Rhumba** to the imported Quarter Horse stallion Doc's Boab to produce **Nonda Hula Hoop** (by Doc's Boab).

She later sold Hula Hoop who went on to become a successful broodmare. Hula Hoop produced **Youngstar Marnies Glamour** for her breeder Rick Young of Dalby.

Glamour is now campaigned by Will Durkin and is one of the most accomplished camp draft mares in Australia. She was the Highest Scoring Horse in the 2021 Triple Crown series.

Heather bred **Yarranoo Bethena** to Docs Freckles Oak to produce **Nonda Feel the Rhythm** (by Doc's Freckles Oak, one of Heather's favourite sires).

She later sold the mare to Huon Smith who bred her to Boonara **Dartagnan**. The result was **Boonara Party Girl** who won the 2009 Cloncurry Stockmen's Challenge.

It was during her visit to Ventry McLennan's farm at Grafton that Heather also saw **Yarranoo Dark Glen**, a beautiful black mare who also came from the illustrious **Glenna** family.

Glenna (Bright Flame – Dark Nell (Dark Fox) was from **Nell's Promise** (Promised Land). It was the same exact and meticulous interweaving of thoroughbred and station stock horse lines that Heather had always bred her horses on.

Heather immediately decided that she wanted to acquire the **Glenna family** as much as she wanted to acquire the **Widden Lass family**.

Ventry McLennan had purchased **Glenna** from Ted Cousins at Glencoe on the New England in NSW.

She was by a sire called **Bright Flame** and his stock had a tremendous reputation, especially as polocrosse horses. The Rangers Valley team all rode horses that mostly carried the Bright Flame bloodline, and they were almost invincible.

Bright Flame was also the sire of Laurie Mills horse **Baldy**, who won the Warwick Gold Cup.

Maxine Brookes, who is Ventry McLennan's daughter, told Joy Poole when she was writing a Stock Horse Magazine tribute to Glenna that her brother Robert played Glenna at polocrosse.

"She had the most incredible 'suck-back' in her turns," Maxine said. She could turn back within herself... She was also a very good pony club mare and was also good at jumping. Her first foal Cobber became a six-bar showjumper because he had the same style."

"Glenna was a Galloway sized mare just under 15 hands. She was a plain looking mare, and she was very tough and was a little bit touchy, not from nastiness but from nervousness. They were horses you could never be rough with, if you were they never forgot and they were very hard to get back on side. "

Star Glenna's Daughter was by **Collum Simmer**, and she proved to be the broodmare to end all broodmares.

Her first foal was the outstanding camp draft mare **Yarranoo Music** owned and ridden by Bruce McNaughton. She later produced **Star Carousel**.

After this Glenna produced **Yarranoo Dark Glen**, who - once again - was true to the Glenna breed. "Three days after breaking her in I was out mustering on her," Maxine said.

“She was a beautiful mare, you could win the Champion Hack on her, go change your saddle and then she would win the Open Camp draft as well. In 1980 I won the All-Round ASHLA Rider Title after being successful in led, hack, working and camp drafting.”

Glenna’s last foal was a gelding called **Kinka Little Mac** (Star Black Minstrel) He was a great camp draft horse for Joyce Lloyd at Wowan, and he won 15 camp drafts for her.

Glenna also carried the imported thoroughbred **Promised Land** up close in her pedigree. He was imported by Otto Baldwin, and he stood to station mares as well as thoroughbreds around the Manilla area.

He was by **Dark Ronald** – who was also imported out from England – and he sired horses including the great **Magpie** (Melbourne Cup) **Harold**, who won the German Derby and **Ethiopian**, another great galloper.

The phenotype of Dark Ronald – that is, his physical appearance – appears to be an extremely dominant force as it travelled through the generations and held an incredibly strong influence over his descendants.

You can see the same distinctive ‘shape, skin and colour’ - that is, dark brown or black – in so many of the best horses that carry his bloodline, including Yarranoo Music, Yarranoo Dark Glen and Star Carousel herself.

Glenna – along with Yarranoo Bangles – were both made ASHS Foundation Mares, and the McLennan-bred stallion Star Black Minstrel was made a Foundation Sire in the ASHS as well, a staggering achievement for the McLennan family and absolute proof of their gifts as great breeders.

Heather was extremely impressed by what she recognised as the strong phenotypical likeness between both **Yarranoo Music** (Star Black Minstrel – Star Glenna’s Daughter) – who she first saw at Sydney Royal - and **Yarranoo Dark Glen** (Star Black Minstrel – Glenna) who she would later inspect at Ventry McLennan’s Grafton farm.

Ventry McLennan told her that his son Stuart - who owned Star Glenna’s Daughter – had bred another black filly foal by Star Black Minstrel and that he might be interested in selling her as a yearling.

She later contacted Stuart, who lived at Miriam Vale, and enquired if he was interested in selling the filly. He responded that he was.

The following year – 1984 – Heather travelled down to Rockhampton and linked up with Alan Ferguson, one of her Primac stock and station agents, to travel with her and inspect the filly at Miriam Vale.

The region was suffering hard drought conditions at the time and Star Carousel was in extremely rough paddock condition with a heavy winter coat when she was led out of an old piggery where she had been stabled.

She was also extremely lame in both front feet from standing on the hard cement surface.

Heather then watched the filly being lunged with a bullwhip around a yard and noticed that the filly never missed a lead change despite her extreme discomfort - and she never took her ear of her handler.

Despite the extremely challenging circumstances, everything the filly did was kind and willing.

The filly was for sale at what was considered an extremely high price at the time, but - despite all her caution around the fillies' condition and lameness - Heather decided that she was still willing to take the risk and buy the filly.

Star Carousel was later shipped by railway wagon all the way from Miriam Vale up to Nonda Downs near Julia Creek.

Heather says she will always remember collecting her from the railway siding and bringing her back in a truck to the station.

“There was this awful, complete silence when everyone came to see her,” she said. “Nobody could believe I would have spent so much money on such a weak, sickly looking little filly. They all thought I was mad.”

Heather started the long journey to nurse the filly back to health. She wanted to prove what she believed was hidden away beneath the hair and the ribs.

Some months later - when the filly had finally gained sufficient condition - Heather sent her back down to Ian Francis at Gympie.

Ian started the filly under saddle and was immediately impressed by her brilliant athleticism and attitude.

He showed her at Brisbane Royal where she won the prestigious 2YO Australian Stock Horse filly led class.

Ian progressed with her training and as a 3YO she won the Moonbi Cow horse Futurity, the most prestigious event of its kind during that era.

It was significant that every other competitor in the event was riding a Quarter Horse because the black stock horse filly showed every bit of the good mind, temperament, and athleticism it took to win the event.

Her winning run was remembered for decades for several reasons.

The filly fell on the heavy, slippery- wet arena surface as she was working her cow down the fence and slid down on her side.

Incredibly, Ian managed to stay in the saddle with both of his feet still jammed in the irons.

The filly sprang to her feet and exploded out of the mud like a black panther, somehow managing to catch her cow again.

She wrapped her up in the final circle and - to the utter amazement of the crowd – she won the event.

Ian believed that the filly was showing all the signs of being a truly exceptional athlete. With his legendary, meticulous attention to detail Ian began to plan her year-long campaign to win the Cloncurry Stockmen's Challenge as a 4YO.

The event had been created by Heather as a Memorial to her father Reg Brown and Ian had helped develop the reining pattern for the new event.

To win such an event with all the deep emotional attachments – not to mention the sheer prestige of the event – meant a great deal to everyone concerned.

Ian then built an immaculate, brand new camp draft arena on his property at Widgee, and he set about training the filly in virtual camp draft conditions.

“If you are going out to hunt,” he once said, “always go loaded for bear.”

Ian certainly found all the ammunition he needed in the young black mare he had built up such a remarkable relationship with.

The combination won both the dry work and the wet work phase of the Cloncurry Stockmen’s Challenge and put themselves a massive twelve points ahead to win the event.

It was a deeply emotional victory for both Ian and Heather because it was her father Reg’s Memorial and - right from the day she first had the idea about creating the Challenge - she had involved Ian and his considerable knowledge to help her create the patterns and most of the basic rules.

“I’m just glad we won it in only the fourth year it was run because boy, it’s going to get really tough from now on,” Ian said.

His words would prove prophetic. Today, that once humble event in a red-dusted cattle town has become not only synonymous with good horsemanship but it has created a massive Challenge industry that is now booming right across Australia.

Heather personally took the saddle off Carousel herself as she came out of the Cloncurry ring and made the decision to retire the brilliant mare at the tender age of four.

It seemed such a waste of such a brilliant young mare who had the ability to reach the stars in any event she contested.

“I was feeling very emotional that day,” Heather says. “I was very close to my father, and it seemed as if he was with us that day”

“Would I have done the same thing thirty-five years later, especially knowing the reality of how hard it is to breed a champion? Probably not, but that was then - and this is now” she said.

“Carousel has rewarded us for a lifetime of loving and caring for her in the best possible way. Her last filly Nonda Dottie Papunya has produced her own champion son Nonda Last Frontier, so the family line continues stronger than ever. “

Star Carousel began the long journey from Cloncurry to Gympie the very next day after her big win.

There’s a funny twist to the story because the utility owned by Janie Penfold that was pulling the float became bogged on the road near Kynuna.

There’s a photograph of the great mare tied up next to the float with Ian’s bare feet sticking out the Ute window while he was having a snooze as they waited for a tow.

It was a very humbling way to end such a triumphant win, but that was life, dirt roads and all.

Back in that era, nobody whinged or complained. They simply got on with it.

Probably the greatest compliment the mare received in all of her years of competition was a simple one line from the legendary horseman who trained her.

“She was one of the greats,” he said.

Star Carousel produced her first foal in 1988, a striking black colt called Nonda Music Man.

He was followed by:

- 1990 by **Nonda Songlines** (filly – Doc’s Boab)
- 1992 **Nonda Yothu Yindi** (colt – Docs Freckles Oak)
- 1995 **Nonda Gurindji** (colt - Doc’s Freckles Oak)
- 2002 **Nonda Paraway** (colt - Nonda Swag)
- 2004 **Nonda Dottie Papunya** (filly - Nonda Swag)

Carousel became an extremely difficult breeder with several reproduction issues that made conception difficult. She was officially retired after her 2002 foal and used as a nanny mare for foals owned by Heather’s good friend Jeanette Elliot at Widgee, not far from Ian Francis farm.

When Heather and her husband, the well-known Reproduction Specialist Dr David Pascoe, finally collected the aged black mare and brought her back to their new farm near Toowoomba, David decided that he would like to have one more attempt at getting her in foal.

The result – which is still considered to be right up there in the ‘absolute miracle’ class – was a black dot on the scanner – which later became known as the black filly **Nonda Dottie Papunya**.

Dottie was sent out on the road with Terry Hall as a three-year-old and when she was droving cattle in heavy scrub near Augathella, she was staked high up in the groin with heavy blood loss.

Terry managed to stem the bleeding and David and Heather organised an emergency float to collect her and bring her back to their Veterinary Hospital at Oakey.

After she recovered, they decided to put her to stud and breed her as a young mare, same as her dam. It proved to be a fortuitous decision.

Her second foal was **Nonda Last Frontier**, a striking black colt by Hazelwood Conman.

“He was one of those colts that just had it all, right from day one,” Heather says.

‘He was smart, good looking, great to work with. He had the athleticism, he had the pedigree, he had the X Factor.’”

The colt was advertised in an industry magazine and the advertisement was spotted by Jody Rozynski in Victoria.

She called Heather and asked her honest opinion of the colt. “I think he ticks every box,” she told her. “I honestly believe he has everything it takes to become both a champion competitor and a champion stallion one day.”

Exactly one hour later, Jody rang back. “We’ll take the colt,” she said.

Just like that.

Jody later told the media that she trusted Heather and David totally and it was clear that they genuinely loved their horses and wanted the best for them.

Nine years later, that same colt Nonda Last Frontier has suddenly burst onto the national stage, famous right across Australia as the winner of the prestigious 2020 Willinga Park Gold Buckle camp draft.

It is an amazing story about the commitment, love and care that great breeders give to develop their great mares, their great sires – and most of all, their great families.

Postscript: Carousel lived at Plaintree Farms under the devoted, loving care of both Heather and David Pascoe until she reached the grand old age of 31.

She died with her head held tenderly in Heather's arms and she was buried under a magnificent old gum tree facing North, the same way that all of Heather's horses are buried.

Full circle.