



The story of the Connemara Pony is one of triumph over adversity, a success that was forged through cooperation that transcended all boundaries. The pioneers never lost sight of their objective and pooled their knowledge and expertise. Michael Igoe, from Kippure Stud explains his passion....

A snowbound Ashfield Village makes headway through the snow.

Kippure Stud

IN THE MOMENT

The goal of up-grading a little native breed that was primarily used to work on small farms was achieved through infusing outcross blood from the Thoroughbred, Arab and possibly other less documented lines such as Welsh and Irish Draught. The end result was an animal that embodied beauty with strength, intelligence with hardiness. It was a derived breed, the creation of a collective collaboration. Ireland now had a world-class brand that would be fit to take on all-comers in any feat or equine discipline. Truly, an all-round, noble working breed was born.

Market Economics

The early 1970's saw Ireland embrace the forces of market economics ~ the rules were to change utterly. Toil through muscle and sinew had to give way to mechanisation. The emphasis now would shift to efficiencies, volume, high output, and high-yield. The concepts of self-sufficiency, sustainability, organic methods were deemed to be

outdated. We were now all signed up to consumerism, specialisation, dependence, and overwhelmed by marketing propaganda. We surrendered to a culture of compliance and surveillance. Was this progress? Could we be assured by food scares and our water quality? The ruthless exploitation of all resources was now seen as a means of economic progress. We began living in 'the moment' with no regard for the future and no respect for the past. It was now to be an everyman for himself approach. This greedy plunder saw fishing stocks forced to the point of extinction, the once familiar sights and sounds of visiting wildlife disappear altogether or relegated to an endangered list, to which once commonplace livestock breeds and crop species were soon to be added. Monoculture through the use of growth promoters and pesticides were to transform our landscape.

The Connemara Pony was to be no exception, our foreign customers shopped wisely. The ground was shifting from under our feet. Brood mares were

no longer expected to be worked and tested thoroughly in the harshest of environments. Faults and weaknesses, that would otherwise be found out at source, were now getting through. Uncorrected errors would now become mistakes. Discerning buyers could always select the best and the extraction and dismemberment of the breed was well under way in the 1980's. The well was running dry.

Continuity

From childhood I loved the continuity embodied in man and beast, the work they did and the trail they left. Perhaps, we need to think 50yrs behind the rest and return to our provincial backwaters. Our knowledge may be broad and universal; theirs was narrow, detailed and personal. The same person would speak of the next parish as we might of a foreign country and they might meet fewer than 200 people in their entire lifetime. People were creatures of inherited habit. Knowledge implanted in the fertile grounds of childhood lasted

Frederiksminde Hazy Merlin



Ashfield Romeo in competition.



Michael showing Braveheart.



Another win for Hazy Merlin.



until death. Succession meant inheriting the knowledge and passing it on. Our ancestors are defined by the care and respect they showed. As in all nature dominant forces favour individuals who can acquire scarce resources and take advantage. The rule is 'use it or lose it'! Any instincts, talents or traits no longer required are shed and lost. This is the eternal struggle, the savage contest known as evolution.

Competition - Past to Present

The CPBS was founded in 1923, the same year as Horace Plunkett formed a Cooperative Movement, a vehicle to promote the Irish Dairy Sector. The Dairy Sector faced the challenges and restructured itself to take advantage of, and cope with competition. The Irish Thoroughbred Industry is considered to be World Class. It is based on a winning formula, competition from the sales ring to the racetrack. Failure is not bred forward. Emphasis is on the highest standards of knowledge and expertise. Results are paramount. Rigid controls and protocols are in place to safeguard their success. This applies from National Hunt to the Flat. Yes, it attracts massive investment and incentives, but NOTHING SUCCEEDS LIKE SUCCESS! Pedigrees can be traced back to three foundation lines. DNA proof is infallible, there is no place for conflict or recrimination and facts are verifiable. Major influences on the breed are recognised and respected. There can be no doubting the impact Vincent O'Brien had through his vision and insight to import Northern Dancer lines which totally transformed racing on this side of the Atlantic. A spin off of this success we can see in Irish Bred eventer's, an advantage gained by having access to such wonderful bloodlines.

Form and Function

Understanding this relationship holds the key. Get it right and you have something timeless, get it wrong and the result is useless scrap. Selective breeding is an art, which is second nature to someone who is gifted with the knowledge. Understanding the bloodlines and backbreeding requires patience and analysis. It is at times like this that I wish I could avail of the opinions of experts such as Susan De Vesci, Jimmy Jones and Graham Tulloch. Their knowledge represents a life's work, a philosophy committed to memory. My question is, how best to play the hand I have been dealt? Much knowledge is obscured by persistent prejudice and myth. My first encounters with the Connemara Pony illustrated an unravelling of some of the original bloodlines. Some animals bore more resemblance to thoroughbreds, others the hallmarks of Welsh or Arab, some just showed too much quality and yet others were too coarse and

plain. The loss of outcross bloodlines and the incidence of inbreeding were alarming. Other symptoms were over-height and lack of bone. The alarm bells were now ringing and we knew that we must proceed with caution. As we delved further into the Connemara the more impressive the impact some of our predecessors had made. Names like Ashfield and Tulira are synonymous with athletic performance, beauty and elegance goes with the Abbeyleix prefix.

Links In The Chain

The links in a vital and fundamental chain must be maintained, without them your demise is hastened. The mere mention of certain bloodlines reveals that formidable characters and individuals of substance were at work. Their commitment to the breed was not so much a choice but rather a calling; their hearts were their imagination.

Such combined selfless energies were indeed a potent force that would reach new horizons. Ashfield Bobby Sparrow and Edward Doyle were crowned European Gold Medal Showjumping Winners as the 1970's ended. I cannot stand aside and see the things they gave their life to broken or mourn their passing.

Our endeavours will be to build on the remains to try and be authentic in the restoration. We must not be blinkered. We have exciting new recipes to try. Our faith may be strong but proof will be required, our dishes are for future generations, time will be our judge.

Need For Reform - Blueprints For Competition

The in-hand world is only a small glimpse into the story of the Connemara Pony. It concerns me to see the questionable forcing of young stock. I worry about increasing levels of bureaucracy in classification of the breed. Rules, boundaries, limitations need to be re-evaluated. Extremes must be avoided and a balance must be struck. Selfish, vested interests must be set aside. We do not have the luxury of time. Trust needs to be rebuilt and a prominence regained. The only constant in anyone's life is continuous change but here, once again, everything is relative. We cannot afford protracted debate and endless argument to further delay and obstruct. Time is of the essence. Precious opportunities cannot be squandered. We must not further alienate the performance world. Ponies must be bred that will meet customers expectations and once again deliver results. Investors should



be stimulated to have confidence in our industry. We must harness goodwill, this is not a time for novices, and there can be no place for restrictive barriers or discriminatory practices. I am not inclined to the fads of fashion, designer living or the glorification of folly. Give me simplicity and the quiet calm of splendid isolation and I will live forever. I believe everything returns in cycles, and maybe people need to be pushed to the brink. When nearing empty it is amazing what hidden strengths you can find, it is the battle of willpower, and only the strongest will manage to hold on. *"For the wheel is still in spin and there is no knowing who it's naming, for the times they are a changing"*. The rhythm of life has a powerful beat, the vital signs are good, the pulse is strong, and yes, a black man with Irish ancestry has made it to the

White House. He carries no baggage he bears no scars. I know change has come to the world. What would life be without hope? It is the strongest link in our chain of survival.

Winter Snow

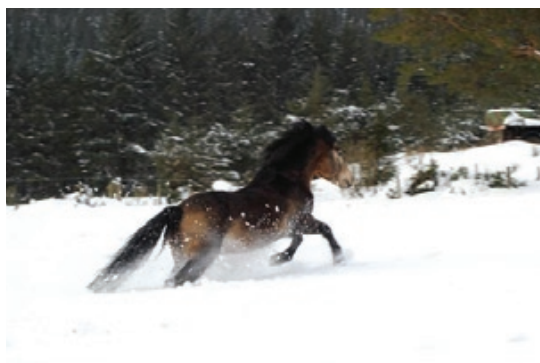
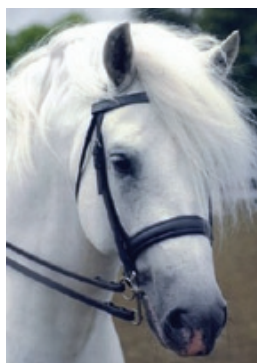
As I write this we have had the heaviest snowfall in 30yrs and I have been marooned with my ponies for over nine days. For me it is total heaven. Our herd has expanded greatly with an ever-increasing range of bloodlines. Recent acquisitions were Ashfield Romeo in 2008 bringing Carna Bobby, Carna Dun in its most undiluted mix. Gunsmoke came back to us in 2007 from the USA. Frederiksminde Hazy Merlin has really made his mark giving us back the Tully Grey, Dale Haze, Rebel Wind and Marble lines. Mervyn Kingsmill has more than

repaid us with some very fine daughters and some stallion sons to include his replica in Irishtown Mervyn.

As I trudge through winter snow and tend to feeding I can feel the presence of the old timers all around me.

'It is now time to stand and stare, for theirs is a sprightly dance, the shimmering glints in the snow, their ghosts the flashing fleeting moments which dazzle as I go, the cold winds that blow. I must tread softly lest I tread on their dreams '.

www.kippureconnemarponies.com



Far Left: Crusader
Left Centre: Mervyn Kingsmill
Near Left: Gunsmoke