

158th Heritage Bank Toowoomba Royal Show Report

30th March-1st April 2023

The response from Toowoomba and Darling Downs locals for this year's Heritage Bank Toowoomba Royal Show was nothing short of amazing.

With recurrent interest rate rises, inflation at its highest level in decades and cost of living pressures, the committee was unsure exactly which way the show would go.

Our plan was simple. Put on the best show we possibly could. Thank our community for what they have endured for the past three years. Support our showmen, competitors, exhibitors, sponsors, and members the best way we possibly could. Stage a show that we could all be very proud of. Promote agricultural excellence and educate our young people about the importance of agriculture and put 'AG' into Agricultural show.

After two years of trialling a Friday to Sunday format we reverted back to a Thursday, Friday, Saturday show whilst maintaining the Friday public holiday and opening at lunchtime on Thursday.

We felt that by opening at 1pm on Thursday this would help reduce the costs for some exhibitors as they could arrive on Thursday morning to set up. The three night format would also give the showmen three nights of trading. We would also be able to stage three nights of entertainment whilst being able to offer a discounted ticket price for those who just wanted to attend in the evening on Thursday.

After the success of the last two years, we were confident that Friday and Saturday would be well supported.

The rain gods were again not smiling on us with heavy rain on Wednesday and again on Thursday morning. And then it was gone.

The rides were up, the hot & tasty dagwood dogs were in fact hot & tasty, the canteens were cooking, the fairy floss was bagged, the entertainment was locked in, the parking gate attendants were ready, the grounds looked a picture and by then, the show had already started.



COMPETITION

Over 160 years ago, pastoralists from across the region gathered to compete to find the best bull, cow, horse, pigs, crops and produce. Their aim was not to win a blue ribbon but to improve the livestock and crops of the colony. This tradition continues today.



For the first time since 2019, dairy cattle were being judged during the show, joined by 19 different breeds of beef cattle and over 40 led steers and heifers.

2500 horse entries were already on grounds with judging commencing on Wednesday.



Over 3000 entries in cooking, handicraft, floriculture, floral art, fine art, apiculture, art in bark, leatherwork and photography had already been judged and proudly displayed in the pavilion and honey court ready for their public unveiling.



The show dogs were groomed and on display on the manicured lawns. The working dogs were doing what they do best in the sheep dog trials arena.

The poultry were fluffing their feathers, the pigs were wallowing, the sheep were getting their final grooming and the alpacas were doing what they naturally do, looking like alpacas.

And now we opened the gates.



EDUCATION

Education continues to be the cornerstone of what we are aiming to achieve as an agricultural society. Educating, particularly young people, is part of our DNA. We continued to do this across a number of platforms.



Costa returned to the show. His passion for gardening, sustainable agriculture, educating and engaging with young people and promoting the show movement is incredible and infectious. You simply cannot be buoyed by Costa's excitement. He is such a strong advocate for what we are trying to achieve.

Similarly, Paul West returned. He is a real friend of the RASQ and a great spokesperson for the show movement. Again, Westy showed his versatility working with members of the QCWA encouraging healthy eating lunch boxes.



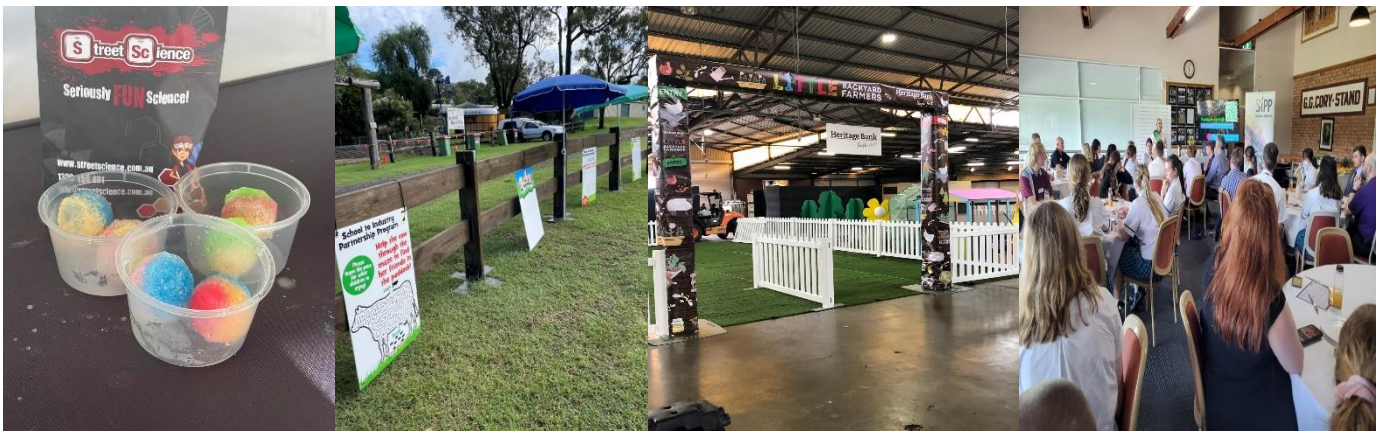
After the success of our Ag Long Lunch from last year, we were again able to stage this event thanks to Heritage Bank. We reverted to our original charter of engaging farmers with school children. This year we changed venue to the Moathouse so attendees could look out over the cattle judging rings. We utilized locally grown produce and with the support of CNH Foods, we were able to serve slow cooked Angus briskets to over 70 people each day. All washed down with Crows Nest Soft Drinks and wines from Riversands Winery at St George. Local produce, local beef, local drinks, prepared by locals (and Paul), local school kids and local producers. It could not get any better.

In addition, our very popular animal nursery, working dairy, historical machinery displays and Little Hands on the Farm programs continued to engage, entertain and educate our patrons.



This year we were also able to re-introduce our Ag Tastic Trail's with new maps, questions and picture boards as well as introducing street science, slime and whacky worms as well as VR experiences thanks to Ag Force.

We were also able to stage The Inaugural Future Leaders lunch inviting years 11 & 12 students with industry representatives. The aim was to provide a conduit for young people interested in pursuing a career in Agriculture and a program that will be encouraged in the future.



FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

Once in the door, pay no more has been our mantra for many years and the 2023 Heritage Bank Toowoomba Royal Show was no exception. There were over 50 things to see and do that did not cost our patrons anything once they entered the gates.

Bluey and Bingo returned and really stole the show. To see the enormous crowds on Friday and Saturday were fantastic with all the Meet and Greets fully subscribed.



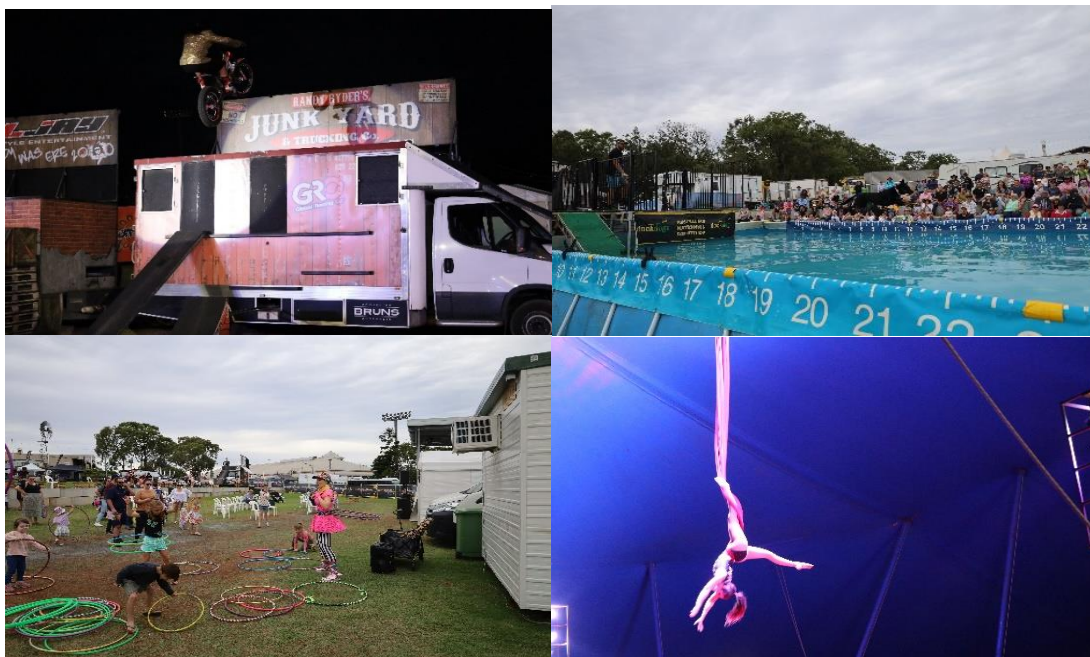
After originally planning The Great Australian Muster Spectacular since 2020, we were finally able to bring it to fruition. Headlined by Beccy Cole and her band and compared by Farmer Dave Graham, the spectacular included The Outback Riders, dancers, bush poetry, chainsaw racing, dog high jump and sheep dog trials with full theatre lighting and sound. It was a great credit to all involved.



Bluey & Bingo were back on the Main Stage along with Eljays Junkyard Action Show, Jetpack Stunt Shows, two fireworks and for the first time in Toowoomba, Swarming Drones.

During the day we welcomed back Eroni's Circus, Jetpack Superheroes, Pig Racing and Dock Dogs.

The Qld Government sponsored Sports Expo returned on The Village Green and included a free rock-climbing wall as well as interactive displays from AFL, Football, NRL and Basketball on a purpose built basketball court built by the Wagner Family just in time for the show. I would like to thank these organisations for their support of this initiative.



A special highlight this year was the Historical Medieval Armed Combat demonstrations. This was a new initiative and was really well received. Huge crowds were in attendance at each demonstration and the group certainly put on a fantastic display. Put 10 blokes in an arena, cover them in armour, give them swords and say go. What could possibly go wrong.



We completely revamped the Founders Pavilion. Pulled down the walls and created an open space with more activities, shows and demonstrations.



I would like to congratulate and thank all our exhibitors who put on excellent displays. Additionally, I welcomed their feedback. Particularly from one exhibitor who had their best Toowoomba show ever. And they have been coming for over 20 years. Almost 20% of exhibitors have already locked in their sites for 2024.



We introduced Brick Events for the first time offering free Lego activity all day. It was the busiest event they have ever attended. Heritage Bank established their "Little Backyard Farmers" for the first time. It was amazing. Not only in the numbers of children participating but the quality of the display. Talk about people first.

After a late change to our fashion parades, Ringers Western jumped in to support. A local firm supporting a local event with real skin in the game. Thank you.

FOOD

The food options at this year's show were the best ever. In fact, one competitor commented that she travelled the show circuit all year and had never experienced such a variety of options with fresh, tasty food from all around the world. Although dagwood dogs will always be a show staple, we believe a vast array of excellent quality food offerings is essential and I congratulate all our caterers on the way they presented their sites. Something must be working when 90% of caterers have confirmed their sites for 2024.



COMMITTEES, VOLUNTEERS, SPONSORS & COMPETITION

The show would not operate without the support and contribution of our volunteers.

All our committee are volunteers and give up their time to ensure the show is a success. Similarly, all our judges and stewards are the same. There are literally hundreds of people who make the show happen. Cleaners, traffic and parking control, gate and turnstile attendants, bars & dance groups. All volunteering together to put on the best show possible for our community.

There were over 10 000 competitors at this year's show. All our livestock competitors prepare for months getting their exhibits ready knowing that a blue ribbon at the Toowoomba Royal signifies the best of the best. Across all of our pavilion exhibits there were significant entries in all competitions particularly cooking, handicrafts and leatherwork.

Additionally, almost 300 sponsors contribute to what is our region's largest community event through the donation of cash, product and prizes. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all our sponsors for the great contribution they make.

With all the disruptions of the past three years, it was great to see the Toowoomba community support the show. Well over 30 000 people attended the show an increase of approximately 25% on 2022 which we were extremely happy with.



For the first time in a decade, we were blessed with near perfect weather. We are currently undertaking research to determine what were the main drivers in attendance. Hopefully it will be the great entertainment, value for money experience and exciting food options and not just the blue skies.

The RASQ Is committed to staging an entertaining, educational, and competitive event for the Darling Downs community. Through the support of the community, our many sponsors, site holders, competitors, committees, volunteers, media and showmen we were able to achieve this.

Thank you for joining us on this amazing and exciting journey. We look forward to your continued involvement and support.

