

A VISIT WITH POMQUEST POMERANIANS

By Brett Abraham & Sandy Barrington-Rowe

When invited by Randy to do a Kennel Visit recently our first thought was why now, as we are only very new kids on the block but as if we were ever going to say no?! Thanks Randy for the invitation and we hope our short story from “down under” does your great magazine some justice. We are Brett Abraham and Sandy Barrington-Rowe from Australia and are partners in life and in the passage of time have, over the last few years, found ourselves in what we now also hope to be a lifelong partnership with this highly addictive breed of dogs.

We will start with a brief background on ourselves before we get on to our formative years in exhibiting and breeding Pomeranians. Ladies first of course. Sandy was born into the world of Thoroughbred horse racing with her father being one of the top jockeys in the country of his time and now a successful trainer. Sandy's mother became ill when Sandy and her only brother were very young and was one of the early organ transplant recipients in Australia. Her new kidney gave her a further 11 years of life and the opportunity to see her first Grandchild born. When Sandy was 13 the whole family moved to the beautiful North Queensland town of Mackay where Sandy spent the next 8 years before she moved back to Brisbane. Whilst living in Mackay, Sandy met her first Pomeranian and was determined to one day have her own. It took a further 25 years before that became a reality and was to be the beginning of Pomquest though in a way that neither Brett nor Sandy could have ever imagined.

Brett's family background extends to being one of 4 settling family's in the rural town of Maleny which then extended to over 100 years of cattle farming before

eventually Brett's parents chose to move to the city of Brisbane to allow the children the best education and work prospects. There is a well known saying that you can take the boy out of the country but you can never take the country out of the boy and that has always sounded true with Brett. As a teenager and young adult he was a leading equestrian competitor and judge and in that time developed his love of the best

danga, we had become the leading Quarter-horse breeders for our speciality, had begun breeding Thoroughbreds too and it looked as though each others dreams were becoming reality.

Life has a habit of slapping you down when you least expect it and everything was ticking over merrily for us until Sandy had a freak riding accident. Fortunately she was found unconscious by a friend after Sandy's riderless horse turned up at the stables and she ended up on an Emergency helicopter flight to hospital. Sandy did receive a brain injury from the accident and it affects her balance and memory. Around that time Brett received a job offer he couldn't refuse back in the city and coupled with Sandy's condition decided to abandon our dreams and move back to Brisbane. We still retained some Thoroughbreds and had a number of nice winners but also came with a number of setbacks that left us both jaded with the racing industry.

We both have had dogs our whole lives and a great association with them. Each being of rural background it just so happened that these generally were Australian Cattle Dogs. In 2005, Brett's ACD bitch was entering the twilight of her life at 16 and as Brett's Aunty also had Pomeranians



Celebrating a clean sweep at Royal Queensland Show 2011

equine athlete there was in the Thoroughbred. He was fascinated in racehorses and their breeding and, being the intellect that he is, he had an ongoing thirst for information on bloodlines and breeding principles. Although he had always expected to become a Veterinarian after studying Animal Husbandry he instead studied 2 degrees in Science and Engineering at University.

Whilst working as an Engineer, Brett continued to have a few horses and developed a close friendship with Sandy's brother David and ultimately shared a small acreage together where they both had a few horses. This led in 1994 for Brett to meet Sandy but for one reason or another both beat about the bush for a few years but knowing inside that we were very much cut from the same cloth! It wasn't until 2001 our love broke through the barriers and we have been together ever since. All our energy at that time was directed to horses and by 2003, whilst based in the sleepy hinterland town of Kan-



Wookiee. Our first homebred

when he was a child he didn't need much convincing by Sandy that now was the time for her to "finally" get her first pet Pomeranian (not registered purebred) which she named "Wombat". Well as everyone reading this magazine would know the personality of a Pomeranian is infectious and we both adored her greatly. Tragically Wombat had only a brief life journey of 15 months when she died of a mystery illness. Sandy was utterly inconsolable and needed to fill the big hole in her heart quickly. Although wanting another female Pom upon reading an advertisement in the local paper for a purebred male puppy this breeder happened to be only a mile or so down the road so we thought we'd pop in for a look anyway just so we could at least see what a "real" Pomeranian looked like. Enter Sue and Daryl Morris of Winterspell Kennels who were only still relatively new themselves to Poms having been with Siberian Huskies previously for 15 years and were only very small show breeders of Poms. That afternoon late in 2006 will be etched in our lives for ever! We sat down around the barbeque table in their backyard with a few Poms running around our feet. One in particular took Brett's eye and she quickly fixed herself upon his lap. Aust Ch Winterspell Witchcraft ("Panda") was the most beautiful dog he had ever seen! Brett asked if she was related to the puppy that was for sale and when Daryl said Panda was from the dam's previous litter then Brett said well then if he has any chance of looking like her I am buying him! So from what was just to be an inquisitive look we walked away that afternoon with Winterspell Picollo ("Spud") in our arms. Apart from being the reason we got our first purebred Pom at the time we could never imagine what impact Panda would actually have later in our life

Spud was only ever purchased to be a pet and was the reject from the litter but we were given his registered papers. We developed a friendship with Sue and Daryl and they invited us to come along to a dog show held on New Years Eve to watch Panda as well as Spud's two retained littermates being shown. We figured it was not unlike a horse show, which we both had plenty of experience at, and thought what the hell lets have some fun and give it a try with Spud. So in January 2007 Sandy and Spud enter the ring for the first time and looking back now we cringe in embarrassment LOL. Anyway we bumbled along showing Spud helped by

Sue and Daryl and some months down the track the "reject" started to beat his two littermates in the show ring! Next step was to get another Pom so we could both have one to show. With our breeding background it was natural for us to try and get a bitch so we could ultimately start a breeding program if we so desired. This was when we found out just how hard it was to actually get one! After months of no joy Sue and Daryl gave us Spud's littermate Winterspell Sara Nade ("Jill") to help us get started breeding Poms on the basis that some time down the track we would give them a daughter back if she ever produced one. As it turned out Jill didn't have a show temperament so we had to put her to the side to breed when ready and kept on looking



Spud in action doing what he loves!

for another bitch. We were eventually offered a show prospect bitch Cupidtown Anniversary ("Boo") so she joined our now show team of 2. As 2007 went on we then knew we were in this for the long haul so started to ramp up our quest for information on breeders, bloodlines etc so as to start a breeding strategy. The epicentre of Pom's in Australia tends to be in Sydney, as our one and only breed club is located there, so it became a "must do" for us to attend the next Specialty Show. In October 2007 we took our very modest show team to the bi-annual Pomeranian Club of New South Wales Championship Show to meet and greet the various breeders we had been in contact with by phone and email and also look at the different bloodlines firsthand to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each. This was the most influential moment in the foundation of Pomquest as we came away knowing exactly what lines we would use and knew where to get them from. The willingness to support



CH Soffie's Bubbla (imp DEN)

us insignificant "newbies" that was then offered from Margaret Munro and Shawn Broadhead was fundamental to our later success. Our results at that show were indifferent with Spud placing 3rd in his class of 5 so we came home with a ribbon but Boo was embarrassingly placed 9th of 9 LOL. We have never encountered a judge place right to the end of the lineup before or since but that really gave us a good reality check. We then set ourselves a goal of coming back in 3-5 years and being at the other end of the lineup!

Shortly after that show we were able to attain Spud's Championship and it was deserved as he had a Group 1st and Group 2nd to his belt although in weak company. Spud was the perfect start for us as he was good

enough to compete and not discourage us but then not good enough to give us an unrealistic picture of the work we needed to do to reach similar success that we have had in the horse world. Although potentially demoralising at the time we also had the "benefit" of competing

week in week out against the best male and best female Poms in the country in Aust Ch Soffie's Buddy (imp DEN) and Aust Gr Ch Canton Country Classic (imp PHIL) which forced us to learn to groom and handle to the absolute best we could to have some hope of competing and when eventually we would have a quality dog it would place us in a strong position to get the best from them.

During 2008 we "eventually" finished Boo's Championship and then quickly neutered Boo for her to become Sandy's daughter's beloved companion. Our experience in breeding horses had taught us to be our own worst critic and we don't kid ourselves on what is or isn't a breeding prospect. Jill was a different story though and we had been tirelessly looking at planned matings for her and eventually settled for a totally unheralded dog Amorea Dark Sandshells ("Cisco") who was owned by Margaret Munro. Cisco was never shown due to an accident so he didn't have a Ch title in

front of his name and most likely would not ever have been a top winner even if he had been shown. Cisco had never produced a Champion though he was 4 years old at the time but he was the best choice dog in our opinion. We decided to go with an alphabetical litter naming approach and after Jill produced one male puppy to Cisco in May 2008, we fittingly named him Pomquest A New Player (“Wookie”). Wookie had a lot going for him and really was a great start to our breeding program. At 9 months of age he was actually defeating some top dogs fair and square but someone forgot to tell him to stop growing and at about 11 months unfortunately had another growth spurt. Stepping back now to our introduction to Poms we convinced the Morris’s to let Panda come live with us, get her back in show condition and exhibit her in some select shows. There was somewhat of an ulterior motive too as Panda was Jill’s maternal half-sister and after seeing what Jill produced to Cisco we had a very strong view that a potential mating to Cisco could be something else. Panda had never been mated and never was going to be but as fate had it she came on season right after her last ever planned show with us and the Morris’s agreed to send her down with Jill to be mated with Cisco provided we whelped and reared the litter. Jill didn’t end up getting in whelp that time but in October 2008 Panda caught Sandy by surprise a week early and was rushed for an emergency c-section with Sandy in tears. Thank goodness our Repro Vets “A Team” were on duty that morning which ensured the puppies survived and that one and only litter of 3 males from Panda would go on to become an outstanding success! It would not be of our breeders prefix but we had a very strong hand in it. We picked Winter-spell Wizard (“Merlin”) to keep, Winter-spell Warlock (“Salem”) went to another show home and as they couldn’t possibly be all show prospects in the litter the 3rd pup, Hagrid, was placed in a pet home but in hindsight Hagrid would have made it to a Champion. Also throughout 2008 we started to “collect” Poms of the lines we were seeking to show and ultimately breed on with. One of these was the bitch Luarts Superstar Dreams (“Fizz”) who was purchased by Ray and Wendy Chan from Perth, WA and placed with us to show. Ray had been chasing a quality Pom for ages and kept getting knocked back but he was finally offered Fizz though she was deemed very expensive.

In discussing her with us we convinced Ray that Fizz was actually “cheap” and so she came to live with us. At the time Ray said he wanted one day to be associated with Poms that would be internationally competitive and although we had still done nothing of any note he felt that in time we would



Richie. Our best bred yet!

get there, so Ray and Wendy then became partners in the Pomquest dream. In 2008 we also had to consume the first bitter taste of Poms being the heartbreak breed. After buying 2 quality puppies then losing one within days and battling for 2 weeks to try and save the other it was a learning experience never forgotten and will always be the



Richie striding out

reality check we need floating in the back of our minds whilst times are good.

Enter 2009 and we now consistently had a show team of 4 in the ring and were getting more and more handling and grooming skills but it was becoming very clear that Merlin was going to be everything we had thought he could be and it was at the Brisbane Royal Show that year that he announced loudly that he was something special in winning Best of Breed at 9 months of age over a number of BIS winning dogs. Now we were beginning to be taken serious-

ly and throughout 2009 we finished 4 Poms to their Championship and Merlin finished the year as the #1 Rising Star Pommeranian on the National Dogzonline breed pointscore. In this year we started to get more actively involved in the Pom community with Sandy as the Pom Club Publicity Officer and we started up an email forum for breeders that was lacking for the sharing of locally focussed information amongst “Aussies”. Our one and only breed club down under has developed wonderfully in the last few years, with Elizabeth Friedman and Lynn Bond being instrumental in that and we have been pleased to be able to assist the club wherever we can.

On to 2010 and this would be the year that Pomquest stepped up a gear! We had no litters in 2009 but during 2010 we had 4 litters sired by Merlin and 1 litter sired by his brother Salem who had returned home after attaining his Championship with Chris Hatfield (more on those 2010 litters later). From these litters it was pleasing to be able to give Jill’s daughter Pomquest Bon Bon (“PK”) as pick of the litter back to the Morris’s and complete the circle. In the showring Merlin started going from strength to strength and early in 2010 he won two Group 1st’s and on his 3rd attempt he went on to win a Best in Show All Breeds and what a day that was! Merlin kept competing at the highest levels but not to be outdone Sandy started showing Salem and he went on to a BISA2 shortly after. We had been asked during 2009 to show some Poms for Ven Grasso (see Pom Reader Kennel Visit August 2008) with one being the bitch Soffie’s Bubbla (imp DEN). After a run of bad luck Ven chose to exit Pom’s and offered us Bubbla and also another bitch Soffie’s C’mon (imp DEN). This was an opportunity we couldn’t knock back as they were international quality bloodlines and with support from Ray and Wendy, Pomquest then had its first imports. Sandy showed both girls to their Ch titles and won a BISA2 with C’mon as well! We were having some nice showring success well above others expectations but it was at the Pom Show in November 2010 when the Pom show scene probably really took notice as from a speciality show of 94 Poms, Merlin won Runner Up Best in Show and our show team won 3 of the 7 total classes in Show. We had some Pomquest babies that debuted 2 days later and both defeated what were the winning Poms of their class at the

Pom Show so if they had been shown too we could very well have won 4 from 7 classes of what were the best collection of Poms from around the country. We had overshot our goal set back 3 years earlier but in our eyes we had just scratched the surface and a huge amount of time and effort still lay ahead to get anywhere near where we really wanted to be, but it sure was nice to know the end goal could possibly be in our reach in time.

Pomquest is very much a team exercise with us both playing our part. We each share the handling of our show team and in general each has a dog and bitch to campaign concurrently. Sandy does the study into health and welfare, diet planning, puppy show training and does the long hours whelping/rearing the litters assisted by Brett only when needed or just when she needs sleep! Brett does all the breed planning, study of bloodlines and does most of the grooming and show trimming. He will also move in to the judges training program in the next couple of years as a natural progression from his previous judging experience.

So far this year our class of 2010 have become the show stars and will become

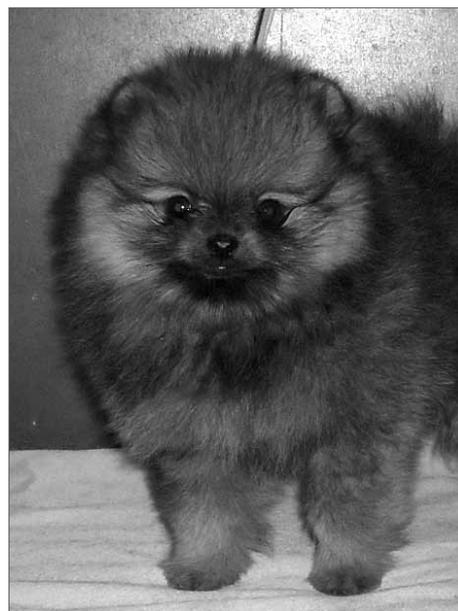


Panda's legacy. Merlin & Salem

the foundation for our next phase breeding program. Aust Ch Pomquest Dont Ya Wish ("Soda"), Aust Ch Pomquest Dare To Dream ("Pop"), Pomquest Enough Said ("Ruby"), Pomquest Envy This ("Topaz") and Pomquest Fame N Fortune ("Richie") are all multi Class in Show winners with Soda, Ruby, Topaz and Richie all winning multi Group 1st and/or Group 2nd's. As much as it has been pleasing to see our Pomquest babies do so well, a very special milestone for us was achieved in June 2011 when Merlin attained his Grand Cham-

ptionship. The criteria for this award is very tough to achieve in Australia and takes 2 years of showing with regular Group wins to get there and it was very rewarding to have the recognition for the special award shared with the Morris's and Munro's that each were so fundamental to our successful start in the breed. Both of Panda's sons Merlin and Salem have been BISA winners this year and qualified for Dog of the Year and both of them have had progeny qualify for Puppy of the Year too so that special girl Panda who was the reason we bought our first registered Pomeranian ended up playing a bigger part than was ever imagined. So that all our Poms can receive the quality of care and personal attention they deserve we don't ever intend having large numbers, so after sitting back and observing the outcomes of our 2010 matings we have chosen to only retain 2 adult bitches in our breeding program being Fizz and Bubbla, then their daughters Pop and Ruby (sired by Merlin) will be added to our breeding program in 2012. Both Fizz and Bubbla have been mated this year to the outstanding USA import Aust Grand Ch Kalo's Rock N To The Moon ("Gus") who is a total outcross to our foundation lines and we are extremely grateful for being given that opportunity from Megan Weinert and the favour will be returned in time. This year we also ventured to Kentucky for the APC Nationals. Just like going to our first Pom Club show in 2007 there is nothing like observing firsthand the different bloodlines and meeting breeders face to face and this was a "must do" for us, particularly being the 100th Anniversary too! We were a bit overawed by the enormity of the occasion but will be back again in 2012 and hope to be able to spend more time with some of you now reading this article.

Well that is our story so far. Where to next? Our initial success has been based on using the quality foundations of other breeders we were fortunate in collecting and then applying our breeding knowledge to try and take that a step further. We intend to keep our breeding program focussed on keeping disparity on 2 foundation lines being the CAN/UK blends behind Merlin, Salem and Fizz and the USA/EU blends behind Bubbla and C'mon then couple these with the introduction of a further disparate line through the use of Gus, so barring the



Super cute Topaz

gotcha out of left field we should not need to go outside of what we now have for many years ahead. Our Poms are first and foremost our much loved pets before anything else so they will only ever be lightly bred and every mating decision considered very carefully. We fortunately were introduced to the heartbreak of Alopecia X before we started breeding ourselves so this has always been high on our agenda to minimise risk in that regard, particularly as our foundation Poms in general have no health or soundness issues of note so we can focus on Alopecia X more. We can't really offer up anything of substance to readers due to our infancy in the breed, however from our prior experiences, study and education we will suggest that always keep one simple word in your mind when breed planning and that is BALANCE. Mother Nature has an uncanny knack of always biting back hard when the scales get tipped too far to one extreme so we will continually seek to maintain balance in breed type, balance in health/temperament/soundness and also balance in genetic diversity. Thank you to Randy once again for the invitation to do this Kennel Visit and thanks so much to those very special people we already mentioned who have made these formative 4 years of Pomquest possible. We chose our kennel name such that it is a "Quest for Pomfection" so we will now strap ourselves tightly in to the rollercoaster of ups and downs of being a Pom breeder/exhibitor and will not be letting go anytime soon! ■

Cheers, Brett and Sandy