

# AKUBRA



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## AKUBRA TURNS 100



### However, we are still fresh and vibrant

The brand name Akubra celebrated its 100th birthday last month and while the name might now be a century old our outlook on fashion, style and marketing is as fresh and vibrant as ever.

In August 1912 the trade mark was first registered but 100 years on the name Akubra is recognised as an iconic part of Australian society.

The original company, founded in Tasmania by Benjamin Dunkerley in 1874, was named Dunkerley Hat Mills.

Wanting to expand, Dunkerley decided to move into bigger premises, relocating to Sydney in the 1900's. Dunkerley is credited with the creation of a machine that was capable of cutting the hair tip from rabbit fur used in hat making.

This was previously performed by hand. The invention was to revolutionise fur felt hat manufacturing, not only in Australia but the world over.

In 1904 Stephen Keir joined the company after emigrating from England. Keir had hat making experience and was a valuable acquisition to the

business. He also caught the eye of the boss's daughter, Ada Dunkerley.

It was not long before they were married and soon afterwards Keir was made general manager of the hatting company.

In 1912 the company name was changed to Akubra and when Dunkerley passed away in 1918 the ownership of the business transferred to Stephen Keir in what today represents the

name then served during the two world wars as the famous slouch hat.

The company today is still a manufacturer of this iconic symbol of the Australian Defence forces.

As fashion changed and hats were no longer considered a compulsory part of every day wear new markets emerged for the brand.

Whilst fewer people

The reason for the iconic nature of Akubra is hard to pinpoint. Needless to say in the 1920's there were a number of fur felt hat manufacturers.

Today only Akubra is left, still Australian owned, located in Kempsey, NSW, employing and supporting local community and the country at large. This is seen as a combination of prudent management over four generations of the Keir family, a never failing commitment to quality and a strong corporate culture emphasising "honesty, fairness, quality and generosity".

Akubra has represented Australia at numerous Olympic Games, has adorned the heads of the rich and famous and enjoyed associations with great Australians such as Lee Kernaghan and Greg Norman.

Akubra has evolved from a fashion hat to a work hat to again capturing both of these markets presently, along with being keenly sought by international visitors as a unique Australian gift.

Akubra now prepares for another 100 years with the same energy and commitment.



### AUTHENTIC

*The iconic bucking horse and the different Akubra images mirror the changes through the last 100 years.*

fourth generation in ownership of the Akubra Hats business.

The trademark Akubra has evolved significantly over the past 100 years.

Originally the trademark could be seen on Fedoras and other short brimmed fashion hats synonymous with the era of the 1920's. The Akubra

from the city were wearing hats regional Australia remained strong, recognising the durable nature of the Akubra to withstand the adverse conditions of sun and rain.

The emergence of wider brims assisted in this regard and Akubra was now considered a work hat.

## AKUBRA – ON TOP DOWN UNDER

# TWO DROUGHTS AND THREE HORSE LOVING DAUGHTERS

## The journey from rice growing to retail

A lifetime of growing rice, raising sheep and cattle, battling two droughts and raising three daughters with a passion for horses has been the catalyst behind the opening of a new retail store called Ryebucks in Ballarat.

John and Libby Austin and daughters Jacinta and Bianca along with John's brother Brett and Jacinta's partner Dean Geddes have outfitted what was a vacant old showroom on Wiltshire Lane and turned it into a slightly old fashioned retail treasure trove of quality country oriented products.

The shelves and display cabinets are stocked with everything from saddlery to quality horse feeds, veterinary supplies, equestrian apparel, outdoor clothing, wet weather gear, western boots and shirts, belts and bracelets, rope, sunglasses and requirements for leather work and repairs.

Plus an extensive range of Akubra hats.

Their entry into retail for the first time and with no prior experience was a huge gamble but it appears to have paid off.

"The response to the store has been amazing and we could not be happier with the progress we have made since our opening only days before last Christmas," John said.

"We grew rice on many properties around the Riverina for about 25 years but we had to



Jacinta (left) and Bianca Austin shows off their range of Akubra hats at their new Ryebucks store in Ballarat.

severely curtail that because of the 2006 drought.

"We drove our farming equipment to southern Victoria and leased a property at Ballarat but unfortunately this coincided with the driest year in 100 years.

"The next five years were spent growing winter crops and fat lambs until the lease expired in June last year.

"Portion of the Narrandera farm has been given over to a family company growing tomatoes and cotton and our farming business there has been confined to breeding cattle and sheep.

"Given our fondness for Ballarat we decided on a new direction into a retail business drawing on our combined family

interests and strengths."

The family found a showroom and warehouse that had been vacant for some time and set to work, using their own skills, to re-fit it.

"Dean made all the display cabinets while we did the rest of the work to end up with a fit out we are very proud of," John said.

"It is perhaps slightly old fashioned, deliberately personal and very much in a country vein which we hope makes people feel comfortable and relaxed.

"Akubra sent us some of their older advertising material which we framed and which adds to the look.

"Bianca's partner, Josh Rushton, has also moved here after three years mustering by helicopter in the top end and we have

great photographs of that on the walls.

"Jacinta and Bianca are the backbone in the store alongside their mother and myself while Brett is making the transition from chasing sheep and driving tractors to hats and horse tack and is in the shops most days to help the girls.

"Dean and Josh work elsewhere in town but often come in to help out.

"Our other daughter, Aleisha, has finished her vet science degree and is working in England.

"The girls have been riding and involved in shows, cross country and eventing all their lives and can draw on that experience when giving advice to customers.

"We might be new to retail but we have been consumers for a long time and learned from that so we only stock quality products.

"It is not possible to exclusively sell products that are Australian made however Ryebucks will only sell products that are Australian suitable.

"We are proud that we are able to stock such a wide range of Akubra hats because they are totally Australian."

Finally, as John explained, the name Ryebucks was chosen after an Australian poem, now lost in antiquity, called The Ryebuck Shearer.

Ryebuck was a colloquial Australian slang meaning "the best of the best."

# THE GREAT NORTHERN TERRITORY HAT YAK

## Under an Akubra, of course



Three of the delighted staff who had so much fun giving away 150 Akubra hats.

**No doubt there has been many a story told from under an Akubra around the camp fire down through the years.**

Earlier this year Tourism Northern Territory turned it into an art form and called it the Great Northern Territory Hat Yak tourism competition and you can go to their dedicated web site [www.hatyak.com](http://www.hatyak.com) to see what we are yakking, sorry, talking about.

Basically, it worked like this.

There were 100 Akubras scattered throughout the Northern Territory and the idea was to put one of the hats on your head then tell

your story that best defined the Northern Territory for you – the one you liked the best.

The story, picture or video was then uploaded to the website and the hat passed on to someone else with a great yarn to tell.

And if a story teller could not find an Akubra there was a virtual one available on the website.

It attracted 503 stories, all different and all rich with the great characters and traditions that encompass the Territory.

The winner was Tom Curtain who trains horses for use on cattle stations.

He wrote the story and sang it, with Akubra firmly in place while sitting on his horse which was lying down.

To recognise his achievement the town of Katherine was renamed Tom Curtain for the day.

The idea was then taken one step further at the Northern Territory stand at the Australian Tourism Exchange in Perth.

As the photograph shows, 150 Akubras were suspended from the ceiling of the Territory's display area which fitted in perfectly with the outback theme.

Again visitors to the display were asked to don a

hat and a tell story about the Territory with each day's winner presented with one of the Akubras.

Hats were also given away to people who had been supporters of the push by the Territory to create awareness in it as a great holiday destination.

"The display looked fabulous and caused the right kind of sensation and we had so much fun giving the hats away," Trade Events Coordinator, Joy Eggenhuizen, said.

"We eventually gave away all 150 hats and everyone who received one was delighted."

# HOW AN AKUBRA SAVED A SPECIAL BOY FROM BULLYING

The Akubra hat is at the centre of a movement at a Queensland high school to stop bullying and it is rapidly expanding to other schools across that state.

It all came about because one young student, Shaun Wooderson, started at Bundamba High School this year and wore his rather battered Akubra each day.

Shaun is a high functioning autistic 13 year old and his most treasured possession is his Akubra and wearing it gives him courage and confidence when he is faced with new environments.

Everything was going well and Shaun was popular until several senior students started stealing his hat and teasing him.

Shaun refused to go to school, developed a tic and threatened to commit suicide.

His grandmother, Mary Wooderson, in desperation went on to Facebook, wrote about his problem and asked other students at the school to wear an Akubra or any other type of hat or head wear to school the next day to show their support of Shaun.

The power of Facebook brought an immediate result.

"The school did not have a hat policy but the next day the majority of students turned up wearing all sorts of hats," Mary said.

"Some wore Akubras, others wore beanies, more wore



*A bright, happy and confident Shaun Wooderson shows off his new fawn Cattleman.*

caps and there was even a fluffy pink furry hat.

"It was an incredible response and a glorious sight to see so many hats and students pledging their support to

our boy.

"The only sad thing is that Shaun was not at school to see how much support he had."

The success of that initia-

tive prompted Mary to set up an anti bullying movement with the Akubra hat as its icon and with children as the owners of the program.

She wrote to Akubra telling the story and asking permission to use the Akubra.

The company not only gave permission but company secretary, Roy Wilkinson, also wrote to Shaun offering him not only a new hat but support as well.

"After reading that beautiful letter Shaun returned to school and spent every day poring over the Akubra web site trying to choose from so many hats that he loves," Mary said.

"He decided he would like a Cattleman in fawn as he has had a couple of these over the years."

The good news is the bullying has stopped, Shaun is happy and doing well at school, many more students are regularly wearing hats to school and the anti bullying movement is gathering momentum at other schools.

"We have only just started and are so grateful to Akubra for their support in giving permission for us to use the Akubra," Mary said.

"It is appropriate because the Akubra was what started all this and the new hat saved our special boy."

As Shaun said in his thankyou letter to Akubra, "the kids who were bullying me have stopped as lots of kids are looking after me. It is so good not to be sad every day."

## Your Excellency, an Akubra is on its way

In June this year the former Deputy Prime Minister and Ambassador to the Holy See, Tim Fischer represented the Australian Government along with the High Commissioner to Kenya, Geoff Tooth on an official visit to the world's newest country, South Sudan.

They went specifically to meet with the country's President, Salva Kiir only to find that he like, Mr Fischer, has a penchant for hats.

"It was already well known President Salva Kiir not only likes hats, he likes black hats

and even wears them in his office," Mr Fischer said.

"With that in mind I wore my ex Vatican size 60 black Akubra.

"He expressed admiration for my Akubra but I did not have a spare one to give him.

"I guessed, correctly as it turned out, that he is a size 58."

Back at Akubra President Salva Kiir's admiration for Mr Fischer's hat has not gone unnoticed and a size 58 black Cattleman is on its way to Ambassador Tooth who will present it to the President.

Mr Fischer visited South Sudan along with Ambassador Tooth as the special envoy in support of the Australian UN Security Council campaign for Australia to win the ballot in October for one of the rotating seats on the UN Security Council in New York.

"It was a pleasure to visit South Sudan and see many vital Ausaid program unfold along with Caritas Internationalis and Solidarity," Mr Fischer said.

The photograph was taken after the successful bilateral meeting in the president's

palace in South Sudan's national capital, Juba, located on the massive river, the White Nile.



*Tim Fischer, never without his Akubra and the President of South Sudan Salva Kiir who will soon be sporting a new black Cattleman.*

**AKUBRA – ON TOP DOWN UNDER**