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LITTLE BEASTS

A look at miniature breeds



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Good things come in small packages

Story by Lisa Potter

IT takes a particularly strong pull to convince a lifelong dairy farmer to take up a new challenge. But Woodville's Bruce Cooper has happily turned his back on decades of dairy farming to undertake a new project with his wife Dimi - breeding rare miniature animals, primarily aimed at the increasing lifestyle block market.

The original 250 acre (101.17ha) Tararua property has been transformed from a working dairy farm to a successful breeding operation for four varieties of miniature cattle and American miniature Mediterranean donkey.

The couple have spent three years establishing their impressive stock bloodlines, seeking out quality purebred stock for their breeding programme.

Tantillus Stud is the result and it is aptly named, with Tantillus the Latin word for 'so little, so small'.

Boasting miniature Herefords, Highlands, Belted Galloway and White Galloway (all in miniature form) the livestock may be small but Bruce and Dimi are hugely committed to the success of their venture.

"We wanted to create something unique and we have," says Dimi. "What we failed to factor in to our original plans however, was how these little animals would steal our hearts.

"It's part of what makes them so popular for small block owners. They're an absolute delight to have around and to handle."

Bruce downsized his original 250 acre (101ha) property to 100 acre

(60ha), but such small stock barely need much land. In fact they are incredibly economical to run.

"The problem is the opposite," says Bruce. "They're really good doers so you have to watch they don't become obese and monitor their food intake all year.

"Our herd of 15 breeding age cows have been in a three-acre paddock for a few months now, being slowly broken through it to ensure a healthy weight."

Tantillus Stud

The couple's home is perched on a softly sloping hill overlooking the mainly flat property. The 10 acres (4.04ha) closest to the house has been carefully converted to accommodate the miniature breeds. Smaller troughs and four wire electric fences are better suited to the miniature breeds. Like any successful stud farm, correct facilities are essential.

months, before on selling them as weaners. Occasionally he also grazes beef cattle as well.

The pair's dream began while enjoying the outlook to the Ruahine ranges from their house verandah, where a pet black sheep was browsing. Dimi turned to Bruce and said "wouldn't it be neat to implant the sheep with a miniature embryo".

This led to a discussion on miniature breeds and the increasing value for the type on lifestyle block properties.

Many who enjoy the benefits of a rural lifestyle through lifestyle blocks, still work full time, so don't want labour-intensive stock.

"They want a dual purpose animal, which is easy and enjoyable to care for, doesn't damage the pasture and is enjoyable to have around. That's where the miniature breeds are just ideal.

"We never wanted to be the largest

"They want a dual purpose animal, which is easy and enjoyable to care for, doesn't damage the pasture and is enjoyable to have around. That's where the miniature breeds are just ideal."

A purpose built shed houses young stock and provides a secure facility for drenching, worming and any vet visits.

On the remaining 120 acres (48ha), Bruce still retains 30 Friesian milking cows, which he uses to rear approximately 200 (standard size) Friesian bull calves over about four

breeder of miniatures around. we just wanted to establish a small nucleus of good breeding animals, which have been handled, drenched and cared for and are ready for their new homes."

Although Bruce and Dimi originally planned to breed miniature Herefords, once they started searching for good genetics they discovered they had to

Miniature Hereford

Predominantly red in colour with a white face, the miniature Hereford dates back hundreds of years. Appealing for their easy handling and the fact they are easy on pasture. Also prized for quality lean, flavourful meat. Miniature cattle can winter on roughly one third the feed of many of the crossbred cows popular today.

Reasons to own:

- Early maturing; cows may be bred at 15/18 months of age
- High fertility
- Excellent feed conversion
- Hardiness
- Quiet and adaptable
- Produce top quality meat

travel extensively throughout New Zealand to find the rare breeds, so decided to set up as a 'one stop shop' for customers interested in miniatures.

"It's been really successful. People often visit us with one specific breed in mind and end up learning about other breeds also suited to their property.

"The Highlands, Herefords and Galloway all co-exist quite happily together so can be run as a herd or purchased individually for those looking for just one or two beasts."

All stock are hand reared, making them hassle free and friendly to handle - another essential feature for many lifestyle block owners.

"Larger farmers are cottoning on to the benefits of these miniature genetics too," says Bruce. "Miniature





Miniature Highland

Descended from Scotland and once an ancient and semi-forgotten species, the miniature Highland cattle is enjoying a strong return to popularity, largely due to its even temperament, ease of calving and low maintenance.

Miniature Highland cattle come in red, yellow, black, dun, white and brindle. The calves have a distinctive 'teddy bear' look. Height at maturity should be 42 inches (measurement taken from the hip/hook bone)

Reasons to own:

- Hardiness
- Extremely strong maternal instinct
- Adaptability
- Excellent feed conversion
- Temperament



Hereford bulls are gaining popularity in the dairy industry, for using over dairy heifers to produce low-birth weight beef cross calves."

While there's no denying the Highlands and Galloway are the most adorable teddy-bear looking animals, it is the Miniature Herefords which really impress Bruce and Dimi for their dual purpose.

"They're a really hardy, dual-purpose animal; lovely to have around and they produce really good meat."

While Bruce admits he sometimes earmarks one for the deep freeze, he admits that it's hard to carry through with this once the animal has a name, "even if it's called roast", he jokes.

"We get pretty attached to them," Dimi says.

"Bruce has grown up as a dairy farmer and I think even he is bemused sometimes at how much these miniatures make their way into your heart."

While Dimi grew up in Australia as a city girl, it only took a few electric

American Miniature Mediterranean Donkeys (AMMD)

Originating in Sicily and Sardinia, the AMMD is its own breed - it has not been bred down in size from a standard donkey. Highly sought after for their lovely nature and as a companion pet, they are highly trainable and live for between 20-30 years. They come in a wide variety of colours, but grey/dun, brown, black and red are the most common. At maturity they should be a maximum of 36 inches at the wither.

Reasons to own:

- Wonderful companion pets
- Loving personality
- Sweet, gentle natured
- Trainability
- Lifespan of 20-30 years

Needs: Shelter shed/stable; pasture grass and good quality hay when required; mineral/salt block; clean fresh water; regular teeth checks and worming; hooves trimmed every 8-12 weeks depending on conditions.

shocks, dousing in the pond and mud baths before she became a fully fledged Kiwi farmer's wife.

Miniature donkeys

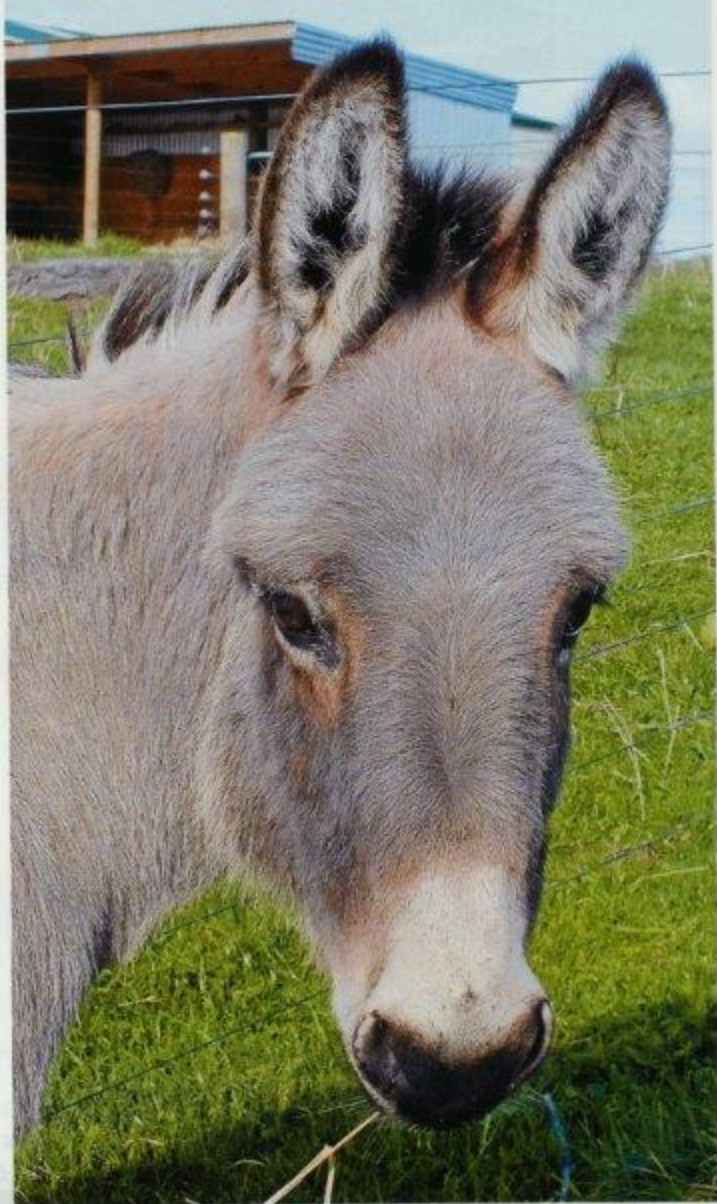
Her equestrian passion means Dimi has a particularly soft spot for the miniature donkeys, while Bruce prefers the cattle.

"The miniature donkeys are just unbelievable," Dimi says. "They're so affectionate and inquisitive and just love being around people. They're wonderful companion pets and are quite happy being in with horses, sheep, or other cattle. They love being right by the house where they can see what's going on."

Dimi says a quotation by Robert Green (who first imported the Mediterranean miniature donkey into the America in 1929) sums them up perfectly: "The miniature donkey possesses the affectionate nature of a Newfoundland, the resignation of a cow, the durability of a mule, the courage of a tiger, and their intellectual capability is only slightly inferior to man."

The first AMMD to arrive in New Zealand was imported from America by Jack and Maisie Hurst in 1997.

One of these original donkeys, RCP



Pocahontis, is the grandmother of Bruce and Dimi's prized jenny Chateaus Lil' Adorable (Addi).

The miniature donkey traditionally measure 36 inches (0.9 metres) at the wither and come in a variety of colours from grey/dun, brown, black and red. The Jacks (males) and Jennys (female) are equally affectionate. However, be prepared for a long time companion as they live between 20-30 years.

Receiving enquiries from throughout New Zealand, Bruce and Dimi love sharing their passion for the miniature breeds and whenever possible, deliver their valuable stock to their new homes.

"We love to see where they are going and make sure they arrive in top condition. We even bring a bag of feed with every animal so the new owners can use it as a treat and get to know them. They're all vaccinated, wormed



Belted and White Galloways

Originating from Scotland as early as the 16th Century, Galloways are a hardy breed recognised as the oldest polled (hornless) beef cattle breed in the world.

Belted Galloway are a solid colour with a white belt; mainly black but also in dun and the rare red.

The white Galloway is predominantly white with a black nose and points.

Height at maturity should be 42 inches maximum at the hook (hip) bone.

Reasons to own:

- Longevity
- Hardiness
- Adaptability
- Naturally horned
- Docility
- Feed conversion efficiency

Needs: Pasture grass and good quality hay when required; mineral/ salt block when needed; shelter/ shade; clean fresh water; regular parasite control and vaccinations.

and well handled, so it's usually a very straightforward transition."

Bruce has no regrets about hanging up his milking shed apron.

"I've lived and breathed dairy farming all my life but was getting sick of being stuck in the cow shed 24/7. The miniatures allow us to relax and enjoy life together - both time out as well as a life on the land.

"It's living the dream, that's for sure," smiles Dimi. ■

For more information, visit www.tantillus-stud.co.nz