

# HORSES PLAY

*a big part of Abbey's life*



## SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS EQUESTRIAN, ABBEY KNAPP IS PASSIONATE ABOUT SMASHING STEREOTYPES AND SHOWING OFF HER TRIO OF RETIRED RACEHORSES

WORDS: JULIEANNE HORSMAN

There is a unique sense of satisfaction that comes from completing a tough task yourself, and 20-year-old equestrian, Abbey Knapp knows the feeling well.

The talented young rider retrained her first off-the-track Thoroughbred for showjumping at just 13, with mum watching on from a distance, of course.

"I had outgrown my first pony and needed something bigger to continue progressing," Abbey said.

"I had my heart set on retraining a horse myself and had been learning as much as I could from videos on YouTube. Mum has had horses her whole life, so she was happy for me to give it a go."

Abbey spotted an advert on Facebook for a lightly raced nine-year-old mare named Dishy Lulu who had been poking around in a paddock for a few years, and thought she was perfect.

"She was so pretty and going to waste so I begged mum to get her," Abbey said. "I couldn't wait to take her home and start putting what I had learned into practice."

Over the next few years Abbey rode Dishy Lulu at every opportunity, the pair learning and improving together. They spent most weekends at Loop Line Pony Club, gymkhanas and shows and brought home plenty of ribbons.

By early 2019 Abbey was ready for another Thoroughbred and again turned to the internet to find one.

A then four-year-old gelding, Mo Good who had trialed twice for Peter Robl and finished last both times, caught her eye. She snapped him up for just \$500.

"I bought him sight unseen, but I could tell from his video he enjoyed his work," Abbey said.

"When I went to pick him up, he started nibbling me and I had a good feeling we'd get along."

Abbey gave Mo Good a few days off to settle in and get to know her other horses before she began lunging him to build muscle. She started riding him a fortnight later and desensitising him to environmental distractions.

"He was green and quite sensitive but always tried hard and improved with every ride," Abbey said.

Almost 12 months later, Abbey and Mo Good were ready for their first competition – Del Throsby Dressage and Showjumping Day at Bong Bong Racecourse.

They did three dressage tests and finished first in both preliminary tests and second in the novice. All their hard work had paid off.

*OPPOSITE ABOVE: Abbey and Mo Good in action at the Hawkesbury Summer Horse Show. Picture by Glenys Lilley*  
*OPPOSITE: Abbey and her retired racehorses Mo Good and Dishy LuLu. Picture supplied*

"It was pouring with rain and I had never ever ridden Mo Good in the rain before, but I was so pleased with the way he handled himself," Abbey said.

Next it was off to Wollondilly Pony Club Gymkhana where Abbey and Mo Good again picked up a swag of ribbons. This time it was hot, but Mo Good was again so good.

COVID-19 suddenly halted competitions for a few months, but Abbey made the most of the break and stepped up Mo Good's education. When competitions resumed, there was no holding them back.

"He was a bit horse shy when I got him but at Pony Club when he did his first pair of hacks, he looked to me for confidence and wasn't scared anymore," Abbey said.

"It was a special moment and then I realised how far we had come. I trained this horse myself. I didn't send him away or spend a lot of money.

"There's still a bit of stigma around Thoroughbreds being hot, but I love proving people wrong and showing them how athletic and intelligent the breed is."

As part of Racing NSW's commitment to Thoroughbred horses in every stage of their lives, dedicated equine welfare veterinarians from Team Thoroughbred NSW conduct random checks on retired racehorses to make sure they are being well cared for.

Dr Carly Garling was full of praise when she went to see Abbey.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Abbey and her beautiful horse Mo Good on a routine welfare check, as he is a recently retired racehorse," Dr Garling said.

"It was clear to me that the two of them were well suited to each other. Abbey was enjoying the process of re-educating him for life after racing and Mo Good had dapples and a shine to his coat, he was certainly loving the care and attention Abbey was giving him."

Just last month Abbey added another Thoroughbred to her stable, an unraced former Gwenda Markwell gelding named Skyburner.

She has begun preparing the 17.2hh gentle giant for eventing, and while he has plenty of potential, Abbey knows she has a lot of work ahead of her.

"I haven't had him for long, but he hasn't put a hoof wrong," she said. "He is big so he is a bit unbalanced and he certainly eats a lot but he's a nice mover and I think I can take him up the grades."

Abbey also still has Dishy LuLu and her childhood Arabian pony.

"Having four horses is a lot of work, especially when you're juggling a full-time job, a boyfriend and trying to be a normal 20-year-old but I wouldn't change a thing. I know how lucky I am to have these horses in my life."

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