

DALBY AMATEUR PICNIC RACE CLUB HISTORY

1980 – 1989

Times were changing and as a reflection of this the club itself experienced major changes through the eighties. By the end of the decade the all horses and jockeys would be professional and the meeting held on for one day on a Saturday with substantial prize money for each race.

1981 saw the last of the grassfed races. Members of that era cite a variety of reasons for the demise of grassfed races; fewer horses used on properties; owner's reluctance to leave valuable horseflesh in paddocks for fear of injury and reluctance to have amateur riders on board their valuable horses. Bob Wild recalled the lead up to the last grassfed race. "Tom Frith, George Jekyll and myself gathered up some horses and paddocked them here (at "Riverlea"). They were a pretty sorry mob. If you looked at your horses you were lucky to find one with four good legs!"

The 1981 meeting was also the final two-day event. Consequently Saturday 1st May 1982 was the first of the one-day meetings with all cornfed horses. In 1983, flooding in Dalby, almost saw the races abandoned. However, thanks to the Bell Race Club, a very successful and enjoyable meeting was held at the Bell Racecourse.

The change to all cornfed races meant that the strict rules adopted early in the century with regard to prize money were also relaxed and the club sought sponsors in order to increase prize money and therefore attract good fields. From the mid- eighties sponsorship began to grow. Early sponsors include Penfolds Wines, and many local businesses such as The Russell Hotel, Graham Henderson & Co and Patz Dresses and Things to name a few.

In 1987 (according to a report in The Dalby Herald) there were a record 520 people at the Saturday night's race ball and over 700 people attended the race meeting. In the late eighties it became increasingly difficult for the owners to find amateur riders. This, together with the prohibitive cost of insurance for amateur riders meant the 1989 meeting was the first to be held with all professional jockeys. As George Jekyll explained, "We couldn't field 10 to 12 horses in a race because we didn't have the jockey numbers to match."

Image: This happy group at the Dalby Picnic Races on Saturday saw their horse, Star Eze, win the Ladies Bracelet. From the left they are Mesdames Norma Perry, Annie Butt, the handler Mr. Des Burns (trainer), Mesdames Lyn Wild, Julie Trout, Anne Green and Mr. Dan Green (sponsors of the prizemoney). Another part owner, Mrs. Jenny Frith is partly obscured behind Mr. Green.

