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**TRENT SMITH**  
CUTTING WAY OF LIFE

# TRENT SMITH

By Kylie R. Melrose.

**A**t the prestigious 2012 Mercuria National Cutting Horse Association World Finals at the Will Rogers Complex Watt Arena in Fort Worth, Texas, held in conjunction with the NCHA World Championships Futurity, Australian Trent Smith of Tubbul near the New South Wales town of Young showed Play Stocks. The son of Playdox and Bobs Preferred Stock, owned by Jim and Deborah Oakham to be named as the 2012 NCHA World Finals and World Champion in the \$2,000 Limited Rider.

The twenty-eight year old professional cutting horse trainer's passion for horses was influenced from his father Ken Smith, who was a well-known trainer in the pacing industry. "I would often help with the training, I really loved riding horses and doing stock work. We did a lot of that as kids," said Trent.

It wasn't until the age of fifteen when Trent developed a keen interest in campdrafting that he recognised the influence of Quarter Horses in the campdrafting world. Then along with his parents Ken and Sue Smith, Trent purchased a cutting bred two-year-old mare, Erin's Jewel, from the NCHA Select Cutting Horse Sale for Trent to draft. The young mare showed so much potential that Trent decided to train and show her

for the NCHA Snafflebit Futurity in 2008. "I was self-taught; just watched videos and other professional trainers. Anyway I made the finals and from that moment I knew I was hooked," said Trent.

Trent describes Erin's Jewel's ability as a cutting horse. "She was very cowy and trainable. She was perfect to experiment with because she was so instinctive and intuitive. First time I rode her competitively was at Wattamondara Show in the Snafflebit class - she won!"

Trent commented on his first impression of cutting. "I was watching the 2009 Tamworth Futurity. I was amazed at the professionalism and the horsemanship that went into it. When I first tried it, I quickly realised the skill and discipline needed was immense."

"I knew I had to get international experience," said Trent. "So in 2009 at the Tamworth Futurity I summoned up the courage to introduce myself to US based Australian trainer Gavin Jordan, who was a judge there."

The following year Trent and his fiancé Claudia made the journey to America, but at the time Gavin had no positions to take him on and gave him trainer David Costello's contact details. As luck would have it Trent started working for David the following week.

After six months at David's showing and riding cutting horses Trent made the move to Gavin's where he had the opportunity to haul in the \$2,000 Limited classes. The first year that Trent was at Gavin's in 2011 he started two year olds and was able to watch the way Gavin trained his horses and take them through their Futurity year, and he also got to show a bit that year. Then in 2012 they hauled and Trent was fortunate enough to be able to go down the road all year and compete. "What I have learnt off both David and Gavin is amazing and to be able to make it into NCHA World Finals was an incredible experience. Then to win it, I could not have asked for any more than that," commented Trent.

Trent learned a great deal from Gavin including how to train a horse from a two-year-old and take it through its Futurity year, how to school horses young and old and he was able to give lessons over there. Gavin taught him a lot about how to settle the herd and what cows to pick. "Gavin is a great showman and I learnt a hell of a lot from just watching him in the show pen," said Trent.

Trent commented on his day-to-day work training horses in America, "I was mainly the two-year-old guy but was fortunate enough to work older horses on a day to day basis. I turned back for Gavin all day long and being right there watching

and working horses while he trained me was quiet the opportunity. The first year was mainly aged events then the second year we hauled which meant I showed just about every weekend that year."

For the last four months leading up to and at the NCHA World Finals, Trent showed the eleven-year-old gelding Play Stocks, who has NCHA Lifetime Earnings of \$100,000. The brilliant horse won the World \$3,000 as a six year old, was a Reserve World Champion in the \$2,000 Limited previously to Trent showing him and then Play Stocks was shown by Trent to win the World Championships and also the World Finals.

While hauling for the world Trent was fortunate enough to win the Pacific Coast NCHA \$2,000 Championship and the Area Two Arizona and California \$2,000 Champion titles. This meant hauling to shows from Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Arizona, California and New Mexico and every other show that was approved, spending almost every weekend on the road.

Trent could not have done the trip to America without his wife Claudia. He says, "She supported me all the way in the three years that I was living my dream, all the loping was spot on, all the gear was there and ready for me to go show. We had a lot of fun seeing the countryside together whilst hauling from show to show. We learnt a lot together and have been able to gel our experiences to become a good



Trent and Claudia Smith  
Photo supplied by Claudia Smith



Gavin Jordan and Trent Smith  
Photo supplied by Claudia Smith



team. David and Vicki Costello, Gavin and Rebecca Jordan made it a home away from home for the both of us and gave us so many opportunities and so much experience."

Now that he has come home to train, Trent commented on what he would like to do in showing and training cutting horses. "I have a passion to start and train young horses with an ambition to get them to the Futurities and be solid enough to go on for years to come. I intend to build a strong clientele and have a solid program of all staged horses and non-professional horses."

"I was lucky enough to be able to come back and start working my parent's property outside of Young, NSW. They already had great facilities and I was able to set up an arena and start working there from the get go," said Trent.

When asked what it was like making the move back from America to Australia to set up his training business here, Trent replied, "It was scary. The industry is not nearly as big here as it is in the US and to come back and hope to god you get clients is daunting. Nobody knew me back here so I just started training some home bred horses, some locals had me break and train some horses and I went to some shows and competed and word slowly spread."

Trent met Claudia while she was working as an apprentice with his sister in a salon and he was a diesel mechanic. He recalls, "One day I had to drop a hair straightener in for my sister. We married last year. She runs the books, prepares horses, and organises all the gear and tack. She basically keeps things ticking over so I can concentrate on the training. Without her there the place wouldn't run."

Trent commented on the success that he has enjoyed in cutting. "I've been doing this for four years now. To be self-taught, watching professional trainers, getting the experience overseas and then to have the good fortune of winning the world title has been a dream run. There's been a lot of risk but the reward beyond the titles is that I get to wake up and do what I love every day. The love of riding them and working cows - that's it."

For Trent and Play Stocks their first run in the NCHA World Finals was tough from the start. He recalls, "I drew last and my help that I had, had one cow left that they liked which I cut first and was having a nice run but then was not able to finish as strong as I wanted to in the first go but was lucky enough to finish with a decent score to

improve on the second go. I drew up better the second go and my help and myself had a lot more cows to pick from which in turn made it an awesome run of 224 which put me to the highest aggregate score of 435."

"That 224, it felt awesome, this old horse started crawling around me. I knew it was in the horse and I kind of knew it was in me. I had some nice runs throughout the year but working rerun cows all the time you don't get to have big runs like that. It was a relief that it was over that all the hard work and travel had paid off and that I had backed myself and at the same time it was an experience I know I will never have again. And it was just great to know that I might have a good shot at doing this for a living. Winning the world is a feather in my cap. It's something you can say you've accomplished - it's a big thing but I had a lot of help along the way," said Trent.

The World Champion commented on his help at the NCHA World Finals. "My two help that got me out and sat to watch cattle with me were Mike Warman and Brent Erickson who are friends of mine, they helped me both days and I would not have been able to get through the runs without them. Gavin's advice was just go, have fun mate and when Claudia handed Play Stocks off to me I was confident in how she had him prepared as she knew him best."

And just how did he feel to win the World Champion title? Trent explains, "Going into the finals I knew I had the World won with the lead that I had but to finish the way it did was unreal, it was an experience that will never be forgotten."

Trent commented on what the experience was like showing in the largest cutting horse show in the world. "It was a rush the whole time, to think I was showing somewhere that I had only seen people showing on the internet, wishing I could be there one day. The atmosphere was great, the crowd was awesome and my horse could not have done any more. It just really came together for both Play Stocks and I."

"It was all pretty awesome. The atmosphere, the noise, the crowd was unbelievable. That feeling amid all that as you walk over the timeline - it was gut churning, but also pretty darn exciting."

### TRAINING CUTTING HORSES

Trent commented on his approach to training. "The aim at the end of the day is for me to train a cutting horse that is completely cow smart. It's also about keeping good form

on the horse and maintaining its foundation but keeping them basic enough for non-pros to ride them."

### TRAINING TWO-YEAR-OLDS.

"I introduce them to the same basics they will need when they begin working cattle. The first lesson - teach horses to listen and respond. I get a bit of draw before asking them to turn just to make sure they're rocking back on their hocks. I ask them to really listen to my feet, as soon as my feet drop out they should be thinking about stopping. I just make sure they're nice and supple with that nose to neck."

"I don't want to bore or annoy my two-year-olds with too much dry work. I do want to be sure they are thinking pretty smart straight away and make that smart mindset a habit. Changing things up between dry drills and cattle work turns the schooling sessions into a game for the horses."

"When I'm working a cow I want to make sure I'm keeping the foundation on these colts, but at the same time, keeping everything cow related and nice and soft. I just make it real slow and easy for the colts. When the cow gives me time to give it a bit of suppleness I'll take advantage of it by pulling them around a little bit, then they can go back to the cow. I want to make sure they're giving at the poll a little bit and ready to stop. I don't want them hollowing out in the back."

When asked, what reaction are you looking for them to have when you first start working them on cattle, Trent answered, "Ears on a horse tell me a lot. If they're working back and forth showing interest with the cow to them rather than pinned back worried about me, tells me right away that there's some sort of natural instinct there. Then I look for a fluent movement of the horse. If it wants to be a little bit more naturally on the back end that will ensure an easier transition. And there are also the more no brainer signs like wanting to be broke and very stoppy."

Trent commented on what he looks for in a cutting horse. "You look for the better equine athletes that move more naturally and must have bovine instincts. Everything a cutting horse does must relate to the cow. That cow has got to make them stop, draw back when we put our hand down - that's what it all boils down to. They're got to be good athletes because if they draw back and they are average athletes they are going to fall down, fumble around and just not be as clean a mover as they need to be.

The training part of making a cutting horse is framing the body up and helping the horse by guiding it, showing it the right way to put those natural qualities to work."

When asked, when do you know if the horse is going to make a Futurity entrant, Trent replied, "Around October you start making your selections. The horses that consistently perform well in training, are always on the ball and they start to demonstrate a show horse quality about them."

### OUTSIDE OF THE CUTTING ARENA

Trent commented on his life outside of cutting, "Riding in the Snowy Mountains with my friends and family - that's the ultimate out for me. Then there's always golf."

### THE CUTTING WAY OF LIFE

"I enjoy having something to work towards and the Tamworth Futurity is the ultimate event of the year - it's challenging getting the horses to a level where they are able to walk over that timeline and know that you can put your hand down and hope to have them cut without any guidance from me."

"We enjoy going up to the shows and catching up with the other trainers there - it's always good to see what stages the other horses are at - and there is the great camaraderie, that has a competitive edge," said Trent on what he enjoys about the cutting way of life.

NCHA \$2,000 Limited Rider World  
Champion Trent Smith and Play Stocks  
Photo by Alan Gold/NCHA



2013 NCHA Futurity  
Trent Smith and Cuchanina  
Photo by Wild Fillies Photography