Annual report, MVDHC, 2018 – 2019

May I begin with sincere thanks for the loyalty and efforts of all committee members: our secretary Jaimie and her laptop, treasurer Emma and her obedient accounts, PE consultant and website wrangler Janett, membership secretary, legal advisor and sponsorship manager Allison, hack show team Sue and Nicole, event backstop and website manager Stef, and judge coordinator Natalie. A small group who achieve so much.

Also the club has benefited greatly from the support of Taree Showground’s caretaker, Stuart Freeman and wife Rhonda. He keeps the grounds in excellent condition. Rhonda makes sure that toilets and showers are always clean, and has a respectful approach to horse owners. The showground has become a popular overnight stabling stop for horse transports. This means that all stables are clean, safe and ready to use, worth the $11/day fee.

Meetings have been fairly regular, on the third Monday of most months at Club West Taree, over dinner. March meeting was cancelled and April transferred to Tuesday to ensure a quorum. Jaimie’s reminders do help, but the night and time prevent Natalie and Allison from attending. We may need to try an occasional variation to include them.

An issue last year was a sharp increase in ground fees that made small events unviable. ( $165 plus $8/horse) Following negotiation with the showground committee a fairer rate was obtained. ($10/horse if arenas prepared, or $8/horse if no preparation, as for small days.) To this end Jaimie and I joined the showground committee and have done time at their very proper meetings, although Junior Football meetings often provide Jaimie with an alibi. When she does attend her blue uniform perspective is much valued. I just sit and vote.

Second ongoing issue was the problem of getting enough help on competition days. A pattern had emerged of exhausted committee members becoming sensitive to minor criticism by non-helping riders. Many hands are needed to make the day run smoothly and while some riders are unable to assist, others have spare time between tests and to encourage them to contribute more and whinge less a refundable levy was introduced. At first it was a voluntary addition to entry fee, alternative to selection of form of work. Some opted for the levy but failed to pay it so it became a compulsory field on Nominate entry form. An extra post event chore checking who had helped, but a plentiful supply of test collectors and pencillers made it worthwhile. Putting arenas away at the end of the day now happens like magic. Putting them up is still a work in progress.

Four official events were held in the year, two T-shirt days, two arena practice days and two unofficial hack shows. Support varied, reasons not always clear.

November, OC/CU/YH dressage: 45 horses, including 11 for Young Horse tests.

December T-shirt hack show, good support, lost number

January T-shirt plus YH: 20 horses, incl 7YH

February arena practice: 5 horses

March OC/CU/YH: 61 horses, incl 5YH

April T-shirt: 26 horses

June OC/CU: 94 entries, but 22 scratched due to Hunter Valley rain

June T-shirt hack show: 13 horses, clashing event plus bad weather

July arena practice: 6 horses

August championships OC/CU/YH: 105 horses, incl 4YH

T-shirt dressage days are profitable, hack shows unpredictable as enter on the day, official dressage more costly as they require more accredited judges, and YH tests need more high level judges, but are a service to regional breeder/trainers. Official competitions also require accredited stewards. Ideally we would like to have a couple of members trained as stewards. So far no candidates in evidence. Annual efforts are made to train and reaccredit judges, a seminar held in September 2018 and another coming in October 2019, with Nell Marshman as presenter.

In February ENSW awards were announced and Manning Valley was 2018 NSW Dressage Club of the Year. Still not sure how that happened, whether it was an encouragement to do better in 2019. The mind boggles. I like to think it reflects our inclusion of all levels and categories, as Para Equestrian has consistently been supported here.

Our club championships in 2019 were classified as a Regional Dressage Festival, an undertaking by DNSW and ENSW to bridge the gap between club and state championships. Our approach was low key with no glossy programmes, but Karen Lever’s high speed scoring and lavish presentation of champion rugs with saddle cloths for reserve champions, plus prizemoney aimed benefits squarely at the riders. Add kind weather, the dulcet tones of Cheryl Pickard in the announcer’s box and a new caterer who provided fresh and varied food; riders were happy. To break even we would need to reduce the number of divisions in official tests. This can be discussed before next August. The support of state bodies is appreciated.

Positions vacant: The more members who get involved, the lighter the load on each. Our scoring system is under constant revision, and our annual pointscore disappeared totally with the last keeper. Nice idea but we each do as much as we can. Deaf to criticism but welcoming to offers of help.

Happy riding. It’s really all about the horses, and a privilege to live with them. Regards all,

Helen