

# The Clydesdale

"If you breed Clydesdales, then who buys them?" That's a very good question and it was put to me in a conversation with George Simmons of Ashburn Clydesdale Stud, New Zealand, when he visited Brisbane Royal Show (the Ekka) in 1988. George was enjoying continuing his family's Clydesdale breeding legacy, begun in 1946 by his father.

Australia has a few similar Clydesdale families – breeding for over half a century, as well as newer breeders, plus some who just like to own one horse. So, where do they, on average, 300 foals that are registered every year with the CCHS (the Commonwealth Clydesdale Horse Society) go to or end up?

If you'd asked that question in the 1970s, the answer could have been that some were bought by aspiring back-to-basics 'hippy farmers' and many more by those aspiring to 'the good life', wanting a horse to perhaps plough their self-sufficient veggie garden and to gaze over whilst reading the latest Grass Roots or Earth Garden alternative lifestyle magazines...

Dreaming... A great dream. In the 1980s, the answer tended to graduate more toward those who'd like a waggon to travel around the countryside in; perhaps gypsy-like or drover-like to give it an Aussie swing. Some wanted a waggon to take to shows and parade in, deciding that getting their feet dirty in ploughed soil wasn't their idea of an idyllic retirement, but plodding into the sunset just might be...

The 1990s brought a slightly more commercial bent, as many who might buy the younger Clydesdales thought about perhaps setting up businesses, and hiring their great white-faced and long-feathered horses out for rides, weddings or formals. For some, this meant their new-found hobby could be a partly self-funding enterprise and, for a few, it was just that.

2001, with '9-11' and all that went with it, descended upon the world with 'insurance' as the big ogre; the necessary evil. It meant those who had thought about venturing out to take paying passengers needed to reconsider their aims, since public liability costs soared to prohibitive figures. It wasn't so easy to do anything much with heavy horses in public just on whom any more.

Typical buyers of Clydesdales were now no longer what many imagined they would be. Sure, some foals were still bought 'internally' (by existing breeders) – a new stallion, fresh female genetics, or an extra gelding to replace a retired older one or to pair up with a single horse – but now, a few newer owners were, to the shock and horror of some puritans, actually riding their Clydesdales!

What amazing waves happened in the industry! Some somehow felt this could lead to the demise of the heavy horse or would auger a change in the type of the breed, whilst other breeders felt the riding horse market was a terrific opportunity to place other stock that might have still been perfectly good horses, but perhaps were not of a Royal Show top-place-getter standard. Fast-forward to the 20-teens and the Clydesdale as riding horse is now widely accepted and enjoyed, and it even has ridden classes included in the three eastern states' capital city Royal Show schedules: Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

The 'information age', which the internet has brought us, has also led to people wanting answers and perhaps impatiently wanting them now! Many Clydesdale buyers of the last decade are those who might have had a pony as a child, perhaps attended pony club, then grown up, married, moved away from horses and then raised a family.

Twenty-or-so years later, the last of the kids have finally moved out, suddenly some of these older ex-pony-clubbers are starting to feel the twangs of enjoyable childhood memories, but being a bit overweight (another thing brought on by internet inactivity!), they feel it would be kinder if the horse they'd like to get was perhaps a bit stronger and a bit slower than the faithful show pony they rode in their teens. I know! What about a Clydesdale!

Coupled with the idea of riding a Clydesdale is the idea that a saddle is not an overly specialised piece of equipment nor is a bridle – compared with learning all about winkers, collars, cart harness, slide or plough harness, its correct fit, and a multitude of variations of wheeled vehicles and horse-drawn implements, which are not among the 'typical horsey person's range of basic knowledge'.

Whilst the purebred Clydesdale has now found and established a firm place amongst riding and dressage fans, thanks to persistent efforts from many enthusiasts over the past 10-12 years, it is still enjoyed as the harness horse it always was, amongst many other breeders and owners.

Carlton & United Breweries are perhaps the biggest public face of Clydesdales regularly seen with their team taking part in parades and openings all around Australia, as well as local brewery deliveries in Melbourne. Penfold's Stationers in Sydney only relatively recently ceased to use a Clydesdale and waggon for the company's deliveries and that was because they had been taken over by another organisation.

Eucalypt Park Chieftain and Windsor Park Coco Chanel, owned by Toby and Anita Barton, Windsor Park Clydesdales. Photo by Cassie Steele, CSteele Designs.

The stallion Happy Choice (imp. NZ), Champion Stallion, Brisbane Royal Show 1934, and Sydney Royal 1935, showing that great Clydesdale action and exhibited by Jim Smith. Photo courtesy Ian Stewart-Koster.



Reaping and Binding at Macalister, Darling Downs, Qld, in April 2010. Photo courtesy of Andrew Stewart-Koster.



Baron's Pride (Scotland), the sire of Loch Fergus one of the many stallions imported by pioneering Clydesdale breeder Arnold Wienholt of Maryvale near Warwick, Queensland. Loch Fergus was a popular champion at the Brisbane Exhibition from 1882.



Rosbercon Marilyn Monroe with her foal Shiralee Scandalous. Courtesy of Jane Stephens, Miss Jane Photography.

The Victor Harbour Council in South Australia set up horse-drawn trams in 1986 to take passengers out over a mile of causeway to Granite Island, and Clydesdales have been earning their keep for three decades there now ferrying tourists back and forth. In many other towns and museums, Clydesdales are used daily to give rides to the public, pulling drags, coaches, trams and omnibuses. However, being 'out in the streets' is not what every new Clydesdale owner aspires to either.

The Clydesdale has long been regarded as a bit of a 'family horse'. 'Having fun' need not be the prerogative of just one family member, like taking a pony to a show might be. Everyone – Mum, Dad, and maybe a couple of kids as well – can each take a turn at trying to skilfully manoeuvre Bess through an obstacle course of witches hats and hay bales at a local show or field day.

It is these types of working horse field days that have grown tremendously in popularity around Australia. The Gatton Field Days in the first weekend of May each year in Queensland is Australia's longest running field day event, having started from a smaller field day nearby in 1978. Showy turnout classes are coupled with led-in breed classes, skilful ploughing and implement classes, obstacle driving in vehicles and slides, log snigging, junior handler classes and, of course, ridden events. The ridden classes vary between a typical barrel race, a small jumping course and a hack-type heavy horse under saddle class. Some shows also include ridden novelty obstacle classes.

St Heliers at Muswellbrook, a New South Wales field day on the second weekend in August, is setting up to be of similar stature to Gatton, whilst in Victoria, the Heavy Horse Festival at Werribee in mid-February is gaining great popularity. In Western Australia, there is a great variety of led, ridden, and working and driven classes at Dardanup and Kojonup.

In Tasmania, the Ridgley Horse Ploughing Association was formed in 1926 and might be still running ploughing events. Each of these types of heavy horse field days, plus others not mentioned, augments the classes that many local agricultural shows also put on for the benefit of Clydesdale breeders and exhibitors, usually culminating at 'The Royal' in each state capital city.

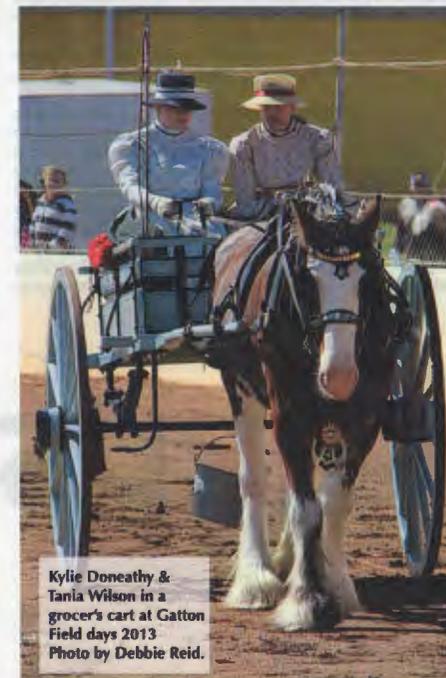
So, decade by decade, the foals produced by stud breeders find themselves new homes in someone else's dream. The flavour of the dream changes a bit with time, but the white and honest faces of the Clydesdales still remain the great focus!

But, what is the Clydesdale?

"But for me, the giant graces, the white and honest faces, the power upon the traces: of the Clydes," penned Scottish poet Will Ogilvie in 1898. For most people, it is just that – a broad blaze and white feathered legs on a great, magnificent and awesome beast.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, however, it was a different matter. Farm work was done either by hand, by bullock or by draught horse. Breeders in southern Scotland made use of classier stallions imported by wealthier landowners in the early to mid-1700's to improve the type of farm horse they had. Some Flemish stallions, in particular, were noted for the great effect they had on the quality of local stock.

The Highland Society started offering premiums for improving the breeding of horses from the 1830s. Horse breeding around the valley of the Clyde – now known as Lanarkshire, but then called Clydesdale – attained a very high standard and, thus, lent its name to this type of horse, which began to establish itself as a breed.



Kylie Doneathy & Tania Wilson in a grocer's cart at Gatton Field days 2013. Photo by Debbie Reid.

Lorraine Nicholas' pair of purebred Clydesdale geldings, Baringhup Keith (offside-furrow horse) & Ben (nearside), ploughing at St Heliers' field days August 2014. Photo courtesy Lee Willis.



Farmers and breeders found the cleaner-jointed and freer-moving, active types they were producing gained better prices at the markets, and were more favoured by carters and carriers, because it was found they lasted longer in work. They were a more mechanically-efficient proposition, than rougher legged or coarser types for haulage.

Although the breed was always a 'farm' horse, about 80 to 100 years of selective breeding and, in particular, line-breeding, helped it shine particularly as a lorry horse. A lorry is a flat-topped sprung waggon used for town deliveries and haulage. The Clydesdale's great action and shock-absorbing legs were especially beneficial features.

A breed organisation – the Clydesdale Horse Society of Great Britain and Ireland – was formed, and the first studbook to establish and record retrospective pedigrees was published in 1878. It shows some special selected line-breeding was used to produce some of the notable foundation sires. Prince of Wales and Darnley being progenitors of much of the winning stock in the later 1800s. Darnley was said to have 'exceedingly good feet and limbs' and 'when shown at the trot and walking gait, he had no rival'. Prince of Wales was probably best known for the showing produce he got from daughters of Damley.

A whole book (or volumes) could be written about the early Scottish Clydesdales, and the breeders who helped concentrate and establish the type of horse that they did, which enabled the Clydesdale to be considered 'the Thoroughbred of the draught breeds', in terms of its quality flat bone, wide heels, springy pasterns, broad hocks, close hock action and clean joints.

There are fascinating stories to be read, written by James Kilpatrick and William Dunlop, one-time joint owners of Baron of Buchlyvie, the stallion that eventually went to auction fetching a record 9,500 guineas in December 1911, in an attempt to settle the partnership dispute between those two. The Baron then became the sire of Dunure Footprint, setting more records with successful showing progeny in Scotland and abroad, including Australia.

Meanwhile downunder

However, in the colonies, one of the great and little-recognised pioneers of Clydesdales in Australia was Arnold Wienholt of Maryvale near Warwick, Queensland. He built a homestead on the pastoral run in 1846 (the area was still a part of New South Wales then) and he established a breeding stud in 1855.

Arnold was determined to import only the best he could from the United Kingdom, bringing Champion out in 1855 and Iron Duke in 1860 just after Queensland became a separate colony from New South Wales. Iron Duke was reputedly a part-Shire horse of also Clydesdale ancestry. England's Glory arrived in 1862, and Prince Arthur and Prince Alfred in 1864. The latter two came from Prince Albert the Queen Consort's stud at Windsor, but they were Clydesdale horses.

Wienholt engaged E.O.W. Hill, a cousin of his, to be his studmaster in 1866. 13 more imports from Scotland reached to Maryvale, including Loch Fergus, who was a popular champion at the Brisbane Exhibition from 1882 and Crystal Star by Baron's Pride. In 1907 in Brisbane, there were 21 stallions in the Aged Heavy Draught Stallion class, including three Maryvale-bred half-brothers – all sons of the mare Lady Jane.

6 year old Duneske Flash Pearl, three times Champion Mare at Brisbane Royal Show, with Ian Stewart-Koster. Photo by Julie Wilson courtesy of Ian Stewart-Koster.



Stanhope Park Trademark (Luke) and McMurchie Archibald (Sam) wait patiently for their passengers at Avondale Historical Farm in Beverley, WA. Photo by Sue Manning courtesy of Colonial Clydesdales.



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**Aarunga Master Ben, Champion Stallion and Supreme Champion at Werribee Heavy Horse Festival, February 2015, with breeder Andrew Marriott. Photo courtesy Rob Lakin.**



**Glengallan Montana Sun shown by Peter Lowry at the 2015 CCHS Junior Championships. Photo TJ McCoombes Photography**



**Box Valley Emily, Junior Champion Filly, Werribee Heavy Horse Festival, Vic. February 2015, with breeder Peter Jorgensen. Photo courtesy Rob Lakin.**



**McMurchie Archibald (Sam) ridden by Emma Iddison, Colonial Clydesdales. Photo courtesy of Colonial Clydesdales.**

Wienholt's AWI brand was known far and wide with great respect, and his own station's studbook was said to predate that of the CHS of Great Britain and Ireland by 23 years. However, all good things must come to an end and, after managing the stud for 36 years for Wienholt, E.O.W. Hill then had to oversee its dispersal, as the State Government forcefully resumed the land for closer settlement from January 1909.

Thus, in May 1908, just over 400 head of Clydesdales, including 80 foals, were dispersed by public auction in Warwick, taking three days and realising approximately 20,000 pounds – a formidable price, and a momentous occasion for the state and the family. This sale allowed many aspiring breeders in Queensland to get a significant start in breeding at a time when the purebred horse was recognised and appreciated, but did not yet have its own specific classes at Royal Shows in Australia.

There were many, many other breeders of significance in Australia, some starting later in the 1800's, and others in various decades of the 1900s. Their stories can fill many a book. The Clydesdale grew in popularity as a farm and lorry horse until just after the Second World War, when suddenly fuel rationing was stopped and machinery dealers were keen to sell tractors.

The horse market drastically plummeted, but gained a brief bit of momentum a few years later when a double drought season in some states meant those who retained horses could still feed them from a remnants of a failed crop, while those farmers trying to make payments on a tractor and fuel loan had no crop or produce to sell at all.

2015 marks 100 years at Melbourne Royal Show for the Clydesdale as a breed to have its own classes. To commemorate the occasion, the Victorian Branch of the CCHS has assembled a special yearbook, which pictorially celebrates the breed there over the past century. This will be launched during the show in late September.

The Commonwealth Clydesdale Horse Society in Australia The CCHS is the current governing body of the breed in Australia. It was established as a provisional body in 1918, following negotiations with the three publishers of separate state studbooks in 1917. Their first studbook was published in 1924, although many of the Royal Shows included specific Clydesdale classes from 1914-1915, as opposed to generic draught horse led-in classes.

The biggest Australian studbook was Volume 10 (Part 1) in 1937, with 579 stallions/colts and 2,201 mares/fillies registered for that year. Volumes 9 and 11 were almost of a similar size. In 2014, Volume 38 was produced – continuing a general trend of recording about 300 total births registered annually over the past 10 years.

Requirements are that progeny can only be registered if both of their parents are registered, and that the stallion has passed his current inspection for freedom of various potentially hereditary unsoundnesses. Younger stallions must also be DNA recorded. Breeders must, of course, be members of the CCHS to be able to register the progeny of a mare they own.



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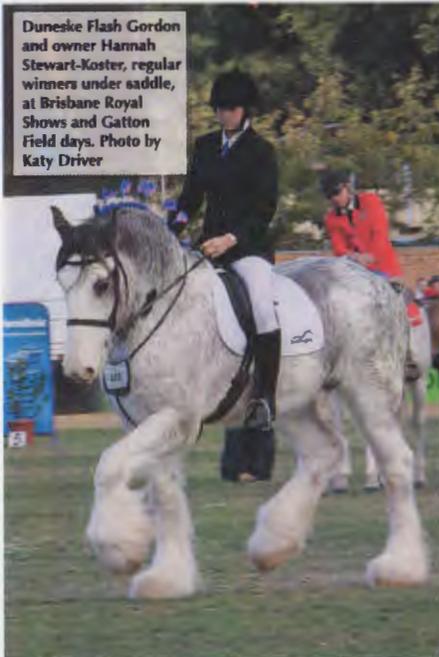


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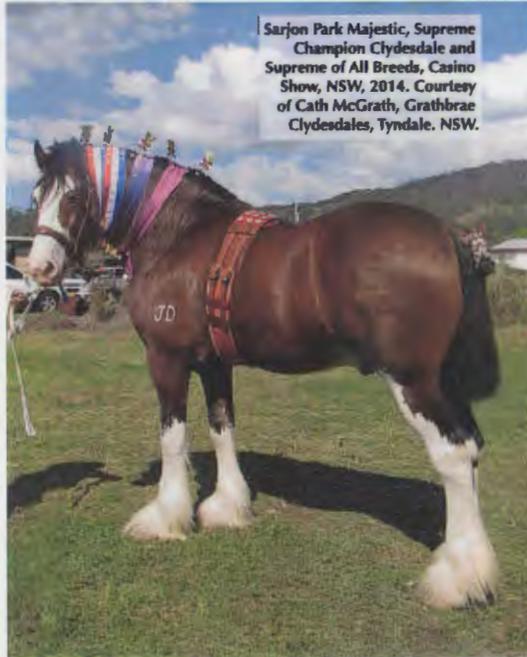
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Duneske Flash Gordon and owner Hannah Stewart-Koster, regular winners under saddle, at Brisbane Royal Shows and Gatton Field days. Photo by Katy Driver



Sarjon Park Majestic, Supreme Champion Clydesdale and Supreme of All Breeds, Casino Show, NSW, 2014. Courtesy of Cath McGrath, Grathbrae Clydesdales, Tyndale. NSW.

Breeders join the society and are assigned to the branch of the state in which they live. There are about 600 members of the society in Australia, though not all own Clydesdales. Membership numbers and breed registration numbers are fairly stable at the moment. Many of the state branches have their own websites and also Facebook pages for updated information nowadays. The society's federal website is [www.clydesdalehorse.com.au](http://www.clydesdalehorse.com.au).

Features of the breed

In a nutshell, the Clydesdale is a sound, active, working horse. Colour is unimportant. They can be black, brown, bay, through to red and blue roans, and some with mostly grey/white coats. Similarly, feather, which is mostly white, can also be black or brown. Eye colour can also vary, and blue or walleyes are not considered to be at all detrimental.

Typical heights range from 16 to 17.1 hh for most mares, and 16.1 to 17.2 hh for most stallions, although the breed does not disqualify any horse for being outside that typical range. Freedom from hereditary unsoundnesses is always stressed and, on that subject, ringbone, sidebone, thoroughpin, curb, bog spavin, bone spavin, stringhalt, overshot jaw, undershot jaw, cataracts, shivering/nervy, nasal disease and malformation of the genitals must be guarded against at all times.

A mature stallion or gelding is generally found to show as much depth of body when seen from side-on and he has daylight underneath his body. A close-coupled conformation presents a fairly square shape, taken vertically up front and hind canon bones, and horizontally from the wither to over the hips. A mare can be expected to perhaps seem a little roomier in the body to allow for her to carry a foal.

The front legs should be under the body, not wide like a bulldog, and they should hang straight down, without any tendency to be backward or forward at the knee. The knee should be broad, and the canon bone and tendons should be wide as seen from side-on, and comparatively narrow when seen from front-on. The front pasterns should lie at about 45 degrees and should match the slope of the front of the hoof. Undemeath, the hoof should show a broad frog and, on top, a wide coronet or hoof-head, covered with quality hair called 'spat.'

The hind legs, unlike those of a typical riding horse, should actually be 'close behind.' This means that the hocks are comparatively close, as are the hind fetlocks, and then the hind canon bones should be parallel and vertical. The back edge of the hind canon bones should line up plumb (vertically) under the rounded back end of the rump. In preference, the hind legs should be neither sickle-hocked nor camped-out behind, nor cow-hocked.

The reason for the hocks having to be close-behind relates to mechanical efficiency, since the Clydesdale is essentially a power or motive source. Horses in heavy draught, or under a heavy load, when asked to pull, will more-likely waddle somewhat if the back legs are wide apart. By being able to concentrate their pushing force in a straight line, by walking close-behind, they will be more mechanically efficient, and place fewer stresses on their spine and joints.



Stanhope Park Trademark (Luke) and McMurchie Archibald (Sam) bred by Stanhope Park and McMurchie Stud now owned by Colonial Clydesdales. Bella the border Collie sits next to Emma Iddison driving the Abbotsford Brewery Lorry built in Melbourne (circa) late 1800's. Photo by Vicki Tapper courtesy of Colonial Clydesdales.



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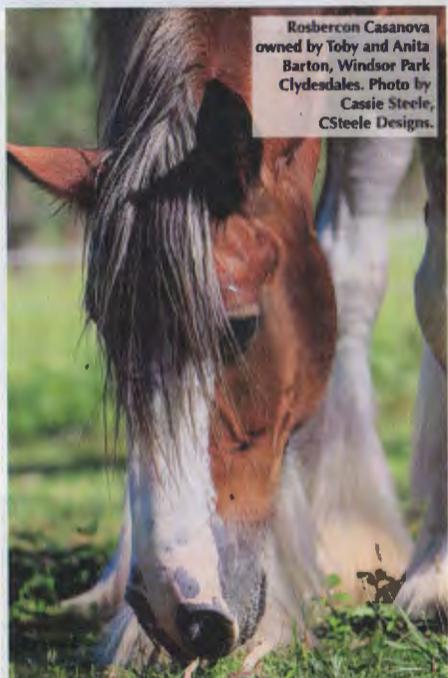
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5 year old Duneske Flash Beauty with handler Sarah Stewart-Koster at Gatton field days 2015 just awarded Reserve Champion Mare behind her 3/4 sister Pearl. Photo courtesy Teresa McCoombes.



Rosbercon Casanova owned by Toby and Anita Barton, Windsor Park Clydesdales. Photo by Cassie Steele, CSteele Designs.



Last minute preparation at the Royal Highland Show, Edinburgh 2013. Photo courtesy of Ian Stewart-Koster.

The shape of the hock is also something that has taken many years to establish with great quality. It should be broad as seen from side-on and comparatively narrow from the front view, but clean and well-proportioned, with no tendency to fullness or puffiness. The hock joint is under the greatest stress of any part of the body when the horse is under work and, for that reason, it is the singular part which most breeders of old paid particular attention to when establishing the Clydesdale.

As well as hock shape and position (or 'set'), the classic feature of the breed is its terrific 'action'. This is the ability to lift the knees high and to lift the hocks high, so the hooves can travel far. It is normal (and expected) that the Clydesdale at walk will overstep by one foot size with the hind, each hoofprint, left by a front hoof. As well as lifting the knees and striding along, the hocks should be lifted smartly up and then carried forwards in each stride.

Older breeders would often talk of a horse that didn't lift its hocks much as being a 'grass cutter' because the hind hooves seemed to scarcely leave the ground, but more-or-less skidded along at a lawnmower blade height!

In order to have great action, a good sloping shoulder is essential, and with that, a good outlook, and good length of rein or neck length. Plenty of breadth between the eyes suggests room inside the skull for a good-natured brain to help the breed to keep its 'gentle giants' tagline. More information on breed features can be found via the society.

"If you breed Clydesdales, then who buys them?"  
So, as with the opening question, we will repeat it as the closing question and answer it saying, "Anybody would like to enjoy some fun with the Breed that Built the Nation," whether in harness or under saddle, for people experienced or learning - Clydesdales are great fun to be with!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ian Stewart-Koster, owner of Duneske Clydesdale Stud, has been working, breeding and showing Clydesdales since the 1980's, and his family has 16 on their farm on the northern Darling Downs, Queensland. This year will be his 30th attending Brisbane Royal Show, and he spent over 20 years writing newsletters for the Queensland Branch of the CCHS, as well as researching and writing two history books on the breed in Queensland. For more information, visit [www.aussieheavyhorses.com](http://www.aussieheavyhorses.com). Ian can be contacted on (07) 4692 8292 or [ian@traditionalsigns.com](mailto:ian@traditionalsigns.com).

To find out more about the Commonwealth Clydesdale Horse Society, visit [www.clydesdalehorse.com.au](http://www.clydesdalehorse.com.au) or email [fedsec@clydesdalehorse.com.au](mailto:fedsec@clydesdalehorse.com.au).

