



APPROVALS

Nye on perfect

Celebrating 50 years of fulfilling dreams!

Here is the Mews... Aussie ex-pat Ross Nye had horses in his blood. Now he and his family have been running his stables on Bathurst Mews in London, for 50 years

Ross Nye Stables in London is one of The British Horse Society's longest standing approved centres. This summer the incredible urban riding school celebrated its 50th anniversary

The centre is the life's work of Ross Nye, a former Australian bushman. Despite growing up in the city of Brisbane, Ross always knew he was a country boy at heart. "Every second Christmas holiday we kids went to North Queensland to my grandfather's cattle station where we spent six weeks riding on a very big area of rough country learning the hard way," Ross recalls. "My grandfather's attitude was, if you fell off, it was no use standing there! So I had it in my blood – whether I wanted it or not I was a horse person!"

As a bushman Ross lived an incredibly spartan life, with the nearest town nearly 40 miles away – and the only way to get there was on horseback. A Jackaroo was a jack-of-all-trades. They had to do everything, as it was too remote to call on anyone else. "He learnt an incredibly practical approach to horses and general horsemanship, being around them and observing their behaviour," explains his daughter, Kirsty. "That's something that he has been able to apply when

he came to teach people."

Ross left his native Australia to pursue the ambitions of his wife, Ruth, who is a much admired concert pianist. Eventually life brought them to London and, once settled, it wasn't long before Ross was looking to pursue his own passion – teaching people to ride.

"When you come into a new place like we did here, it was remarkable. A lot of the local residents were delighted and, being Australian and a bit different from what they'd have seen from any other equestrian organisation here, they just welcomed us."

The family set up home on Bathurst Mews – living first in an old mews property and then moving on to their current base that Ross was able to design to best accommodate the ponies. The biggest asset to this location was the availability of Hyde Park, just a two-minute ride away. The Park was being used by the Mounted Police, the Household Cavalry and the Royal Mews to exercise their carriage horses, but there was not a riding school. Ross saw an opportunity and seized it.

"It's the mark of a true expert to





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apply what he learnt in Queensland's outback to trotting round a Royal Park in London," says Kirsty with pride. "His extremely irritating catchphrase, that we get all the time, is you have to be **insistent, consistent and persistent.**

The horses just have to have routine and then generally they will slot in and like the work. I think in 50 years we've had just two horses that weren't happy with city life."

Many of their ponies have lived to a ripe old age, including Gulliver who is still going strong at 31 years-of-age. Apparently the secret to happy ponies is ensuring there is plenty of variety to their work and regular breaks to the family farm in Surrey. "We do a lot of our teaching out on the leading rein trotting around the tracks in the park, so they are not constantly being ridden in the arena," says Kirsty. "Our horses are so well schooled, so well behaved and so willing to do what they do because they enjoy their work and because they have the variety."

It's not just the ponies that benefit from visits to the farm. Until he left Australia Ross was not aware that people grew up in situations without access to the countryside or animals. So when he came here it was always high on his list of priorities to be able to teach children who lived in the city the benefits of having contact with animals. Throughout the summer months the family run holidays for the children to stay at their farm in Surrey, where they are given all sorts of opportunities, including camping out under the stars.

The family's ethos has always been not only to enable people to fulfil their longing to be around horses – but to learn how to do things properly. Under Ross's leadership the stables was one of the first places where it was recognised that even



if you didn't have your own pony or live in the countryside, you could still learn properly. You could not just learn how to ride to the trot, but learn how to handle horses, how to anticipate their behaviour – proper horsemanship. They were also the first centre to have a Pony Club branch and the first centre to host RDA groups with riding school ponies.

So what change has Ross seen over five decades? "There's no comparison with conditions today to those early days, because nowadays the people that you encounter have had little or no equestrian experience. Fewer and fewer parents these days have grown up around animals. The attitude towards the idea of setting up another stable would be completely alien to 50 years ago, in fact they would probably say 'blooming nuisances, we don't want any more horses on the road'."

"Children have many more demands on their leisure time now," adds Kirsty. "Getting them to spend time with the horses and developing knowledge is tricky.

Ross Nye was one of the first centres to boast a Pony Club branch, and the first to hold Riding for the Disabled groups with riding school ponies

ROSS'S DAUGHTER KIRSTY SAYS...

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