

# Best mate's happiest in bush

G'DAY readers ... Bob Venz was born at Nobby in 1924.

Some time later his father drew a soldier settlement block at Dingo, where they battled on that starvation selection for a few years.

But the Great Depression was on and the family moved to Indooroopilly where Bob's father took work on the Brisbane wharves until he finally landed a steady job with the PMG.

Bob did his bit to supplement the family income by selling wheelbarrow loads of cow manure to local market to gardeners for a shilling.

He later found work in a blacksmith's shop at Taringa where he eventually learnt to shoe horses.

Bob headed for the bush in his early teens and spent 12 months on Karinga Downs, at Roma, where the standard fare was wood duck and rice.

Next Bob took up a job as horse taylor in Hoary Green's droving camp.

At 17 Bob tried to join the army – the best he could get was a job as a civilian mounted guard riding the boundary of the ammunition dump at Darra and later at Calvert, which was far too dull for Bob.

He gave that away and went droving cattle and sheep all over the west.

At the end of the season,

## G'DAY

GRAHAM DALY  
CONTRIBUTOR



Bob and wife Kerry, a long-time union.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

Bob would take work with the forestry department at Beerburrum, topping trees with a crosscut saw off a springboard before they were felled.

Kenny Chadman was on the other end of the saw. After seeing their mate Ernie Smith die after a fall from a springboard, they both gave it away.

Back to the west for Bob, delving inside bore drains at Muttaborra with a horse-drawn scoop for a time and then packhorse-droving down the Georgina, taking mobs of 1500 bullocks off Buckingham Downs every year.

In Bob's words, "when the cattle moved, the whole plant moved ... no running back for trucks and cars, no noisy bloody generators at night; the only thing you blokes have got these days that I would have wanted is a mobile phone".

In 1948 Bob married his first wife Rita. They took on a dairy farm at Bonalbo for a time and had four children – Ron, Frank, Elaine and Robert.

Drought took its toll though and Bob found what he regards to this day as his favour-

rite profession, driving bullock teams.

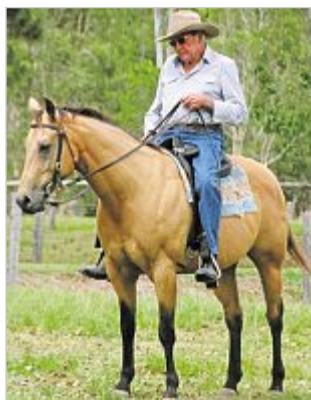
Never one to shirk, Bob took work in slaughterhouses in tough times and mastered the art of butchering.

He also worked on Risdon Thoroughbred Stud and Rangers Valley at Glen Innes for 'Roaring' Bob Caruthers.

The rodeo circuit was a big drawcard for Bob but was too much for Rita – she packed up and left.

Always a lady killer, it wasn't long before Bob met Pat at a dance, swept her off her feet and they married and had three children – Robin, Joanne and Mathew.

Back to the west again, this time on a station at Glenmorgan, where Bob nearly met his death after being bitten on the



LADY KILLER: Bob on his favourite mare.

hand by a death adder. The boss refused to take him to the hospital.

Had it not been for the mail lady, it might have been curtains for Bob.

No anti-venom in those days, it was 11 months before the effects of the poison subsided completely.

As soon as Bob had his strength back, he flattened that bloke who refused to drive him to hospital.

Stuart Swenenson was only too pleased to offer the position of overseer on his Walkon aggregation to Bob, where he stayed for some years before taking on a place of his own at Bollon – breeding shorthorn cattle – and another sweet little 640-acre block at St George where Bob started a dairy.

Ravaged by drought once more, Bob and Pat sold up and moved to Brisbane in 1964, buying a home at St John's Wood and a milk run.

One day in the pub, an old mate bumped into Bob and asked, "Can you still shoe horses?". In a matter of weeks Bob was so busy shoeing he had to sell the milk run and he spent the rest of his working life shoeing and breaking in horses throughout Brisbane.

One afternoon in 1966 I pulled up at Kev Wallen's camp where Kev took me by the arm and said, "Come and meet the hypnotist".

I could not believe my eyes; there was Bob Venz tacking the last shoe on an outlaw I had been struggling with for a week. I knew right then I had to get to know this bloke.

Bob became my farrier that day but, when he raised his price from \$6 to \$8, I said: "Bugger that, it's too dear, you'll just have to teach me to shoe."

We shod hundreds of 'em together but, on my best day, Bob could always shoe two to my one.

We became the best of mates and still are.

He could play any instrument he picked up but the most impressive thing of all was his ability to recite poetry.

Before any party ended, Bob would go into his rendition of Will Ogilvie poems, a hush would come over the room as he sat back and recited The Riding Of The Rebel – all 16 verses, word-perfect in a melodious powerful voice that stirred the imagination to the point where you could hear the slip rails clatter, smell the dust and feel the rebel's muscles strain.

Bob's third marriage was a complete disaster – two ladies were busting to marry him after he and Pat split up.

Bob rang me and asked for my advice as to who he should choose.

"Why are you asking me," I replied, "you're the expert but, if you really want to know, I'd pick Jan, she is the best rider and dancer."

On that basis, Bob married Jan, and endured the worst years of his life.

In the mid-1970s, Bob sought my advice once more. "What do you think of Kerry," he asked.

"Screaming neurotic bitch," I replied, wrong again.

He and Kerry, the love of his life, have spent 40 years together.

This ever-youthful, skilled and talented bloke will turn 90 in December and I am backing him to get a telegram from the Queen in 2024.



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