

Polo Ponies - Ninety Percent of the Game



Twiggy

15.1 1/2hh 11 year old bay mare. Australian thoroughbred from the track. She won the Warwickshire 2002 Best Playing Pony.

Proof

15.1hh 8 year old bay mare. Home bred she came through our breeding programme. She won Prince of Wales 2003 Best Playing Pony.

Jack (Ruki) Baillieu

talks to Alice Gipps and Sarah Wiseman about Twiggy and Proof

What type of pony are these two?

They are both different styles of horse, Twiggy's a longer, faster, more thoroughbred type whereas Proof is more of a polo type, more handy and better on the rougher fields.

Why do these two stand out from the rest of your string?

Proof's handling ability is like no other I've ridden before, she has exceptional handling ability and Twiggy's lateral and speed is quite incredible.

Which can you achieve the most on in a chukka?

If it's a fast running chukka I'd say Twiggy is a lot more useful but if someone else on my team is running a lot more because of their pony then I could make a lot more plays off Proof, so it all depends on the situation.

Did you train them both yourself?

Yes, Twiggy was green when I got her and Proof we bred and broke in.

How long did it take to make them into a polo ponies?

I started playing Twiggy at six and a half.

José Donoso made Proof, he was the first person to really play Proof for a couple of years in Australia when we played together. He played her very well and I took her off him at seven last year.

How do you choose a horse for polo?

I have a certain style I look for, everyone has the styles they like. I like horses that are very lateral and have a lot of power.

So which chukkas do you bring them out in?

They come out early for half a chukka, maybe the first or second, then depending on how much they play in the first two I'll bring them out in the fifth and sixth. The key if you want to repeat a horse is not to stretch it too hard in the first as you get to the bottom of them and they never recover.

Do you think the quality of polo ponies is improving?

Definitely, it's very hard to find good ones and because of the prices people are demanding for them people are having to make them themselves.

Do you think there is a particular country where the best horses are coming from?

Well I'm a little bit biased. I think from what I've seen the best horses have come out of Australia and New Zealand in the last 10 years. A perfect example is Ellerston, a majority of their horses are from Australia and New Zealand and the standard of horses was far superior to any other team going round. I just like the type and style. There are a few really good English thoroughbreds running around and some great Argentine horses but I think the really good Argentine horses stay in Argentina to play the Open.

When these ponies can no longer keep up with your level of polo what will you do with them?

I will definitely take Proof back because of her breeding, her mother is New Zealand, we bought her a while back and I have six or seven foals on the ground and they're all great. Also I've kept two stallions out of the same mare because of the consistency in the breed. I think it's a very good line. I have Twiggy's mother and the jury's out on whether that line works. While I'm playing

her in the next couple of years here I'll be able to see if it works and if it does then I'll have the option to take her back but it isn't cheap to take a horse back to Australia.

Do you use embryo transfer?

We do that at home but unless you are set up here its very expensive.

Did you have a most memorable game last season?

Yes we had a big game against Ashbert Raiders in the Warwickshire and we had to win by three to qualify for the semis. We were on very wet ground at Ahmibah and Proof was exceptional, as she was in the final of the Prince of Wales. Twiggy was pretty solid all the way through. In the final of the Warwickshire I scored 5 or 6 goals off her two chukkas so she made the difference.

Have you any promising youngsters to look out for?

I've got one here which I think is exceptional, she's an English thoroughbred called Forest.