

## Foundation Mare

# COMARA AMARETTE - FM ASH Reg: 2650



*COMARA TOPLINE - IS (by ABBEY - FS), the most notable son of COMARA AMARETTE - FM.*

This mare highlights the depth of breeding and the popularity of her family line, found in the mid-north coast of New South Wales during the twentieth century. This article continues the Foundation Mare history of the Comara Stud, printed in the two most recent issues of the ASH Journal. But it is more than that, as it also starts our look at the Foundation Mares of the Barona Stud.

The status of Foundation Mare requires Stud Book registration of the mare within the first ten years of the Society's formation (registration numbers 1 – 65,000), with over 500 registered descendants within five generations. COMARA AMARETTE - FM produced four progeny that have resulted in 1,228 descendants, in the latest statistics of the Society (July 2010). Owned by Northern Rivers horseman 'B.E.' (John) Coombes of the Barona Stud, she is one of his three Foundation Mares. She is also the third Foundation Mare with the Hill's 'Comara' prefix. In association with very successful campdrafters like Gertie Brooks and more recently, Bruce Hollis (both Warwick Gold Cup winners), these bloodlines have had great success at campdrafting and subsequently have been well sought after as breeding stock.

COMARA AMARETTE - FM was born in 1956. Of mostly thoroughbred background, she was sent to Theo Hill for breeding as an unregistered horse, but for the benefit of her future progeny he had her successfully classified and registered. She therefore carried the 'Comara' prefix, even though she was owned by B.E. Coombes. A leggy, red bay, standing about 15.1 to 15.2 hands high, Theo Hill describes her as 'a nice type of broodmare'. The description of this mare in Comara sales catalogues, where some of her progeny were sold, reads something like: 'Many times this mare was successful in rodeos and sporting events, winning at campdrafting, bending and flagging races.'

B.E. Coombes passed away in 1993, but his family and friends have helped to fill in the background of his Foundation Mares.

The family farm was 'Amaroo', on the Hastings River upstream from Wauchope, New South Wales. The connection with Comara comes through the nearby property 'Yarras', also on the Hastings. It belonged to Theo Hill's uncle and was one of the original Hill Brothers properties.

B.E. was fortunate to be born into a family with a strong and active interest in horses, which he turned into a passion. This interest goes back generations, as B.E.'s son, Adrian Coombes, tells me that the family history records the Coombes family importing a thoroughbred stallion from England through Port Macquarie in the 1850s. One of four sons, B.E. was the only one to continue with the horse breeding activities of his father.

B.E. didn't breed commercially but focused on breeding good stock horses and some racing thoroughbreds. He didn't breed a lot of horses, using a dictum that Adrian remembers: 'you don't want a lot of horses, you just want good ones'. He was known for giving away mares to others to breed from because they were 'second string'.

Herbie Tout describes himself as a good mate of B.E., who lived near him. 'Horse mad he was – a keen horseman and a good rider. But a terror he was too – always looking for a good deal to make a quid. He would try any horse that was cheap. As a dairy farmer, with what one would expect as a limited need for horses, he was one to have quite a few horses and amongst them would always be a good one.'

B.E. was perhaps the forerunner to many recreational members of today, with a passion for the breed and its good horses, beyond what is needed to earn a livelihood. Bruce Hollis, who for many years worked on 'Yarras', used to help B.E. with breaking-in and campaigning horses in his later years. He describes B.E. as, 'one who would often skite about how good his horses were – but then he had something to skite about.'

On the dam's side of COMARA AMARETTE - FM, Adrian tells how his grandfather went to the Macleay River to buy the stallion Bruce, who was by a thoroughbred by the Principal race-winning, sire Moorefield (Aus 1889). As he had a preference for thoroughbred types, he didn't buy Bruce when he found that he was out of a pony mare. Coombes Snr came home instead with the colt Larrimore, who was by the same sire.

Despite the reputation earned later by Bruce, B.E. was always of the opinion that this was a good decision 'because it didn't seem to matter what you put Larrimore [sic] over, he produced a good riding horse and his mares bred on. Herbie recalls the stallion as 'jet-black, having a white star



**Above: BARONA LARRYETTE (ABBEY - FS/COMARA AMARETTE - FM)**

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## Adrian Coombes remembers clearly that his father considered [BARONA LARRYETTE] to be 'the best horse that he had ever bred.'

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and two white hind feet. He was a strikingly handsome horse that took your eye. He was a really good stock horse type that threw quite a few handy horses around here.'

Only one of these is recorded in the Stud Book and that horse is Una 03. She was a liver chestnut in colour out of Molly, a grey mare by the English-style arab Cohely. Her dam was the thoroughbred Chemical, bred by B.E.'s mother and purchased by the young B.E. in 1918 when he was only eight years old. She was a favourite of his, and he used her to run cattle off Mt Seaview to stock his selection in the late 1920s.

Una was never broken-in, having been crippled in a rabbit burrow. She was also particularly unlucky in breeding, having had about ten foals with most either born dead or crippled in some way. Her big success was being bred to the unregistered thoroughbred Bridgeburn to produce the brown mare Society 02 in 1937. Society stood 14.2 hands high and was a top campdraft and sporting horse. She had three foals, the first being unregistered, the second being COMARA AMARETTE - FM and the third being BARRIS - FM, by BAR EYE.

'Bridgeburn was a really beautiful bay stallion owned by Mrs Paul of Wingham, New South Wales - a very attractive horse with a good temperament. You could do cattle work with him as if he was bred a stock horse. I remember him well as I

owned a colt by him myself', remembers Herbie. Bridgeburn only has three progeny registered in the Stud Book. The first of these, Olga B, is a forebear of the CECIL BRUCE - IS colt TURNERS STUD SPECULATION, through the dam's side of the pedigree. The third foal was Tony, a sire who left some outstanding horses and features strongly in the breeding of John Fahey's Valentine Stud and a number of horses of Barona breeding.

COMARA AMARETTE - FM was by the sire Red Race, a non-studbook thoroughbred stood at stud by B.E. Coombes. Adrian Coombes remembers him as a very kind-natured horse and the type of 'good blood horse that his father liked to put over his top string mares'. Born about 1950, he is of some significance as he is also the sire of STANTON STUD MISS G - IM. The story of this 16 hand chestnut colt with the big blaze highlights the degree of good fortune that can be part of successful breeding.

Les Hobbs, a local horseman, bought a palomino colt at the Scone sale with the intention of breeding palominos to sell on. To this end he went back to the Scone sale the following year and bought four old thoroughbred mares, chestnut in colour. One of these was a Midstream mare and another was the unregistered mare Alphees, by the registered thoroughbred Rampion



**FIG TREE VALLEY AMARETTE, out of BARONA AMMA (BARONA DIRECT/COMARA AMARETTE - FM)**

(Aus, 1923). She was in foal and carried the papers for her mating with Cape Race.

Born in 1942, Cape Race was a first generation Australian thoroughbred, by Fair Trial (GB, 1932) out of Pelerine (GB, 1933). Fair Trial was by Fairway (GB, 1925), a bloodhorse by Phalaris that also appears in the sire pedigree of STANTON STUD HENRY - FM, the dam of STANTON STUD MISS G - IM. (see ASH Journal August/Sept. 2002, pp.32-33, where the group winning performances of this sireline are recorded).

Cape Race's dam, Pelerine was by an Italian sire Apelle (ITY, 1923) out of an Irish mare Trustful (IRE, 1924). On the grandsire's side our Foundation Mare is quite multi-cultural. With that sort of breeding, Red Race was sent to Grafton for training as a racehorse, but as Herbie puts it, 'he was not fast enough to get out of his own road. B.E. then got hold of him to breed with.' There are only two of his progeny registered in the Stud Book, but there were many more that he produced.

Like many horses, COMARA AMARETTE - FM's breeding career was a joint venture. Coombes owned the mares COMARA AMARETTE - FM and BARRIS - FM, who were both sent on a foal-for-foal basis to the Comara stallion ABBEY - FS. Another

mare, BARONA AMY - FM was sent to ABDUL - IS on the same basis. The progeny from these three mares has excelled, either through performance or breeding, with all three becoming Foundation Mares. COMARA AMARETTE - FM's first three foals were all colts by ABBEY - FS, who all remained entire, giving her an early start in achieving her Foundation Mare status.

A good indication of the popularity of this Foundation Mare's bloodline is gained by the number of progeny sired by her first son, COMARA TOPLINE - IS. He has an impressive 213 progeny recorded in the Stud Book. An out-of-season foal, this brown colt was advertised for the National Capital Sale in Canberra in 1975. Robert Smith of Homesdale Stockhorses near Glen Innes, New South Wales was looking for a sire for the working horses in his steer fattening operation.

He liked the ABBEY - FS bloodline, but not wanting to travel to Canberra for the auction, bought another colt from the Quirindi-based, Comara stud instead. He was pleasantly surprised when COMARA TOPLINE - IS was passed in for \$2,050 at the auction. Bob Smith recalls, 'We bought him afterwards for \$3,000 and Theo was able to deliver him a week or two later to the Guyra rodeo'.

Originally purchased by a syndicate, Bob eventually bought the others out and describes the horse as, 'A long-bodied thoroughbred type, standing about 15.2hh, with an extremely good nature. I rode him a bit doing stockwork - he was sure-footed and very good in the hills. I am just a breeder, but there were others that campaigned him throughout the New England district and beyond. We had a lot of fun.' Thumbing through his record book, Bob was able to state that: 'He won over 200 led and ridden classes; won four drafts (novice and junior) and took out 16 campdraft placings.'

In relation to his stud activities, 'We bred him to about 30-40 mares a year at times and bred 100 of our own; he sired about 500 live foals in total. Most of these were unregistered as people only used them for station work, but he produced a lot of good campdrafters, siring well over 100 winners. Most were quiet and all had ability and cow sense. They were very good sporting horses,' said Bob proudly. At the Wellingrove sports day campdraft (near Glen Innes) in December 1990 his progeny did really well. They were placed first, second and third in the Open; first, second and third in the Associate; first in the Novice and first in the Maiden. That happened at a few campdrafts around that time.

Tom Williamson campaigned on several

COMARA TOPLINE - IS horses, including GLENMORE PARTNERSHIP HOLLY, and later campdrafted HOMESDALE DESIGN with tremendous success. Some of his better-known progeny are Blake Finlayson's STONEBROOK ABILENE, who won over 30 campdrafts, and HOMESDALE TOP SECRET. Terry Sloman had success with HOMESDALE BAY LINE and Greg Bruce with COPPERETTE, HOMESDALE BANGLE (who campdrafted under the name of 'Madonna') and BENBRAGGIE TWIST TOP, with the latter three mares having bred very good progeny.

Theo Hill's daughter, Julie Tonkin, confirmed that mares by COMARA TOPLINE - IS are highly valued as broodmares. Bob concludes, 'He was sound until the end, serving his last mares in 2006. We had to put him down in 2008, but at 31 years he had already outlived a number of his own progeny.' During the research for this article, the Stud Book was updated, with his direct progeny numbers rising from 209 to 213. This tipped the number of his descendants over the 1,000 threshold, to 1,171 in fact, elevating the horse to Impact Sire status. Do you reckon Bob was pleased when I told him?

In the 1975 season another colt was produced. BARONA LARRYETTE was brown and a bit over 15.1 hands in size. Bruce Hollis broke him in and recalls that 'he went well, showing a lot of potential'. Adrian Coombes remembers clearly that his father considered him to be, 'the best horse that he had ever bred.' At about five, he went to Bruce Woods of Kempsey to campaign him. Bruce also considers him to be a great horse: 'he had speed, he could get into the right position easily and he could always give that little bit more', said Bruce. 'Even though it's 30 years ago, it's easy to remember such details about the best horse that you've ever drafted'. Bruce won a maiden campdraft on him at Kyogle and then rode him into the finals of the Canning Downs campdraft at Warwick in 1980.

Unfortunately, not long after that he broke his hind leg during a storm and had to be put down. Luckily he had already sired about 12 horses, with some of these being very good campdrafters, including BARONA CARESS, Allen Laurie's 'Larriken', and Ken McCarthy's mare BARONA LAURETTE, on which he won the Canning Downs campdraft. It's a pity this horse didn't get a good chance to prove himself as he may well have ended up a very popular sire.

COMARA THEO, a brown colt with a crooked blaze born in 1976, became a station sire on the property 'Couti-Outi', near Rockhampton in Queensland. He was purchased as



**Above: COMARA THEO (ABBEY-FS/COMARA AMARETTE - FM) at about ten years of age.**

**Below right: COMARA THEO (far right) amongst a group of yearlings at Comara Stud. Source: back cover of November/December 1979 ASH Journal**

a yearling for \$5,000 by Lawson Geddes, who was looking for a good station sire to improve his working horses. The colt did this job well for 26 years until he died in 2002.

Lawson considers him to be the best stallion that he ever had, and even though he has bought a few replacements since, he still has not found one as good. Lawson went on to explain, 'Running cattle is what we do but we need good horses to do it. We used to have a part-arab stallion that produced good horses but they were really lively. Theo dulled their temperament down all together so that even our children could ride them as they moved up from their ponies to working horses. I didn't ride him much but I would ride him from his paddock back home.'

When buying him, Lawson selected him from eight or ten others at Comara, ignoring the typical ABBEY - FS type and choosing this leggy colt with the good wither and obvious thoroughbred background. He can clearly be seen amongst the other young horses on Comara's back page advertisement of the ASHS Journal (November/December 1978). He grew to be 15.3hh, very quiet with really good conformation and a trainable temperament. Lawson admits that in retrospect he had his faults like any horse - he was a bit long in the back and a bit flat-footed, but still considered him to be a top horse.

Colin Kime worked for the Geddes for ten years until 1979,

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and got to use the colt over his mares for two or three seasons. He and his father Gordon only breed about 8-10 mares annually, going for matings of quality on their small stud, Amaroo at Nebo. 'We have four or five mares by him that form

'We reared her on cow's milk, bottle-feeding every two hours at first,' said Michelle, remembering all that hard work back in 1979. 'She ended up more like a human than a horse - she became a real mate'. Registered as BARONA

her similarity to her grand-dam. She has been great with our young girls and did well in junior events at the National Championships in Warwick in 2006', said Michelle. The fifth foal recorded in the studbook, NO NAME, with the same details as BARONA AMMA, is therefore an error.

The family of this mare is quite memorable. She has a Foundation Mare as a half-sister on the dam's side (BARRIS - FM) and an Impact Mare as a half-sister on the sire's side (STANTON STUD MISS G - IM). To top this off she has now produced an Impact Sire herself (COMARA TOPLINE - IS). It is clear that despite this recognition, her influence is understated, given the large number of descendants that have gone unregistered. It is amazing how good studmasters, an owner with a 'good eye', good riders and a little bit of luck can bring out the best in our breed. 🐾

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the basis of a lot of our broodmares', said Colin. 'One of them, 'Solo', won three state polocrosse championships.'

The Stud Book records only seven progeny by this stallion – all with the Amaroo prefix. Curious, I asked Lawson about this. He replied, 'Cattle is our focus. We don't breed horses for sale and none of us draft – we just need good horses to ride for station work. That's why we didn't register them.' But Lawson's neighbour won some campdrafts and Lawson Jnr played polocrosse successfully for the Nebo-St Lawrence Club – all on horses by COMARA THEO. On the breeding side, a few locals also bred their mares to him but his main job was for the Geddes. 'On average we bred 8-10 horses per year over his breeding life. I guess he produced at least 150 foals', said Lawson.

The last foal out of COMARA AMARETTE - FM was by BARONA DIRECT, a son of ABDUL - IS. He was bred by B.E. Coombes out of one of his other foundation mares, BARONA AMY - FM. Herbie Tout's daughter Michelle received a phone call from B.E. to say that COMARA AMARETTE - FM had died during foaling, and that the dun filly foal was hers for the rearing.

AMMA, she had a great nature and grew to 14.3 hands. She was campdrafted a bit, placing a few times and produced four foals, only dying in 2008.

'We named one of those fillies FIG TREE VALLEY AMARETTE, because of

### PROFILE: COMARA AMARETTE - FM

**Colour** ..... Bay  
**Height** ..... 15.2 hh  
**Lifespan** ..... 23 years (1956-1979)  
**Breeder** ..... John (B.E.) Coombes  
**Performance** ..... Sporting horse and campdrafter  
**Progeny** ..... Four progeny. Three colts and a filly, with the most notable being the stallion COMARA TOPLINE - IS.

COMARA AMARETTE - FM ASH Reg: 2650	red race 02	cape race 02	fair trial 02
			pelerine 02
	society 02	alphees 02	rampion 001
			agitate 01
	una 03	bridgeburn 02	bridge north 001
			Unknown
			larrimore 001
			molly 01