

Telling the Tin Horse Highway



Many thanks to Peta and Barry West for sharing their story of the West Kulin Whoppa and providing us all with a valid argument to the ongoing controversial question- Does size really matter?

Size Does Matter

Ask a tourist about the West Kulin Whoppa and you could forgive them for thinking you were talking about a tasty burger served at the local Woolshed Café. But for the Kulin locals, the big tin horse on the bend represents much more than metal and mission brown paint. For the crew on the Western side of Kulin, the horse is a fantastic signpost to the Kulin Bush Races – a symbol of good times and great welding but most of all it screams: “The Bigger the Better!”

The inspiration behind the West Kulin Whoppa was motivated by many years of friendly ribbing from the ‘East-ender’ farmers carrying on about those ‘little cockies’ from the West. “See we have this thing going, and it’s all fun cos we all get on great and we enjoy a bit of the East Enders versus the West Enders.” says West Kulin farmer Barry West.

Barry and Peta West knew they had something that would make an impression when they discovered a large unused tank at Clayton’s farm. And it got them thinking: if they could build a tin horse – and a bloody big one at that – it would wave a red flag to the East-enders and promote the Kulin Bush Races at the same time. And whilst they always knew that an intricately designed horse was out of their scope, they wanted something that would brand their area.

So they rallied up a handful of West Kulin neighbours and got cracking on their sizeable project. “We made some calls and asked Tim Clayton if he needed that water tank. And he got excited about the possibilities. So the initial group of Wests, Claytons, Spurgeons, Meikles, Duckworths and Urens then got together to plot it all out.” said Barry.

Barry and Peta recall how the horse’s neck, which consisted of two 44 gallon drums, was welded to the tank at the shed before putting it on a low loader and ‘walking’ it down the road to the site. Once in place, the legs needed to be attached. The back end of the horse was lifted up high so that two bits of rail way iron could be welded on. “We then went around to the front where the head was and used an excavator to lift it up and then welded two more bits of railway iron onto the front for the front legs” says Barry. Drums were slid over the railway iron after the iron had been welded on. This would ensure that the horse looked like a horse and not a stick insect. It was at this point that Peta West realised the enormity of their metal master piece “We thought – What have we done? It is so big!” Peta laughs.

The men did all the welding and the girls painted and then fashioned a jockey – so lifelike that Marg Clayton could not resist waltzing around the shed a few times with him before he was attached to the Whoppa. Marg outlined the West Kulin Whoppa’s face and Peta drew the letters, whilst sitting in the excavator bucket. “It’s a long way up there. I don’t usually mind heights but I was trying not to look down” Peta remembers.

So whilst Rome can’t claim to be built in a day, the West Kulin Whoppa can. “There was a rumour that it went up overnight and was built in the dark, but it’s not true – it was just that it appeared so quickly” says Barry who does admit that the efficiency of the Whoppa’s construction had also taken him by surprise “Before the day, we made sure we had enough rail iron, roughly the proper length. Everyone just brought what they could and away it went. It staggered me how quick we built it”.



Various West Kulin families have helped with maintenance of the Whoppa over the years, and although it was built to last, the West-ender gang admit that their big horse was never going to compete with the intricate craftsmanship of some of the Eastern tin horses. But it did beat them in the size stakes! According to some, the competition is not over and there have been various whisperings from the East of going one better. The West-enders remain unfazed, and as they say ‘Size does Matter’. And they know even in the unlikely event of a bigger horse appearing, the West Kulin Whoppa will always be the original and the best.

Photo above: The West Kulin Whoppa in 1999, after its construction © Peta West