

Kilgobbin Stud - naturally. The home of Carl Bronner, her Friesians and Warlanders. Someone who has a whole new approach to raising young horses - and it makes 100% logical (and neurological) sense!

So what is different about Kilgobbin and why does it work?

At Kilgobbin, horses live out in herds, big herds and interact with each other in a stimulating environment. There are hills, trees, dams and they get to move across large areas of varied terrain. They really get to gallop, play and they learn to balance on the hills. There are different age groups of mixed mares and geldings and in some cases stallion interaction. Foals are often born outside and Carl finds that in comparison to some of the other studs she knows where horses are born in stables, she has fewer injuries, far fewer problems at birth and the horses don't seem to get joint illnesses or get sick as often.

What can Carl offer? Why buy a horse from Kilgobbin stud in particular?

Carl says that by the time she had worked through getting her first few horses to that **desirable stage**, she realised that having a young horse that is naturally brought up in regard to his herd and nutrition and without inappropriate human interference means that you can get the best head start you could ask for. This, she says, makes all the rest so much easier - everything you will wish to do with your horse will fall into place much easier and much quicker. As she says in her promo:

“There is no such thing as the perfect horse... you have to find the best ingredients and blend them with a training method that is the most compatible with the horse, educate yourself and mix it all together with a whole lot of time”

Sadly I find that many breeders are in it just for the money or the prestige. Friends of mine who recently tried to buy a horse were not considered by some of the breeders they went to because the horse was not going to be going to a **competitive home**. This really says it all doesn't it? Carl, in contrast, really tries to help find a good home for her horses and also a match between the horse and the human. She also puts in a lot of work to find the best feeding programme and ensures that her horses are handled correctly right from the start. Foals and young horses leaving Kilgobbin are a cut above the rest and most people who experience them cannot believe what they are seeing. Their usual experiences of young horses and foals, is of pushy and uneducated young stock but at Kilgobbin, a horse is expected to: stand for the farrier, be able to have its feet handled easily, stand for the equine dentist and be confident, lead up well, stand on a block, move sideways and backwards, yield in all directions and load into a trailer - **and all before it is 6 months old.**

What does Kilgobbin's breeding/handling programme offer that is unique?

The whole set up is advantageous to the horse owner who is seeking their equine soul-mate. The fact that the horses grow up in herds and there is limited use of stables gives the horses a sense of belonging and self-confidence that teaches them **how to be horses**. There is something to be said about horses growing up with a consistent, steady herd which seldom has changes of individuals: there is a sense of family history within each horse's upbringing. In the book **“The Brain that Changes Itself”** by **Norman Doidge** he states:

“Mental training or life in an enriched environment increases the brain weight by 5% in animals and up to 9% where training is used directly to stimulate them. Trained, stimulated neurons develop 25% more branches and increase their size, the number of connections per neuron and their blood supply”

At Kilgobbin, horses get both mental stimulation from the way they are trained and live in an enriched environment. Having experienced the young horses at the farm, they are certainly different and seem much more able and willing to learn. By allowing the horses to live as naturally as possible, potential owners get a chance to see the “real horse” and to get a feel for its individual characteristics. They can find the horse that most fits them and know that what they see is what they get. The horses are happy to have people among them and have appropriate human handling that is enough, but not so much as to make them too desensitised or over humanised. Over handling, is as unhelpful to a foal as not having enough handling - it can make them much more of a handful when it comes time for them to be started. Although you don't want the horse to be fearful of a trainer or human handler, having enough respect to look to that trainer for help during the starting procedure is good. It can make the process run more smoothly as they look for guidance in working out their own problems rather than challenging the trainer and asking many questions!

It is important for the horse to be able to ask questions of us - because it is healthier for it to be part of the decision making process, but too many questions can mean that the horse has a more difficult journey during its start and this can be less enjoyable for both horse and human. The art is in finding the balance and that is why great care should be taken when raising foals and young horses. It is essential to have the foal respectful (but still curious of course) rather than over friendly - something that is often seen in foals that are raised almost as pets, are over "loved on" or have too much "imprinting" done on them. It can be quite unpleasant having to deal with these over-desensitised types when they are 2 or 3 years old and now getting on for 500kg! Also, over handling tends to hide what the *real horse* is like and it is important for them to develop their own characteristics. At the end of the day, foals are really still just horses and so to treat them as anything else will be asking for trouble later on!

One of the most difficult horses to deal with can be an orphan foal, all grown up, but expecting to be allowed "pet" status even though the cute stage is long gone. At Kilgobbin, orphan foals are immediately pair bonded with another mare, and are taught to drink from a bucket with a teat on the side (similar to the calf buckets, but with a human baby teat). This bucket is attached to the gates of daytime fields and the night time paddocks (which are smaller and close to the homestead) and the foal learns that these buckets are filled every 2 hours and eventually will go and help himself to milk when needed. Once the foal knows how to drink from the bucket, at no point then in the feeding routine is a foal handled by humans. **In this way, the human-food connection is not developed and the foal doesn't get the usual orphan foal "here comes my food human, lets get pushy!" attitude.**

For me, as a trainer, this is fascinating and I have to say that orphan foals I have worked with at Carl's are very different from those you usually meet and grow up knowing they are horses. As Carl explains: "Once the foal learns that drinking from the top of the bucket is way faster and more satisfying, we then put a large milk bucket on the ground within a small car tyre, so it cant be knocked over. Once again, the human quickly walks in, puts the bucket in the tyre and leaves immediately and only returns to remove the empty bucket once the foal has walked away from it. We treat the orphan foal in exactly the same manner as the rest of the foals: we don't fuss over them, they get the same handling as all their peers and we don't make exceptions for them in the manners department. We have had 2 early orphans (less than one week old) and 2 at 4 months old and they are completely integrated into their herds and don't look to humans for emotional reasons.

What other care is put into the horses at Kilgobbin Stud?

The horses are supported by good veterinary care and by complimentary healthcare including homeopathic, herbal, Bemer and Quantum Therapy treatments. The Nutrition is a well balanced, high fibre diet with careful consideration towards calcium and phosphorous content. Since being introduced to SpeediBeet (a low GI, high fibre, slow energy release carbohydrate) all horses from 2 weeks old are fed a balanced diet that promotes maximum condition while avoiding pitfalls like contracted tendons, laminitis, colic and Cushing's Disease. ***In February 2009, during the FPSSA Friesian breeding keuring, the international Dutch judges commented on the overall condition of the horses being outstanding and the quality of their joints as being the best they had seen. Five out of the six foals show were awarded 2nd Premiums.***

Environment and Training

Foals are grown up in paddocks of varied terrain, which makes them sure footed and well balanced. They become brave and adventurous, well muscled and strong. Training starts early on, usually in a smaller enclosed area where the mare can safely be with her foal and in the first few days of its life. The foal is asked to offer yields left, right, forward and backward and this is often done just using the human's energy or body to suggest where the foal can move from and to and allowing it to stop, rest and think the moment it has made the right choice. Often, rubbing the foal all over its body and down its legs, even lifting the feet is taught while the foal is drinking from mum. As the foal will learn quickly in a state of relaxation and from licking and chewing, drinking time is an ideal opportunity to teach it and the licking and chewing will help consolidate the learning, just as it will in the horse once it is grown up. This approach is discussed and suggested by Equine Learning Theory lecturer and author Paul McGreevy. Of course, you must make sure the foal is relaxed and drinking confidently first, but if you have taken time to get to know your herd, your mares and the foals, this will not be difficult.

Training moves from this onto work with neck and bum ropes (building the foal's confidence with all equipment before asking for more) and progresses to "leading the foal from behind" by pushing it along and not pulling it about. This pulling is so often what causes foals to rear or to resist and it gets horses heavy to handle, long before they are ever started under saddle. The process is detailed and careful and can not be rushed. Sometimes a training session may only be 5 minutes as foals will tire easily and should not be over stressed so you need plenty of

time and patience. Once the foal has a good understanding of how to move with the human, the halter is put on and off and it is asked to follow a feel while it is supported in a way that it already understands. It will be led a few steps away from mum and back to her. Over time the distance can be increased and as it grows in confidence more is asked of it including work with obstacles and the all important trailer loading. It should be noted that unless you know what you are doing and are used to working this way - training is best left to a professional in this area of training.

Other than Friesians Carl breeds Warlanders and is moving toward a focus on this breed. What is a Warlander and why choose one?

The Warlander is an Andalusian x Friesian. You can basically consider the Warlander as a Friesian with stamina! They offer the best of both worlds - the Friesian strength and gentleness with great temperament and enormous trainability. We mustn't forget that the Friesian has Andalusian in its history - so the breeds are a perfect match for each other. Crossing the two is a logical step. It is a true multi-purpose horse and you can do any discipline with them. They have a good mind, a great attitude and are keen to learn. People say that when teaching a Warlander it's like merely reminding them of something they already know.

About Carl Bronner:

Carl has a great in depth knowledge of horsemanship and has been supporting and promoting Silversand and NHZA horsemanship training for many years (www.nhza.com and www.silversand.com.au)

In fact, she thoroughly researches and studies all in which she specialises and although she does not teach - she is happy to share her knowledge in the areas of her passion - the breeding of her horses and the way they are trained, feeding all horses for their best performance/growth and health and Trec.

There are very few, if any, studs working in the way Carl does and I would have no hesitation in recommending the horses she breeds to potential buyers who are seeking a whole new experience with their horses. Carl also runs "Horseplay", a way for people to learn more about themselves and horses. Carl and NHZA will be joining together to host a new course called "The Inner Game" the first of which will run in May 2010. It will set out to explore the idea about who we need to become for ourselves and our horses and will be available to anyone who wishes to learn more about what it takes to be good with horses. Carl holds her Silversand Skills 1, 2 & 3 and is working on her Advancing Skills. A DVD featuring Kilgobbin Stud and some of the work done with the foals is available from Carl Bronner: info@horseplay.co.za.

Young Stock at Kilgobbin consists of:

- * FPS registered Friesians
- * Friesian x TBs
- * Warlanders
- * Andalusian x TBs