



Story by Bronwyn Farr

**A** HANDS-ON APPROACH, immense experience and a genuine passion for horses is immediately evident as Mike and Mia Thew step into a paddock at their property Crownningstone on the outskirts of Scone.

Three shiny mares dozing under the shade of a tree saunter over rather nonchalantly from their cool spot for a pat, and a gang of gangly weanlings arrive with much exuberance, surrounding the couple to be showered with affection. The strongly-made adolescents are enthusiastic and naturally mischievous but they are respectful rather than pushy.

The property nestled in the Dartbrook Valley near Yarraman Park, Attunga and Wakefield has been custom-built by Mike and Mia, utilising their considerable international experience and desire to be innovators.

“We started talking about a name and a good friend the Scone TAFE librarian helped us – we wanted something relevant to the district and there are names of great horses like Carbine and others and they are good but everybody else has used them! Crownningstone was suggested and although we are not royalists we thought it was a great connection to the heritage of the region,” Mike explains.

Seven years ago the couple purchased the land and started from scratch building fences, stables, machinery shed, foal yards and nine day paddocks, among other improvements, just the way they wanted.

“Safety was the prime aspect, and ease of management from a logistics point of view as well as horse welfare and how well they do in a particular situation,” Mia says.

“We definitely have smaller paddocks than most studs and we have no more than six mares and foals in a paddock. We can group them better, and if one particular group belong to one owner, we can keep them together. We prefer to keep together mares that have arrived together,” she adds.

The property boasts excellent gently sloping grazing country and clean fertile loamy basalt soils. Particular emphasis is placed on hygiene and disease prevention for client horses.

As a small farm amid a region characterised by large, opulent international farms, Mike and Mia’s point of differentiation is a truly personalised, one-to-one service from selecting a stallion right through to preparing a yearling for sale or to be retained to race.

“We don’t have our mares tagged, we don’t need them tagged, we know who they are and who the foals are by,” Mia says. “We also have a full time senior horse person here in Sally Lowe, who has had considerable experience at places such as Yarraman Park, Holbrook Stud and Clovelly equine intensive care unit,” she adds.

“We’ve designed facilities with a view to minimising the stress on horses through movement; we have laneways that connect to yards from all paddocks and we never run mares and foals along a laneway. So we are reducing the stress and risk of injury. If we need to treat a foal for a minor injury, or if the owner would like to



**MIKE and MIA THEW - offering a very personalised service with an emphasis on quality**





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inspect it, then it is easy to walk into the paddock and slip on a headcollar, there is less stress and they are not taken out of their routine,” she explains.

“We all spend a lot of time handling mares and foals; in the long term, it is time efficient because if we need to handle a horse it is easy to do so, safely, in their own environment,” says Mia as a chestnut weanling nudges her insistently for a forehead rub.

Their rapport and gentleness with horses is obvious, so it is not surprising to learn that clients such as Lyndhurst, Noblenote and Tamac Studs, Wadham Park and Access Bloodstock report that young horses sent from Crownningstone are remarkably tractable and easy to handle.

Although Crownningstone has a good client base with large interstate farms who appreciate the quality of a specialist operation,

Mike and Mia particularly enjoy working with smaller clients who may be new to the industry, offering a year-round service and a business relationship that extends to accompanying clients to stallion parades and kicking up their heels together on Scone Cup Day.

Crownningstone also cater for spellers having spelled and pre-trained for conditioners such as Paul Perry, Graeme Rogerson and Greg Hickman.

“I like the reward of helping clients achieve good sale prices for their yearlings, or growing out their horses to race,” says Mia.

“We look forward to assisting new people in the industry or people who are looking for personalised service all year around. We offer a professional personalised service with an emphasis on quality,” says Mike.

The couple have been involved in training staff for the breeding and racing industry and have blazed a trail as innovators: at Wakefield Stud in 1983 Mike began the now commonly accepted practiced of “walking out” mares. Mia worked with the prototype marketing company Natbred in Canberra and later at Magic Millions in pedigree, bloodstock and marketing.

Mike spent three years working at Spendthrift Farm in Kentucky managing the client broodmares including such notable mares as Native Partner (dam of Serheed), Fall Aspen and Allez France. His time at Spendthrift instilled in him the importance of quality husbandry and management of breeding stock. Mike was the manager of Wakefield Stud at Scone for the first six years of its operation.

At Wakefield he was the first stud manager to use the now widespread black fence paint, was one of the first managers in the Hunter Valley to adopt and promote the practice of walking in mares to visit stallions and was involved in some of the first field trials using Regumate for maintenance of pregnancy.

Over the past 10 years Mike & Mia have has been a leading figure in promoting and delivering education and training of staff for the horse industry.

“When we go with a client to a stallion parade or sale, we’re emphasising that conformation is just as important to factor in as pedigree and the commercial end-point, we are very strong on that.”

Crownningstone offers client services catering specifically for the needs of breeders looking for a high standard of broodmare and progeny management at a competitive rate, supported by a more individual and personal approach. Services offered include agistment, broodmare fertility management, walk-ons, foaling and weaning and yearling preparation.

## The Stone of Destiny

THE PROPERTY CROWNINGSTONE has a stunning natural rock formation in the ranges that frame a magnificent vista that lends itself to a name that is inextricably linked with the name and Celtic heritage of Scone.

There is a kingmaking “Stone of Scone” or “Stone of Destiny” upon which all monarchs were crowned at Scone in Scotland. The Coronation Stone or “Liath Fàil” was returned from Westminster Abbey to Scotland in 1996

According to legend, The Liath Fàil was lent to the Scots by the Milesians (Irish) for the coronation of their new king; the Scots neglected to return it. It was later stolen by King Edward I of England and became part of his coronation chair.

The 152kg slab of sandstone appears in the legends of the great Celtic kings and heroes including those of the iconic Cúchulainn. It was a highly visible symbol of Scottish power – until the English nicked off with it!

When the English took the Stone to Westminster Abbey, they inserted it into the base of the new English coronation throne, St. Edward’s Chair, which was specifically designed to house the Stone. The chair was named after Edward’s namesake, Edward the Confessor, England’s only canonized king. Thus, subjugated to “English arses,” the Stone of Destiny became symbolic of England’s destiny to rule over Scotland.