Article by A.Gosling from the S.P.S.B.S Magazine 1981

"THE RIDING TYPE — AND OTHERS"

"You seem to have so many different types in England—show types, riding types, Scottish types . . ."

The speaker was an Australian breeder who had, last summer, made an extensive tour of British studs, and the occasion was the National Horse and Pony Show of Australia, held on the Sydney Royal Showground in November.

To complete the background: it is a four-day show, with well over a thousand entries; it takes place on two consecutive weekends, with ponies on the first and Arabians and Palominos on the second.

With some two hundred and fifty in-hand Shetland entries on the Saturday (and only for the Groups could a pony appear in more than one class) and some seventy more for the eight riding and driving events the following day, it was almost a Breed Show on its own and resulted in the splendidly large and representative gathering that welcomed us so kindly and generously after the last class.

Judging the seventeen well-filled classes had been a most interesting and valuable experience. We started at 8.30 and, thanks to the efficiency of my stewards and the friendly co-operation of the exhibitors, we were finished soon after half past four, despite an hour off for a most delicious lunch. The standard of showmanship was excellent and every class had its share of really good ponies.

Mr. Faulds, the President of the Shetland Pony Owners and Breeders Society of Australia, met us as we came out of the ring and took us down to the stables, to meet the exhibitors, and there followed a highly enjoyable and stimulating hour, during which time many and varied topics were discussed, but possibly this one of "type" seemed of the most interest.

Basically, of course, the answer is that there are no different types of Shetland. There are good Shetlands and bad Shetlands and mediocre Shetlands, but there are not Riding Shetlands. or Miniature Shetlands or English Shetlands, there is only one true Shetland.

It can't be denied, however. that not only do our ponies vary considerably but that the word "type" is used increasingly often. I have even heard it said, "I don't want too heavy a stallion, I'm trying to breed a good riding type."

It is a fallacy to think that, because a pony is lighter of bone. narrower of girth and longer in the leg, it will necessarily prove a better riding pony. A good sturdy Shetland, with well laid back shoulder and free, straight action, will make an unbeatable mount for the age group it serves. To prove the point, there are several well-known stallions which, in recent years, have carried all before them in breed classes as well as in harness and under saddle.

There is a very real danger in the idea that a breed of pony may be modified to serve a certain purpose and the result of this misconception is clearly shown by the American Shetland. Australia is also, possibly, running the risk of having its own "type", with the very attractive pony that some of them are breeding over there. It is active and full of quality. light and a little long of leg. It could well be classified as a "Riding Type" and while it remains far closer to a Shetland than its American counterpart, it is already losing many of the essential characteristics of bone and substance.

I would suggest that if, for some reason, a genuine Shetland pony does not meet the requirements of a particular owner, then either a different breed should be considered or the modification which has been achieved should be given a different name. The danger lies in altering the original frame-work but in still claiming that the result is a Shetland pony.

I think a lot of damage was done during the hey-day of in-hand showing, when any inferior foal was dismissed as being only suitable for "a kid's pet". (The word "only" is significant as showing all too clearly what was felt about the actual use of a Shetland for any purpose other than breeding.) As "kids' pets", these ponies were sold, sometimes without papers but, more often than not, being officially transferred as registered ponies so that there was no barrier to breeding from them and, in due course, from their progeny.

With production of ponies now noticeably in excess of demand, this would seem the time to try and check the breeding of inferior Shetlands and make a strenuous effort to produce fewer and better foals. Stallion inspection is already going some way towards achieving this aim. A scheme for the compulsory inspection of mares would seem the next logical step but one realises the almost insuperable problems of organisation and expense that would have to be surmounted.

Might not a slow but, ultimately sure, method be the extension of the Gelding Section of the Stud-Book to include mares? Re-named, possibly, the Riding and Driving Register, it would permit inferior fillies as well as colts to be sold with papers, allowing them entry into Breed Classes (ridden, driven and in-hand) but excluding their progeny from registration in the stud-book. Geldings might retain the initial G as at present and mares' numbers be prefixed R/D. Any foals born to these mares being ineligible even for this section of the book.

This would not, of course, result in an immediate improvement in the standard of ponies in general use but experienced judging in all classes combined with the falling off in the production of mediocre ponies would surely achieve this in the end?

These are preventitive measures; what is far more encouraging is the present positive attitude towards the use of Shetlands and the growing popularity of ridden and driven events.

Everything possible should be done to foster the growing enthusiasm for these classes and to support the exhibitors, who are insisting that these classes should be properly judged so that, in the ridden classes particularly, placing will depend upon conformation as well as upon action and manners.

If we can work along these lines, if more and more people will take a pride in selling good ponies for riding and driving, if we can welcome and encourage any scheme that will raise the quality and not the quantity of future foals, then the time may come when our Australian visitors will no longer be confused by the variety of ponies they see over here, and when to have bred the winner of the National Pony Society Ridden Mountain and Moorland Championship at Olympia will carry as much, if not more, honour and glory as winning the in-hand championship at Ingliston or Stoneleigh.

A. GOSLING.

OPEN **28, 1980**

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