

# Horsepower, Nelson Bunker Hunt and the farm at Banks road - Part 2

By Neville Barlow

(Continued from Part 1 in October magazine)

Our next-door neighbour was a racehorse trainer. His property was made up of two 10-acre paddocks, one of which contained the family house and the other the stables. One day he came to see us and asked if we were interested in buying his stable block as he wished to get enough money to build a set of stables on the house section.

My Dad suggested to him that he would be very happy to build his new stables in exchange for his other 10 acres. The deal was accepted, and he completed an amazing 12 box concrete stables complete with feed room, jockey's accommodation and feed silo. So, for

Dad, what to do with the old stables? The extra land was incorporated into the dairy farm. Soon after I purchased a 26-acre block directly across the road from our house. I was very proud of the fact that I had built my house almost entirely myself, even though it took me two years. I was already rearing 50 Bull calves every year and they added nicely to my Poultry farm which now contained 10,000 layers. It wasn't very long when our next-door horse trainer looked at his old stables and suggested that we should have some horses in it. Why didn't Dad have some fun and buy a Broodmare and have a foal or two over the next few years? Funnily enough he had just the filly in his stables that a client of his wanted to sell. All our family fell in love with this jet-black filly. So, our journey into horses began. Soon there was horses



Bull Calves

everywhere and we needed a Stallion of our own to service all our Mares.

We found what we wanted in Australia. His name was "SHELTER II". His pedigree was impeccable being bred by the National Stud in England but never raced due to an injury. He was standing in the back blocks of South Australia and was owned by one of the three men who started "Mitre 10". Another Multi-millionaire! He was very keen to see the horse he once owned having a chance in New Zealand.

## SHELTER II

BY  
NEVER  
SAY DIE  
FROM  
GAME CART



STANDING AT *Vitesse Lodge* MATAMATA

Such a nice man who came to visit us and said he would be delighted to show me around Melbourne if I would like to travel over. He met me at the airport, and I spent several days being taken to the races and prominent horse stables.

Dad and I were learning fast and had had about a dozen young foals in the stable that we now owned. One afternoon I saw a large black Chevrolet car stop in the middle of the road and a man got out and walked into our stables. I thought it was unusual where he had parked and we had horses we were very protective of. I shot down the road and this man came out and said, "Where is my horse". I said, "I do not know who you are and we only have foals in there". It transpired that I had leased a couple of paddocks across the road to another horse trainer up the road, who used them to spell some of his client's horses. I had told him he could make use of three horse boxes facing out on to the road if he required. Any way a young jockey arrived and said "Afternoon Mr. Hunt I have come to give your horse a light work out in the nearby paddock". Surely not Nelson Bunker Hunt I thought. My father arrived on the scene and shook his hand. He was invited to afternoon tea at my parents' house.

It was to be one of many visits he made over the next few years. He said he wanted someone he could trust in New Zealand, that he could contact when he required, not these trainers who told him a lot of bull dust. Incidentally his horse ran in the Melbourne Cup and came second. He soon bought a dairy farm some 9 Ks out of Matamata and turned it into a Horse stud which he called Waikato Stud. His first Stallion was called Pretendre, which had run a close 2<sup>nd</sup> in the English Derby and was to stand at the highest stud fee known in N.Z. at that time.

The power of the man was obvious when around our kitchen table he told a story of a man he knew. That man was Mr. Frank Sinatra.

Frank 'the man' invited both he and his wife to his birthday party in Las Vegas. As they were making plans to come to N.Z. they were delighted to stop off at Frank's on the way. They had a delightful evening but when they arrived back at their room, they found they had been burgled.

Her diamonds were gone as were their passports, all their money and many other things. They immediately rushed down to see Frank and he quietly informed them he would have all their property back in their room by morning. True to his word a parcel was delivered to their door with everything accounted for. Franks mafia!

All this happened when he was fighting bankruptcy over his silver escapade and Waikato Stud was sold. It necessitated him to sell most of his horses worldwide but after several years he was back to his beloved horses but on a much smaller number. He died at the age of 88 after several years of sickness, in 2014.

I really enjoyed the 12 or so years I was involved with thoroughbreds. It was the hardest and most intensive work I had ever been known especially when the foaling season was in full swing. Ninety percent of in foal mares produced their foals at night. We had a special foaling paddock that was flood lit. These animals are so finely bred that there is always a risk of the mare or foal dying in the process of foaling. When the mares water breaks it is important the foal is on the ground in 20 minutes and the foal should be on its feet and suckling in another 20 minutes. We did have access to Vets night and day.



My day would start at 6am with feeding the laying birds. The shed was longer than a rugby field and even with my semi-automatic feeder it took me an hour and half and 800 metres to complete the job. I would feed out half a ton each morning. The young birds and chickens came next. I liquefied the poultry manure and spread it on the dairy farm with a tanker truck. Most of the morning and afternoon was taken up with stable work, vetting in foal and in season mares. Dad would take an early tea and then go to bed. I would watch the mares about to foal, up until 1am. As soon as I saw his bedroom light come on, I knew he would take over. Then I went to bed. A 19- hour day! When there was a foaling usually, we both were required. The saddest thing I ever saw was when a mare who had a dead foal, was standing over it for hours, licking it back to life. We did have a few and it was a black day for us.

We were not a very big outfit but out of the 10 horses I raced, 9 won at least one race and two of them were especially good. There were mighty ups and downs but to breed a horse, watch it grow, see it broken-in to race and then see it win a race, is one of the greatest feelings ever. It was obvious that my dad was rapidly aging and not able to cope with the work required so our stud was closed down in 1984. It wasn't a money- making business, but working with graceful, intelligent animals was reward enough for me.



When my dad passed away in 1986, I took over the management of the dairy farm. I knew it was a wonderful piece of land and that dad's real interest had been in his engineering side. So, I set about trying to increase total production. In the next 16 years I employed four different amazing young sharemilkers. Together we pushed production up 300%. My first action was to replace the entire 3ks of water line down the farm and double the number of water troughs. Next, I changed the milking plant and was able to save a good deal of power. I engaged a fertilizer expert, and we were able to half the cost of fertilizer and at the same time reduce the cases of milk fever that had always been a problem. In the first 3 years I replanted the farm with modern fast-growing grasses. Cow numbers doubled and that meant the cowshed had to be increased in size, twice. All four sharemilkers, when they left went to their own farms and I was very proud of them all.

I met Judy in 1999. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. We were married in 2002 and retired to Cooks Beach where we spent an amazing 13 years. To keep me busy I took on a lawn mowing round and mowed 10,000 lawns in 10 years. We moved to Tauranga in 2016.



My winning Mare - Shelon

*Neville*