

The First Tollers of Oz

by Denise Jacoby 2015

The idea of importing came about whilst sharing a few ales, the late Peter Sandow challenged Marilyn Kellie to “get herself a real Canadian dog!” Having seen a Toller on the cover of RNSWCC Journal, she wrote to all the Canadian breeders she could locate but not one was willing to send to Australia. Tollers were, and still are jealously guarded against exploitation, and inappropriate breeding.

Finding the task of locating Toller breeders willing to part with a Toller, let alone export, extremely difficult, Marilyn (never one to refuse a challenge) took a personal approach. On her next trip home to visit her parents in Surrey B.C. she set about travelling to every Toller breeder across Canada who would accept a visit. Eventually after seeing some of the greatest Tollers and many varietal differences she was successful. Elaine MacDonald was retiring from breeding and decided to assist in the project of introducing Tollers to Australia. Elaine bred Missionviews Shilo of Kelmark (Shilo) and agreed that he and his partner Bridget (aka Bridie) Ardunacres Jetlag to Kelmark (so named because she was delayed in Canada for one month due to retesting) could make the long journey to Australia.

In 1991, quarantine from North America to Australia was nine months. We considered this too long for one year olds to be confined in such a small space without training and socialisation so an alternative approach was devised. Hawaiian quarantine protocol was five months, the first month isolated, then dogs kennelled with general public visiting for an additional four months. So arrangements were made, tests undertaken, a dog walker hired for daily visits, and our first Toller Shilo flew to Hawaii! This meant that the flight costs, extra dog walking, single quarantine accommodation in Hawaii, were more than budget allowed. \$\$\$ were adding up so Denise decided to add her savings in the project.

Shilo arrived safe and sound, beautiful, but serious and slightly “remote”, not at all the high energy, bouncing boy we had expected. His first show was a disaster despite Denise having sent breed standards to all gundog judges in Australia. Shilo was non awarded at his first show!

Marilyn continued up the coast, staying at Denise and Peters home in the Clarence Valley. We prepared Curlies, Afghans and Toller for the Brisbane Royal. Success! Under a Canadian judge Shilo was awarded Challenge and Best of Breed. Judges comments “a very pleasing representative of the breed”.

After a triumphant return to Marilyn’s house in Wallsend (near Newcastle) Shilo disappeared! The ad in the local paper read, “LOST Retriever x Collie”. Marilyn drove around the streets for two days ending up at her local garage to beg some fuel as there was a fuel strike, there was Shilo out the back with a few of the local mutts! I don’t think she ever really forgave him, he came to stay with me after that!

Bridie came, as planned, with no fuss. She was a “wicked little red headed bitch”, funny and loving with her chosen people. On leaving Eastern Creek quarantine, we stopped to visit an extremely ill Peter Sandow in hospital. He was not expected to survive, however this little redhead had other ideas! Bridie curled up in his lap and settled. She became another reason for him to live. Peter lived another 15 years! We put it down to his passionate interest in his beloved gundogs, as well as fresh country air.

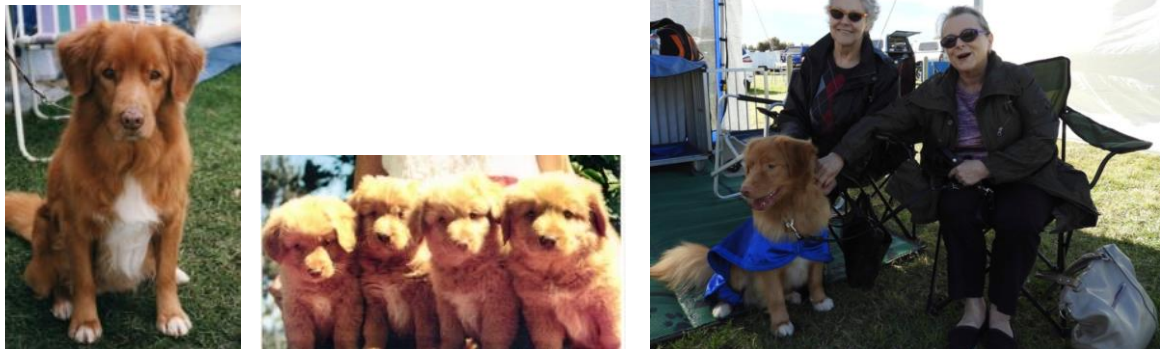
Having exhausted our funds, Marilyn took a job nursing overseas and Denise took the Tollers, showing and shooting over both Curlies and Tollers. Denise bred the Kelmark litters as well as her own Ximinez litters, Tollers were very sought after.

Shilo remained the perfect gentleman all of his life, chose his friends wisely, performing on the command, "say hi Shilo!" then retired happily to curl up with his people. Marilyn said he was a snob, I suspect he was very discerning! He passed away at 14 years of age whilst staying with one of his favourite Toller fans, Jane Millar (Semeru).

Bridie's last litter was her only caesarean, she was neutered during that operation, went into melancholy from which she did not recover and died three days later. A shocking loss, from which we never fully recovered. Denise has had continuous involvement in the breed, importing, breeding, judging, exhibiting, trialling, mentoring and lecturing about Tollers. Marilyn concentrates on Curly Coats and Clumbers, but has maintained her interest in Tollers, now mentoring a new breeder in Newcastle.



Left: Shilo 1991 Centre: Bridie 1992 Right: 1994



Left: Shilo at 10 years Centre: the first Australian litter Right: Marilyn and Denise at the at the 2016 Toller specialty show, celebrating 25 years of the breed in Australia.