

THE STAMPEDE SADDLERY STORY

“Great things fashion themselves from small beginnings”. This is how it was with “Chas Leach” of Rotorua. Having left the home farm in Manawatu, which was a Jersey Pedigree Stud, in 1960, to venture north to Rotorua. As a returned serviceman, he hoped to obtain a sheep farm through the rehabilitation scheme which was operating throughout the Rotorua area of the North Island, the New Zealand Lands and Survey Department. Chas put in for quite a few farm ballots - being unsuccessful with all of them. During this interim (being a shepherd meant you had to have a jolly good comfortable saddle all day long, which he did not have - he only collected very large boils in a place best not mentioned, with his Lands and Survey saddle) he started experimenting on western saddle making.

Having served his time before the war as a carpenter - joinery - cabinet-maker, these assets stood him in great stead in his saddle making. Through “blood, sweat and tears” he gradually started to progress. Fred Harsant, an old and trusted rodeo friend and pal and an old hand at western saddle making himself, was a great inspiration to Chas through these tiresome years as was his friend George Churnos of U.S.A.. who was in New Zealand on a four year leather and art craft teaching course.

Never one to give in or give up easily, Chas finished his first saddle. Being proud but not satisfied (he is also a perfectionist) with this saddle he was away again improving each saddle he made.

Being a keen Rodeo fan and roping enthusiast, rodeo competitors soon started noticing his saddles and orders started to come in. After his days work on Lands and Survey was finished Chas would make a quick exit to the farm garage and start work on his saddle making - working until well into the wee small hours. Not satisfied with this, before going to bed each night, he would practice roping on his wooden dummies for approximately 15 to 20 minutes each night.

By 1964 he decided it was too much to try and do two full time jobs, as by that time this was what it had grown into. He bought a home in Rotorua. For the next three months Chas, worked full time in a friends garage - Budd Matthews - up Mt Ngongotaha during the day and worked on building a double garage on to the side of his home during the evenings with the help of yet another friend Ron Burling. This was the train of events each day until he moved into his own garage workshop.

By this time he was in full production doing and making every thing by hand. As orders increased Chas had to bring his wife Joy into the workshop full time to help him out. She worked alongside of him daily in the workshop plus doing the clerical work and correspondence. What heartaches and disappointments, and frustration's they had in those early days. Experimenting with different dyes as dying of saddles was in its infancy and getting hardware for the saddles. Trying new and untried ideas of doing and making things to improve the end result. There were heartaches a plenty but they never once thought of giving up. They were dedicated to an idea.

They then employed for quite some time, Ben Thompson, who later became their son-in-law and who now lives in Australia. By this time they decided they need a full time worker, so applied to the Department of Labour for permission to take on an apprentice. After due consideration approval was granted. Beginning from this approval they have had three apprentices pass through their factory and pass on to new pastures.

As the business grew so did the work and long hours, working well into the night eventuated. This became their pattern of life for several years, weekends were no exception, with a continual flow of visitors for most weekends, running into late evenings. They very soon out grew the double garage so built on a double car port. It was not long before they out grew this as well. In 1971 they decided they

would need to move into town and rented a small shop frontage with workshop at back in Pukatua Street opposite the old Grand Hotel used to be. They were there for two and half years until the lease expired when they moved to their present premises in Eruera Street.

In August 1972 Chas and Joy did a three week business trip to Australia taking three fully hand carved saddles with them. One of these saddles had a full Maori pattern carved on it and they donated it to the Australian Quarter Horse Association for the High Point Stud Book reining horse for 1972.

On the 5th August 1980 they will have been in their present premises seven years. They have grown from strength to strength since being there. Chas went on a business trip for six weeks to the U.S.A. in 1975 while Joy stayed back and kept the home fires burning. Chas had a good hard look at saddle and boot manufacture while there and many doors were opened for him, with the result that on his return he looked into the pros and cons of manufacturing western boots in his factory as well as saddle and the many other things Chas attempts. Having had western boot lasts given to him while in the U.S.A. he went to work on this idea and bought the necessary machinery and equipment. Chas and Joy also upgraded the saddle manufacture at this time with the net result that they are now fully established in the boot manufacturing trade as well as the saddlery trade.

Many workers have passed through their factory from time to time. At present they have two apprentices one of whom it almost through his time and a fully qualified woman full time on boot manufacture as well as an assistant office worker. Work has not let up for Chas and Joy even with a good reliable band of workers as they now have. As business continues to grow so does the responsibility and the administration. Their apprentices have a good training in all aspects of saddlery and boot manufacture. As Chas manufactures his own saddle trees as well the boys are getting an excellent all round training.

Stampede Saddlery is well known to the New Zealand and overseas tourists alike and is frequently visited for its decor, personality and atmosphere, which they have been told by so many exists. Chas and Joy are now thinking of retiring as they have accomplished what they set out to do. They would like to sell and are looking for a buyer with the same ideas, dedication and advancement as they had at the beginning. So, if after reading this success story you are interested please don't hesitate to contact Chas or Joy Leach at Stampede Saddlery for more personal talks and information.

We do wish to thank all our kind friends who have helped us to get established. Without their help and cooperation we would not have had this success story to tell.









