

TERRITORY

AUSTRALIA

ISSUE THREE
APRIL – JUNE 2014



THE BEEF ON CATTLE

ECONOMICS AND
EXPORT

CAREFLIGHT

TOP END AEROMEDICAL
SERVICE

TO FINKE AND BACK

DESERT RACE WHERE
LEGENDS ARE MADE

'LYNDAVALE'

THE NEXT GENERATION
STEP UP

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT DAVID WARRINER

EVENTS CALENDAR | FREE SUBSCRIPTION | BUSINESS DIRECTORY



FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

WORDS: NIGEL ADLAM. PHOTOS: GLENN CAMPBELL (COVER) AND SUPPLIED.

David Warriner knew from the time he was knee-high to a Brahman bull that he would be a cattleman.

"It never crossed my mind to be anything else," he says.

David was brought up on cattle stations and is now the consulting manager to the Tipperary Group of Stations, which sprawl across 7500 square kilometres west of the Adelaide River, 200 kilometres south of Darwin.

He has also taken on one of the toughest of jobs at the toughest of times - president of the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association.

His story may have ended abruptly and violently long before it became obvious that he was going to make a name for himself in the pastoral industry.

David fractured his skull during a rodeo at Daly Waters in 1985 when he was only 20 and, therefore, feeling indestructible.

"The horse just bolted across the arena crashing into the end rails. I bailed out and landed on my head."

He was working as a jackaroo on Newcastle Waters at the time and billionaire owner Kerry Packer offered to fly him to Sydney for treatment in his private jet.

But David recovered in Katherine Hospital after being "pretty ordinary" for a long while.

Three years later, he crash-landed a light aircraft after engine failure while flying in arid country west of Newcastle Waters. Miraculously, he was unscathed.

"And apart from a car accident, I haven't had any brushes with death since then," he says. "Three is enough."

David was born in Alice Springs in 1965 while his dad Ken managed Kenmore Park station, which is now Aboriginal-owned land.

There was a terrible drought during the first years of his life and when it finally

rained, apparently he ran under the house in fear with the dogs

Sadly, his mother suffered from breast cancer for many years before her death in 1971, and he and his younger brother Geoff were often cared for by Aboriginal nannies.

David was one of only a few non-Indigenous people in the vastness of the Central Australian cattle country and his father says he more or less spoke Pitjanjatjara before he spoke English.

The family later moved to Mt House station in the Kimberley and then Brunette Downs on the Barkly Tableland.

"Life was very simple for us all when we were little kids," he says. "The Aboriginal people went hunting for food in the traditional way, and often took us along. There were plenty of corroborees at night time.

"It was all such a great thing to experience, so rare and mostly lost nowadays.



“We enjoyed a carefree life. We went where we liked, often hunting with the blackfellas. We were pretty much the only white kids there and they looked after us.”

“There was a fair bit of segregation among the adults, but not the children, although we never slept over at the Aboriginal camp.”

“There was an understanding between the races, between two vastly different cultures. Some people today would say it was racist, but I don’t think it was inherently racist. We just appreciated each other’s lot.”

The Warriner boys were taught by governesses until being sent to boarding school at Toowoomba and

then Southport from grade 4.

“We were pretty wild kids. We’d run off out to the stock camps and the governess could never catch us, until dad employed a former New South Wales athletics champion. She’d catch us all right, unless we ran through the prickles when she didn’t have shoes on.”

David admits he wasn’t academic and didn’t do too well at school. But he went back to studies part-time in his thirties and picked up a swag of business qualifications, including one from Harvard University.

After leaving school, he went to Humbert River station to learn the cattle business from the bottom up by working as a jackaroo, tank builder and drover.

David met his future wife Gina at Humbert where she was working as a cook while backpacking around Australia. They have three children: Mary, Lucy and William.

They have seen many dramatic changes in the pastoral industry, including the loss of Aboriginal stockmen.

“It’s a terrible tragedy. The industry is always looking for workers and yet we have an unused workforce among Aboriginal people, a workforce that would stay in their jobs for life.”

“At the moment, we get city kids coming up to work during their gap year. They go to cattle stations like some of them go to England. We have to train them up and then they’re gone.”



LEFT: (FROM LEFT) BROTHER YAP, FATHER KEN AND DAVID WARRINER.

BELOW LEFT: DAVID WARRINER (RIGHT) WITH JAMES PACKER.

RIGHT: DAVID AND GINA ON THEIR WEDDING DAY AND RELAXING ON HOLIDAY.



“WE WERE PRETTY WILD KIDS. WE’D RUN OFF OUT TO THE STOCK CAMPS AND THE GOVERNESS COULD NEVER CATCH US, UNTIL DAD EMPLOYED A FORMER NEW SOUTH WALES ATHLETICS CHAMPION. SHE’D CATCH US ALL RIGHT, UNLESS WE RAN THROUGH THE PRICKLES WHEN SHE DIDN’T HAVE SHOES ON.”

“I’d rather see the effort put into training Aborigines than some rich businessman’s kids from south eastern cities.”

David, who runs his own pastoral consultancy business, DWs Agricon, has taken over as leader of the NT Cattlemen’s Association as pastoralism recovers from a Federal Government-imposed six-month ban on live exports, and as the industry faces up to enormous challenges – and lip-smacking opportunities.

He says the biggest issue is the development of new markets.

Most cattle from the northern half of the NT are shipped live to Indonesia. Smaller markets are opening up in Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines. And the Australian Agricultural Company’s new \$82 million, 1000-head-a-day abattoir on the outskirts of Darwin is expected to develop a lucrative frozen meat trade with China.

Australian cattle are the most expensive in the world to process – twice as much per processed head as in the United States – because of high labour, energy and transport costs.

“We have to be more productive and technically advanced than our competitors.”

David says there are “great opportunities” for pastoralists but new markets have to be chosen carefully.

“Australia exports close to one million live cattle and two million tonnes of beef a year, so we don’t want to develop a market for more than this capacity by dropping the price. We must achieve prices that more than cover our value-chain costs.”

“And we have to ensure that any market is sustainable, that countries like Vietnam and the Philippines can afford cattle prices that support our expensive value chain.”

He says the industry needs to be more profitable to encourage greater investment in upgrading infrastructure and tackling such environmental problems as exotic weeds, which are damaging productivity.

“We should be employing twice the number of people to get the work that needs to be done, done.”

Australian cattle stations used to have one stockman for every 1000 head of

cattle; now it’s one to every 5000 in some cases.

One of the heaviest burdens is the cost of complying with government regulations. Cattlemen complain long and loud that they’re “over-regulated.”

David says pastoralists and “processors/exporters”, the companies that buy the cattle and then have them slaughtered or shipped live overseas, need to work together more closely. He has just been appointed to the board of what could become the second major company on the Australian Stock Exchange, STAG Beef.

When not fighting the good fight on behalf of cattlemen, David enjoys living at Tipperary, which is owned by Melbourne barrister Allan Myers but used to have a private zoo owned by Perth businessman Warren Anderson.

“It’s a good life out there,” he says. “Nearly all the exotic wildlife has been removed, but there’s still the odd deer running around. And a pygmy hippo turned up one day. That was a bit odd, to say the least.” **TQ**