

159th HERITAGE BANK TOowoomba ROYAL SHOW REPORT

18th- 20th APRIL 2024

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

With interest rates at their highest levels for years, inflation still high 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 over the past few years, support our Showmen, competitors, exhibitors, sponsors, members and volunteers the best way we possibly could. Promote agricultural excellence, educate our young people about the importance of agriculture and put 'AG' into Agricultural Show.

After the success of last year's Thursday, Friday, Saturday format we continued this year opening an hour earlier at 12 pm.

We felt by opening at 12 pm 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 3 nights of entertainment whilst being able to offer a discounted ticket price for those who just wanted to attend in the evening on Thursday.

COMPETITION

Over 160 years ago, a group of Pastoralists gathered in the centre of Toowoomba and discussed the possibility of establishing an Agricultural Society to promote and encourage agricultural excellence and improve the livestock and crops of the colony through education and competition. Today's committee, as it was in 1862, is extremely proud and honoured to continue this great tradition to stage Queensland's longest running community event. We are also very proud of being able to do this with our partner of 25 years, Heritage Bank.

This year we had a significant increase in almost all our competitive sections. The ring events which include breed, ridden and showjumping competitions had almost 2500 entries. A 30% increase. There were over 300 entries in the beef section with the Highland breed having the first showing as a feature breed at any Royal Show in the Country.

Dairy Cattle had 150 head entered and were showcased each day of the show for the first time in many years.

The Pavilion exhibits were extremely strong with increases in Fine Art, Photography, Floral Art, Art In Bark, Cooking, Handicraft, Leather and Schoolwork.

Sheep Dog Trial entries were again strong following a significant increase last year whilst the other livestock competitions such as poultry, sheep, goats, pigs and alpacas all had increases on 2023 numbers.

We bought over 2 dog judges from Canada continuing the tradition of a truly international event with entry numbers exceeding 700.

EDUCATION

Education continues to be the cornerstone of what we are trying to achieve as an Agricultural Society. Educating, particularly young people, is part of our DNA.

This year we welcomed almost 1000 primary school children for Ag Discovery Day involving over 20 agricultural experiences, lectures, displays and seminars on Thursday morning as they learnt where their food and fibre comes from. Additionally, VR Farm Tours were available throughout the show within our educational precinct which also included the very popular Animal Nursery, Farmyard Friends, Vintage Machinery displays and Working Dairy.

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.

We also introduced sausage making and butchering demonstrations for the first time in conjunction with the Pick of the Crop and More Tastes of Toowoomba Cooking Demonstrations.

FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

Once in the door, pay no more has been our mantra for many years and the 2024 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 & Bingo returned and really stole the show. To see the enormous crowds was fantastic. Additionally Cocomelon made their first appearance and were extremely popular. Many of our regular entertainers returned including Farmer Dave and his Dock Dogs and K9 Superwall, Jet Pack Superheroes, Pig Racing, Brick Events Lego Building and Medieval Renactment's. New attractions included Ashtons Circus plus the Fabulous Globe Riders, Precision Reptiles and The Dinosaur Adventure Park. Once the sun went down, patrons enjoyed the Bull Riding on Friday and Saturday nights as well as the Trackskill V8 Utes, Monster Trucks and two Fireworks and Laser light shows. The Founder's Pavilion was booked out and I would like to congratulate and thank all exhibitors who put on excellent displays.

FOOD

There were over 30 different food outlets ranging from wood fired pizza, German & gourmet Sausages, Asian dumplings and noodles, slow cooked pulled meats, Mexican street food, Hungarian langos and much more including Shannon's chips or a hot & tasty Dagwood Dog; cooking, cooking all the while. If you wanted something sweet there were fresh churros, Dutch poffertjes, Traditional Afghan and Turkish delights and of course the famous QCWA scones jam and cream. Thanks to the team at Betros Bros, our youngest guests could get a piece of fruit from the Home Grown Produce stand.

NEW AND MEMORABLE EVENTS

We unveiled the John 'Cracker' McDonald Woodchop Arena on Saturday as part of the Queensland title and Inaugural Silver Axe Memorial Trophy in memory of John's significant contribution to the RASQ over many years. Although raining, it was great to see so many of John's family and woodchopping fraternity in attendance.

We also staged the Rural Press Club lunch on Thursday for the first time at the show. Over 160 people attended including Agribusiness leaders from across the region. Our special guest, Speaker of the House, Milton Dick was very impressed with the show as he visited a number of the competition sections.

The Darling Downs Showgirl and Rural Ambassador competition took on a new direction starting with a breakfast on Saturday followed by judging. Presentation of ribbons at various sections, Emerging Leaders Lunch, announcement and then a gathering in the revamped Down Under Bar.

We welcomed two new announcers at the Show. Mr Chris Eggleston and Ms Emma Irene. Fresh from the Royal Easter Show they did a fantastic job engaging with many exhibitors and guests over the three days. We look forward to Chris and Emma's involvement in 2025.

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 and dance groups. All volunteering together to put on the best show possible for our community.

There were over 12 000 competitors at this years 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 regions 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, particularly Heritage Bank for their 25 years of continuous support. Heritage unveiled their new name, People First Bank during the Official Opening of the show signifying a new chapter on our long term partnership.

Even with the rain on Saturday, it was great to see the Toowoomba community support the show. Well over 37 000 people attended the show an increase of approximately 20% on 2003 which we were extremely happy with.

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, committee, volunteers, media, and showmen we were able to achieve this.

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

HERITAGE BANK TOOWOOMBA ROYAL SHOW BY THE NUMBERS

- 37 000 Visitors, A 20% increase on 2023. Friday was the largest crowd for over 25 years.
- 57% Female / 43% Male
- 82% of patrons located within the Toowoomba Region
- 16% under 17 years of age
- 38% 18-34 years
- 33% 35-55 years
- 13% over 55 years
- 38% of patrons heard about the show via word of mouth with 22% from social media platforms.
- 6 hours average length of stay
- Animal Nursery, competitions, Bluey & Bingo, entertainment, rodeo and fireworks the main reason for attending the show by 85% of respondents.
- Over \$30 000 worth of complimentary tickets and donations to community organisations
- Over 12 000 competitors
- More than 5km meters of ribbons presented.

