



Barrack Saddles



By KATHY
MEXTED

On a two-year working holiday as mustering riders that stretched from the Kimberleys down through Western Australia and across the centre, Richard and Lucy Barrack heard about a saddle-making course in Qld.

"We went to Jimboomba and did the course with Eddy Powell. Because we had quite a clear idea of what we wanted in a saddle, we decided to make our own and it was a great way to finish our travels and take home a couple of our own saddles," says Richard. "We loved it once we tried it. I particularly enjoyed the whole process, which surprised me. I had been a sales and account manager in Melbourne and Lucy had been a contract manager in sales before we left, so neither of us had any artistic bent. The artsy side of this is really a happy by-product; it's the functionality that appeals most. Even the teacher was quite shocked that neither of us had ever done any leatherwork. We are both detail oriented and cautious and both our fathers are handy. My dad is an architect and builds model trains. Lucy's father is a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, though he is extremely practical. He does his own gardening and home repairs," says Richard.

Having bought 70 glorious acres on an east-facing ridge at Metcalfe, Vic, the couple commuted to their city jobs in Melbourne. After 'The Great Two-year Adventure' mustering with the horses, they returned to the land and took casual jobs locally. They couldn't get past the idea of making more saddles, so invested about \$7000 in basic tools and a sewing machine, built

a bench out of an old door and set to creating their business, Barrack Saddles.

The first thing they did was teach each other the skills they learned on the saddle-making course.

"I made a Western saddle and Richard made a half-breed, which is a cross between a Western and an Australian stock saddle. Friends then asked for some and now we've been doing it for about five years. In the beginning we made them even without orders and sold them at horse events such as trail riding weekends, horsemanship clinics and we even ran a horse event at Maldon to create business. About 20 horsey people came and we ran a fun weekend, fully catered with demonstrations and riding activities. It was a lot of work and we got one order," says Lucy. "We now make around twenty-five or more saddles per annum."

To complement the business, Richard and Lucy also start up to about 20 horses under saddle each year. They generally get all-round horses—similar to the type of riders who buy their saddles.

"People love that often when they have met us on a ride, we were riding in our own saddles. Many horsey people focus on just one discipline such as dressage, cattle, endurance, trail riding etc, we're genuine all-rounders and have a go at anything we enjoy. We work together well. There's very little that we don't do together," says Lucy. "We also make associated gear to order, such as bridles, saddle-bags, breast plates. We are aiming to have a bespoke gift line of note books and journal covers and next year we hope to run

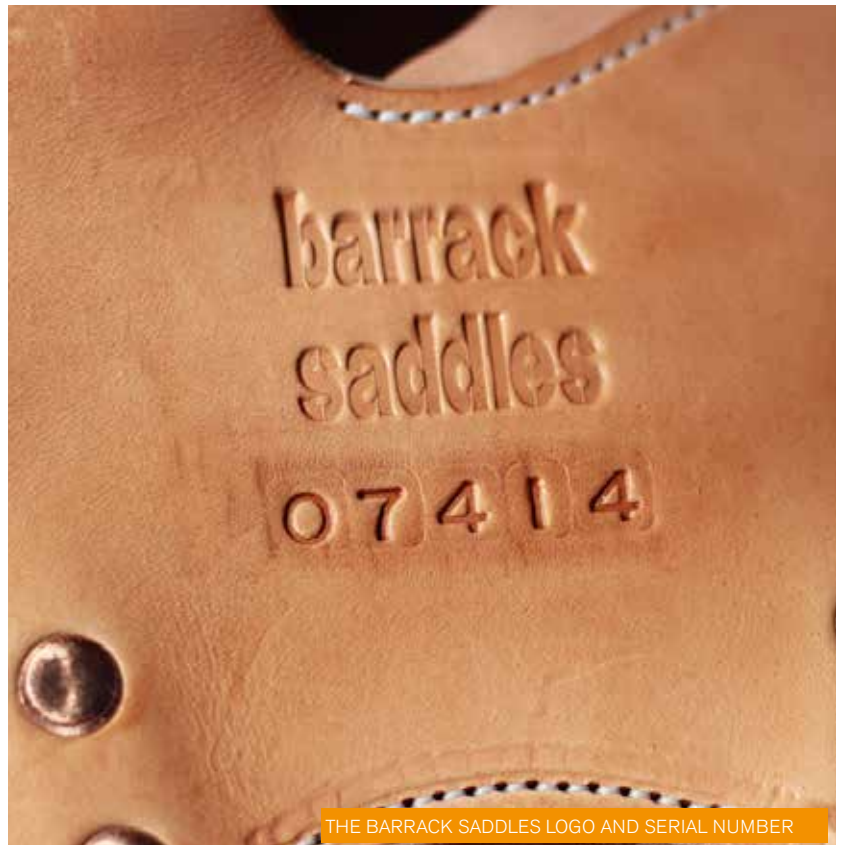
TOP: RICHARD AND LUCY
BARRACK WITH THEIR HAND
MADE SADDLE

leather workshops out of Kyneton."

The couple say that sourcing leather was easy. "We picked the suppliers that we found have the most consistent quality materials. We are a long way from their biggest clients but because we pay on time and are easy to deal with we receive good service. We maintain professionalism as a legacy of our corporate background, by paying on invoice rather than running an account and recognising that we're all trying to run businesses."

We are often asked for saddles that are 'just really plain', but those are often the customers who relish the design process. They don't like all that bling, but they then realise that it can look quite stylish when understated.

One horse breeder said, 'there's so many great horses out there, they may as well be pretty as well. We feel the same about the saddles. We're in this business mostly because of functionality. We want the saddle to produce happy horses and riders. We are quite particular about the quality of all the fittings, and finally, that it looks nice.'



THE BARRACK SADDLES LOGO AND SERIAL NUMBER



DECORATIVE STAMPS ARE ALL HAND DONE



RICHARD ABOUT TO FIT A PIECE OF SADDLERY



RICHARD CARRIES A ROLL OF LEATHER TO THE WORKSHOP



TRIMS CAN BE UNDERSTATED AND INTERESTING



A COMPLETED SADDLE OUTSIDE THE WORKSHOP

MAKING A SADDLE

Some people like a saddle made with the smooth side of the leather up, other's the rough side, because they like that look and feel. There isn't any wearing advantage to either choice, though having the rough side up makes it a bit more 'grippy' and makes the rider feel like they're held in the saddle better. We believe that the balance of the saddle actually holds you in. If you're balanced, then you're unlikely to get unseated. We most commonly use polyurethane and fibreglass trees. We sometimes get timber and rawhide trees if somebody wants a particular style of western saddle, or has a difficult to fit horse. Though the polyurethane trees are moulded so they always arrive the same, you can still adjust them to suit a

particular style of horse or rider. We can either shave the tree down or add leather to change the shape of ground seat. It might only be a couple of millimetres but it makes a lot of difference to the rider or the horse. For example, for a really skinny small person who may find the standard seat too wide, we might build up a small amount of leather so the fall off the side of the seat is gentler. If we can, we like to measure the horse to look for extremes in requirements. We can do fittings in person or we can send a pack for people to measure remotely. Sometimes we have a client who rides a lot of different horses so wants a generic style that is as versatile as possible.



THE RAW UNDERSIDE



A WOOLLEN BASE READY FOR FITTING



FINE WORKMANSHIP USING SMALL NAILS DURING CONSTRUCTION



A SCREWDRIVER IS USED TO MANOUVRE A LARGE PIECE INTO PLACE

CARING FOR LEATHER GOODS

Leather is a lot tougher and durable than people give it credit for. Archaeologists have uncovered leather articles and artefacts dating back to 1300 – 1400BC, and found them to be in an excellent state of preservation. Most modern leather goods use nylon or polyester thread, so rotting of cotton stitches like in older leather and saddlery goods is less likely to occur. Well cared-for leather is durable, but needs oiling. The enemies of leather are sun, sweat and moisture. Dust and dirt abrade it over time. If your gear is really muddy, you can hose it. If your saddle fell into a bog, you can hose it and go on with the rest of the process. It only stains new leather, but on something old and well oiled and broken in, the marks rub out. If it gets wet, let it dry. Don't dry it too quickly ie. in front of a heater, but don't let it sit damp for too long. Let it dry in a well-ventilated shady area. If left wet, it will grow mould. Dampen cloth and rub onto glycerine soap, then wipe leather object, then use clean damp cloth to wipe excess off. To seal and moisturise, we use natural products, so therefore we recommend beeswax.

GOOD FROM BAD: SADDLE FIT TALKS

- Ensure the channel is high enough and wide enough to clear the spine and withers.
- Ensure the saddle is neither too flat nor has too much rock to put pressure unevenly along the horse's back. From front to back the curve has to match the horse's curve, so you don't get pressure points or bridging.
- The tree should be wide enough so the horse's shoulders (scapula and muscles) can move underneath it without them being blocked.
- We believe in having flare (relief) in the front and the back of the saddle. We are big believers that every saddle should have some curve to allow movement of the shoulders underneath the front of the saddle as well as at the back to avoid pressure on the horse's loins.
- Balance for the rider: Stirrups/fenders and the shape of the seat should correlate correctly. A saddle should interfere as little as possible with a rider's natural position of sitting on the horse. If the rider is out of whack and bouncing or falling back and forth or jamming down in the saddle seat, then that affects how the horse moves, and in turn affects saddle comfort for the horse (and rider!)



RICHARD AND LUCY WORK WELL TOGETHER