

## PONY POPULARITY

A comparatively recent and, in my opinion, very welcome development in the South African riding scene, is the appearance in our showrings of steadily increasing numbers of ‘quality’ children’s ponies. They are still in a minority but these pretty little animals have begun to make a definite place for themselves, and it is obvious that they are here to stay.

There is something about the sight of a small, obviously very young rider, beautifully and suitably mounted on a pony of appropriately corresponding size, that has a charm all of its own. They are a pleasure to watch and to judge. Today these small ponies are being especially bred for the purpose. Previously the only means people had at their disposal for producing so-called ‘children’s ponies’ with any pretensions to quality were either underfeeding, which resulted in the weedy thoroughbred type, or the introduction of Shetland blood. This gave us mounts which were too broad, bad movers and which in my experience, at any rate, almost invariably had uncertain – if not definitely unpleasant – temperaments.

One of the first enthusiasts to make a constructive effort to remedy this sorry state of affairs was Mrs R Lasbrey of Constantia in the Cape. In 1948 she became the first Welsh Pony importer in South Africa. It seemed obvious to her that the ideal way to start was by importing a small breeding nucleus of these attractive animals. They were already firmly established in Britain and America as the ideal mounts for children, either purebred or judiciously crossed.

With an eye to variety, she chose different colours, and the first Welsh mountain ponies to make their appearance in this country were a roan, a black, a chestnut and a grey. There were four in-foal mares and a stallion. She exercised great care and deliberation before making her final selection, and what came into the country as foundation stock was of a very high quality indeed.

*Coed Coch Glyndwr*, sire of the original stallion, *Coed Coch Seryddwr* – was Supreme Champion of Great Britain in his day, and *Seryddwr*’s own son, *Coed Coch Madog*, for whom offers of four figures have been refused, has swept the boards in Britain, under the covetous eyes of United States breeders. Other enthusiasts joined her, notably Miss Ida Illingworth of White River, owner of *Valiant*, South African Supreme Champion Welsh Stallion; the Clarkes of Hanover, Cape; the Grobbelaars of Villiers in the Free State, Mrs Mackie Niven of Addo and Mrs Pam Trollip of Bedford. It all looked very promising for the future.

But South African, by and large, were not at all pony conscious, nor were they educated to appreciate a quality pony; nor was it accepted or admitted that the

foundation of good horsemanship was laid in early days. It is only now, after over a decade, that it is becoming accepted that a child must be mounted correctly from the beginning if he is eventually to realise his full potential as a horseman. The Welsh pony has a very good front, with a strong, sloping shoulder, good length of rein and narrowness between the small rider's legs: with all this he has the fluid free action of a show hack, which is an invaluable asset in that it accustoms the child to the correct movement and 'feel' of the horse onto which he will eventually graduate. So often the child – having been started on a Shetland or other unsuitable type of stocky, stunted pony – finds he is riding something completely unfamiliar when he makes the transition to a larger mount. He has not got the proper feel at all and has to start unlearning in order to re-learn.

That the desirability of smaller quality mounts is recognised in Britain and the Federation is clearly indicated by the fact that most show schedules start with showing classes for ponies as small as 12.2 hands and under. The number of ponies of this size being ridden by children warrants these classes. If we were also able to introduce smaller height classes we would be able to introduce correspondingly more age division, thus automatically giving the very young rider his chance to get into the showing and gain valuable experience.

In the showing or out of it he could not be better mounted than on a Welsh or Welsh Mountain pony. Temperamentally tractable and extremely sweet natured, they mature both physically and mentally much earlier than any other breed. They can be ridden at two years without damage to their legs and a young child can safely be mounted on a Welshie of, say, four years, whereas it would be totally unsafe to mount him on any other type of pony of the same age. So often in the past it has been the aged pony on which, through lack of anything else, we have been compelled to mount our very young riders.

With the advent of the fast-maturing Welshie, the search for aged ponies is over. The Welsh or Welsh type pony can grow older alongside his small rider, and the child benefits immeasurably by having not only a mount, but a pet which he can handle himself. It will submit patiently to his efforts – often none too expert – to saddle and bridle it, and will stand with equal patience while he mounts and dismounts. These ponies learn fast and are incredibly well behaved in the showing; they do not seem to suffer from any of the temperament so often displayed – to great disadvantage – by their larger rivals.

I have seen a Welsh Mountain mare aged four years, which had only been broken in for a few months, successfully guided to fourth place in a class of some 20 entries by a six-year-old rider in what was a first showing appearance for both of them.

Veteran of the Welsh show ponies in this country is *Badgemore Passika*, He was originally bought from Mrs Lasbrey by Mrs Dawn Baines of Salisbury for her small son, Peter. My wife and I judged him as Champion Child's Pony at Salisbury in 1955. But he was more than that; like all of his breed he lost no time in becoming one of the family. And so he has gone on – passed on from one carefully chosen home to another. His first rider is grownup now, but *Passika* is still at it, teaching succeeding generations the skills and joys of early horsemanship. He was Reserve Champion Child's Pony at the Royal Show at Salisbury this year.

At the 1962 Rand Easter Show and at Salisbury, the Child's Pony Championship was awarded to a Welshie – *Badgemore Silver Prince* who, with his stable companion *Badgemore Silver Atom* had come down to show from Rhodesia. The first Welshie to make his debut at the Easter Show was Mrs May Foxcroft's partbred *Taffy*, a son of *Valiant*. At the age of two years he behaved like a veteran in the ring, to win his class and become Reserve Champion Child's Pony!

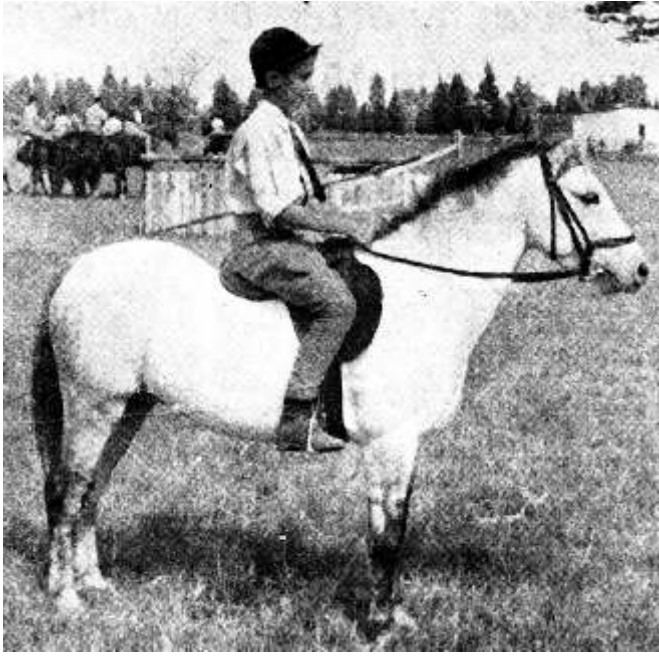
And so have followed *Jamani Blue Elle*, *Foresyte Valiant Sunday Morning*, *Foresyte Valiant Star* and *Foresyte Valiant Twinkle*. In the very near future, we hope to see many more.

### **DAVID STUBBS 1962**

The South African Tatler,  
November, 1962

*Adam Struben, aged six,  
and his four-year-old  
purebred Welsh mountain  
pony mare, Abergele Baby,  
prize winners at a recent  
show. Bred by Mrs E E  
Clarke of Hanover Cape;  
this mare is by Gredington  
Ifan out of Gredington  
Hogennig, both imported  
Photo: Rand Sport and  
Press.*





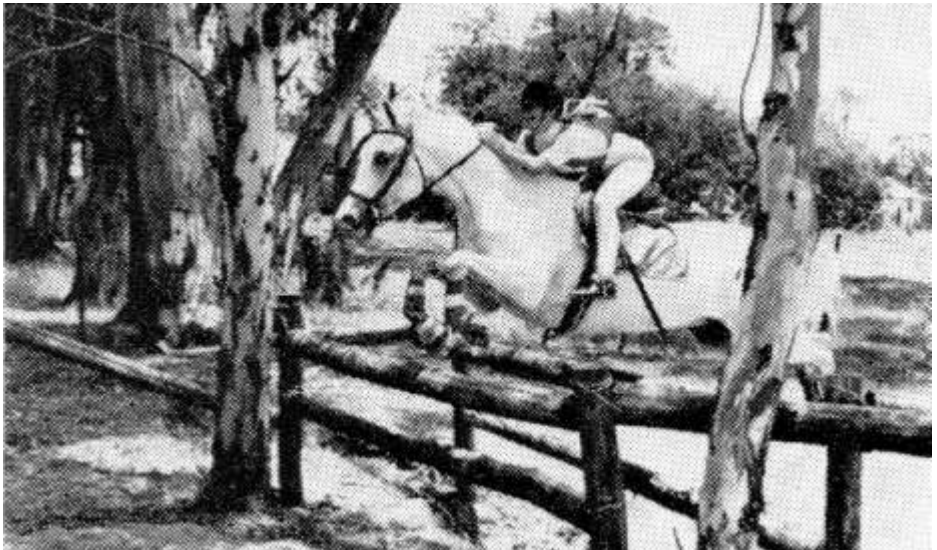
*Badgemore Passika: Peter Baines at the Pony Club camp. Champion Child's pony at the Royal Show, Rhodesia*



*Jamani Blue Elle: Bethel Show 1963, Champion Child's Pony ridden by Peter Armitage*



*Badgemore Silver Prince: 1962 Rand Easter child's pony champion ridden by R Halsted*



*Taffy with Diane Foxcroft*