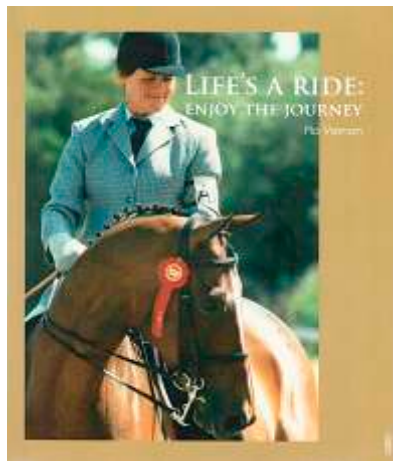


FONT STUD

I am truly indebted to Flo Vernon for providing the information for this article on the Font Stud owned by Neville Comley. A lot of the background information has been gleaned from her most interesting book “LIFE'S A RIDE: ENJOY THE JOURNEY” self-published in 2017.

Florence Duncan was born in George but in 1952 the family moved to Cape Town where she was educated at Rustenburg High School for Girls. Flo started riding in her teenage years and had no idea at the start that the passion she developed for horses would have a major influence on her journey through life.

One of her most vivid memories is of walking up the hill from the church in Belmont Road, Rondebosch, with her mother after the morning service. Her mother asked her whether she would like to have riding lessons to which she replied 'Yes, please!' The



realization of what horse-riding was about dawned on her at Joan Blackwell's Beneva Stables (see 2010 Journal p105) and that was the start of her lifelong association with horses. She became immersed in horse-riding and spent every possible moment she could at Beneva exercising as many horses as possible during the week for their owners who could only ride over the weekends. Although Flo was a medical technologist attached to Groote Schuur Hospital, because she often worked night shift she was able to ride during the day. In addition she participated in shows, hunter trials, reliability trials, drag hunting, eventing, endurance and finally found the passion of her life; dressage.

She moved to the then Rhodesia and married Carl Vernon who worked for the Rhodesian National Parks. In mid 1970's when her children reached school-going age and because of the unrest, they moved to South Africa and ultimately settled in East London where horses played an ever-increasing role in her life. Life revolved around agricultural shows and South African Championships. She was involved in Saddle Horses and Warmbloods mostly but the Thoroughbred was also used to a large extent. She qualified as a judge in many disciplines during this period.

Neville Comley, who managed the Kommadagga farms is the owner of the Font Stud. According to Studbook he has registered/recorded 73 Saddle Horses, 24 Warmbloods and 6 Welsh Part-bred ponies since 1968. Neville suffers from a

degenerative disease of the retina; when Flo met him he only had 4% sight which has slowly deteriorated. He is able to judge the conformation of a horse by feeling the body and would listen to discern the purity of the gaits. He competed successfully at most of the agricultural shows as well as at the SA Championships in Bloemfontein.



Aberdare Dozy and Font Woodpecker

The first Welsh pony to be acquired was Aberdare Dozy (Coed Coch Prydus x ??) bought as a yearling filly in 1978, with the purpose of her eventually being a riding pony.

In 1981, Neville bought Aberdare Sepal (?? x Aberdare Petal) from Mrs Niven as a 3-year-old

filly in foal to Spasido Sisi Senor (Torbry Sattelite x Revel Siesta) and on 1 November, 1982, Font Senorita, Neville's first Welsh pony was foaled. She was to become the principal Welsh pony brood mare for the stud.

On Christmas day of 1980, Aberdare Nicholas 2 sired by Bukkenburg Billy out of Aberdare Lotus was born. On a visit to Mrs Mackie-Niven in mid-1981 Neville had seen a young colt galloping down the hill at the Aberdare farm with all the other mares and foals in tow. Neville felt that he was old enough to leave his mother and told Mrs Niven that he would like to buy him when weaned provided she did not



Aberdare Sepal and Font Senorita

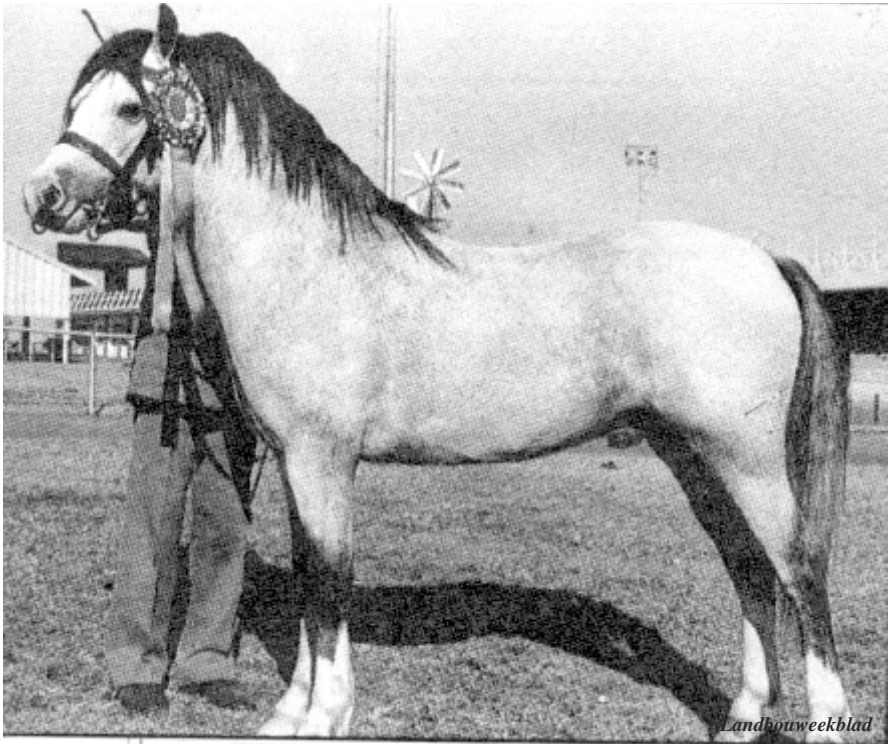


Aberdare Nicholas II

over-charge for him! A few months later Neville bought this colt and was to become his breeding stallion. In 1985 Nicholas covered Font Seniorita, the result of this mating leading to the birth of the colt Font Senior Nic on 27 August, 1986, while in the same year he covered Font Lady Jayne producing Font Sir Lancelot on 2 September, 1986. Flo backed Nicholas and also put him in harness. At one Bathurst show Nicholas won the Open Victor Ludorum Shield competing against all the other horses which were terrified of him. He had the habit to high-blow and the other horses around him would just take off.

In 1986 Neville bought Bernet Pinocchio (Coed Coch Nerog x Badgemore Petria) from Myburgh Streicher of the Bukkenburg Stud who had bought him from the breeder, Mrs Griesel, a few months earlier. He was immediately put to Aberdare Dozzy and on 24 September, 1987, Font Woodpecker was born. Woodpecker was sold to the Ferreira's as a two-year-old. Pinocchio was an exceedingly well-mannered pony and easy to work with.

Earlier Neville had the opportunity of using the good-looking grey Thoroughbred stallion, Lancer, before he went to the Transvaal for his last breeding season. He



Bernet Pinocchio

took his Saddle Horse Crackling Rosie, who had a foal at foot, to Ernie and Jonné Davenport's farm near Pearston. Rosie was served by Lancer but during the night there was a tremendous commotion at the stables and the young colt Mayfair Wunderstern was found in her paddock while she was protecting her colt foal. Regrettably, Lancer died three months later. After Rosie had foaled, a vain search was made for grey hairs on the colt, but there were none. The realisation dawned that the beautiful chestnut colouring with white stockings was permanent, as was the name, Font Last Lancer!

Early in 1990 Font Last Lancer was put to Font Seniorita and in April 1991 Font PTW was foaled (*PTW - Prettier Than Winooski – Winooski being the first foal Flo bred which was by Last Lancer out of a warmblood mare Davenport Walliken*). The breeding was repeated in 1991 and on 6 April 1992 Seniorita foaled Font Little Llewellyn who was sold to Diane Snodgrass in 1994. He was jumped very successfully by Mariska de Villiers before he was exported to the USA to compete. Font Seniorita was sold to the Le Roux family.

The last Partbred Welsh was by Aberdare Nicholas out of Aberdare Dozzy who produced Font Nicole.



Ponies in the drought – Font Senorita, Aberdare Nicholas and Aberdare Dozzy

During the drought, the pony mares and foals were allowed to graze in the garden. Flo noticed the sea shells that were on one of the small tables in the lounge were often moved and wondered why, until she saw Nicole coming through the front door and going to the table to nuzzle the shells. Flo did not mind, so left the door open, until the day Nicole led all the other ponies into the lounge and down the passage, leaving through the kitchen!

When the children were in primary school, they each had a Welsh Pony. Flo's daughter, Shelley used to ride Wellington Womble to the Kammadagga school when she needed extra lessons. Her son, Dean was a reluctant rider but would ride Chummy to take part in the out-rides. Neville's sons, Chad and Rhys started on lovely Welsh pony mares before progressing to Welsh pony stallions.

Chad afterwards rode Aberdare Nicholas who was a crowd-pleaser; he was very proud and enjoyed showing off. They had won many classes at the agricultural shows as well as the very prestigious SA Riding Pony class at the championship



Font Nicole with Dean Vernon



Bernet Pinocchio with Dean Vernon

show in Bloemfontein. Flo used to jump Nicholas at Grahamstown club shows providing Pat Pohl with her amusement for the weekend, and she drove him in harness. At one SA Welsh Pony Championship show, Nicholas and Flo entered the harness obstacle event: when they had to drive through a 'dog's leg' of lucerne bales, Nicholas jumped the first bale! As Flo had to get out and dislodge the bale from between and pony and the cart, they were eliminated.

Rhys rode Pinocchio, a very smart upright pony, grey apart from his black knees, and also drove him successfully in harness classes. Both the boys progressed to competing at saddle horse shows.