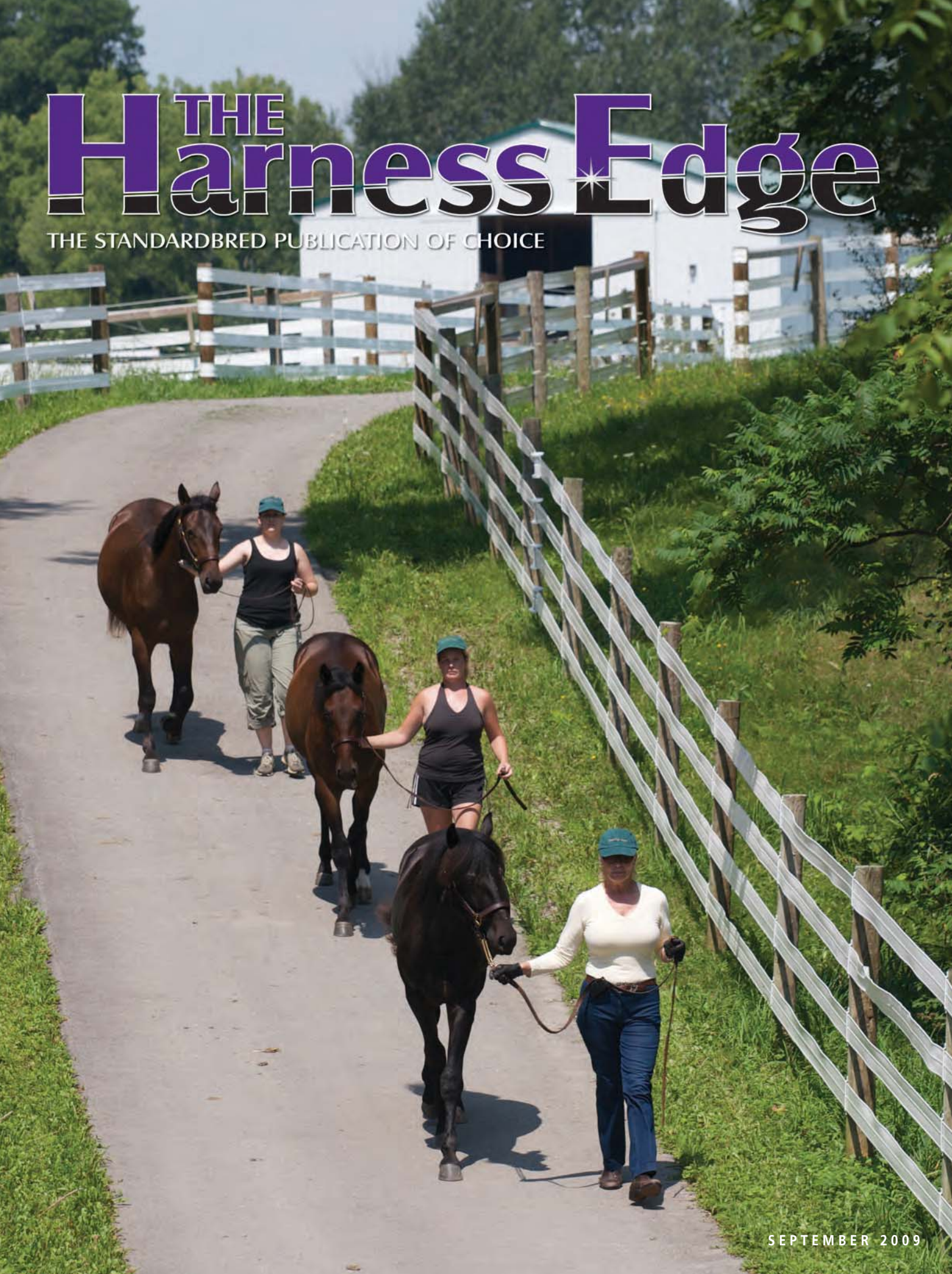


THE Harness Edge

THE STANDARD BRED PUBLICATION OF CHOICE



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A WALK IN THE PARK

Aldebaran Park is the newest Standardbred nursery in Australia with the unique twist of being dedicated to trotters.

Start-up breeding operations in the Standardbred industry are an oddity and almost non-existent these days but that has not deterred the creation of a new facility in the Victorian state of Australia that has attracted a great deal of attention.

Aldebaran Park is the brainchild of Melbourne trotting enthusiasts Duncan and Lyn McPherson who, in conjunction with Chris and Sharon Lang, have taken a raw piece of land and built a superb facility that does not lack anything.

Located 100 kilometres north of Melbourne, the property encompasses approximately 120 acres. While not huge, it is perfect for the small number of horses the two couples run on the land. A new dimension came to the operation this year with the addition of former Canadian trotting star Eilean Donon to its stallion roster.

The McPhersons were the driving force behind the startup. Duncan is one of two partners in 2Construct, a major building firm in the state of Victoria. It specializes in civic, commercial and school

work projects including the Melbourne Convention Centre.

Duncan's family and the Lang family have been involved with racing Standardbreds for 45 years dating back to the time of Duncan and Chris Lang's fathers and it was almost a given that the two would carry on that interest.

Chris Lang and his wife Sharon were featured in this magazine in the November 2008 issue. The couple, who only have trotters, were heading to Europe to race the southern hemisphere's top trotting horse Sundons Gift in the Elitlopp.

"Six years ago a freeway was built through a portion of our farm with the government expropriating 11 acres. It also cut up the block of land beside us and we ended up buying about 120 acres which we had done nothing with until Duncan began to pursue this idea of building his own farm," explains Sharon who handles the day-to-day management of the farm.

"Duncan wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and have his own farm. Being in construction he was keen on

having a blank canvas to work with. He's a man with unlimited energy and enthusiasm. I like to think I'm a goer but I know I cannot keep up with him."



Sharon and Chris Lang are the front liners in Alderbaran Park. The couple share ownership of the business with Duncan McPherson and his wife Lyn but it's the Langs who handle the day-to-day details.

So the work began and nothing was left to chance. Sharon guestimates that over \$1 million was spent on developing the land.

"In Duncan's world nothing is half done. Here in Australia water is a major concern. He brought that into the property from a main irrigation channel and installed a sprinkler system around the paddocks. Now this will likely seem odd for North Americans where water is not an issue but here it is," explains Sharon.

"Traditionally, irrigation is done by literally flooding the paddocks but that is a very inefficient use of water. It's not all that great for the pasture because the grass gets drowned and not great for the horses' feet either. This sprinkler format is vastly superior although not inexpensive to install. Ninety minutes of irrigation time is equivalent to one inch of rain. That's the kind of attention to detail he put into the property."

Most Australians do not know what real winter is all about. There is no need for barns as Canadian and American breeders require but that is not to say they do not face certain construction costs. As photos with this article demonstrate there are a number of run-in sheds dotted across the landscape.

"While we do not have winter, we do have some climate extremes. The temperature can get as high as 46 degrees for a week. Being stuck out in the sun can be very difficult on the animals which is why we needed to provide protection with these sheds. I believe they are taller than those in North America and that is to allow for more ventilation."

Sharon knows of what she speaks. Her background is on the equestrian side having been involved for many years with both event riding and dressage. She was a member of the Victorian Olympic development squad although she did not actually participate in any Olympic games.

Through a friend who dabbled in training Standardbreds she met Chris. The couple had two children before Chris was struck by a mysterious illness that made him unable to work for several years.

"At one point I was doing three jobs to keep everything ticking over. Because



we were self-employed we were not eligible for any assistance and that was a very difficult time for us before Chris's problem was finally diagnosed and resolved. These days things could not be better but we both know the value of hard work."

As Aldebaran Park was being built the Langs were attempting to race a young son of Muscles Yankee named Aldebaran Yankee. He was a homebred that demonstrated plenty of promise.

"We got him to the races at two and he looked like a special horse. He raced at three different tracks for three wins without any pushing. We put him away early but he never came back as the same horse. He seemed to have lost his rhythm behind and trotting was a real effort so

we finally gave up and put him to stud," notes Sharon.

"I'd never had anything to do with standing stallions before so it was a learning experience for me. It turned out that his semen was not great but all right as long as he was limited to one mare a day. So we stood him at \$1,375 and he served 22 mares. You have to bear in mind that trotting is far behind pacing here in Australia. The whole experience was an eye-opener and I'm much more prepared for this breeding season."

When the Langs received the invitation to race in the Elitlopp they jumped at the chance. Neither had been outside of Australia and the opportunity to see how some of the world's best trotting trainers went about

their work was too good to pass up. Sundons Gift was their ticket to knowledge.

"Getting to see how Ake Svenstedt and Stig Johansson operate their stables was amazing. We got so much out of that trip because both Chris and I believe that you can never keep doing things the way you have in the past. You must keep moving forward and exploring new ideas. Now we hope that we can get to North America next."

Racing in Europe has a strong social component which led to the meeting of Boko Stable owner John Bootsman. He has many equine holdings in both his native Holland and Sweden including Eilean Donon.

A son of Angus Hall, Eilean Donon was a bit of a Cinderella story for trainer Bob Stewart. He earned \$576,000 in his career including an elimination of the Hambletonian but seemed to come up short at the most inopportune times.

In the end he was sold to Bootsman who placed him in Holland, a country not regarded as a prosperous jurisdiction akin to Sweden but the horse was

well accepted. Bootsman, a free thinker to be sure began thinking when he met the Langs on a visit to his mother-in-law's Swedish farm.

"John is a very smart man and he and Duncan hit it off on our trip. He saw an opportunity to maybe get a foothold in Australia and a deal was struck to send us the horse for a few breeding seasons. We just love the horse and think he will be well accepted here."

In early August Eilean Donon and Sundons Gift both arrived in Australia after being quarantined in Newmarket, England. A fee of \$2,475 was set for Eilean Donon.

"Trotting is a world-wide game while pacing is not. Chris and I decided some time ago that we wanted to be more global so getting involved with Duncan and Aldebaran Park as well as Eilean Donon made a great deal of sense."

Going green is a common theme in the world today but Aldebaran Park is attempting to actually put it into practice. The farm is quite specific about its use of fertilizers.

"Like America we have trouble raising horses with OCD problems. After much research we decided not to use phosphate fertilizers. Our soil here is clay based and simply adding some lime and gypsum will make up for what is lacking. While we are not "greenies" per se we do look at what we are doing and really think about what we are doing in an effort to produce better horses."

At present the farm is home to 15 mares with an accompanying number of foals and yearlings for a total of 40 head. Those duties combined with the Langs' own training operation make for full days.

"We do have a lot on our plate but when you like what you do it is amazing how many hours one can work."

On its website www.aldebaranpark.com, the facility is described as a boarding facility but it is rapidly becoming more than that. It is a refreshing face on the Australian scene with a focus on trotting and a desire to be a leader in the southern hemisphere. 