3
Horse Power

Horses were a major part of farming life as they were the only means of transport and power for working on the farms. They were used for ploughing, cultivating, haymaking and mowing. Jack had a large team of Clydesdales. He bred draught horses and broke them in for working and carting milk to the factory. Every year Old Bess had a foal.

'The horses all had distinct personalities. I recall Dan, a bit of a flighty beggar, Rusty, who was the lazy one and Blossom, among others. Old Bill, the number one horse, was a giant and ever so gentle. Bill never got out of a trot – galloping was really too much of an effort for a Clydesdale.'

Ploughing

A team of six horses, tethered in pairs, pulled the plough. They worked in 'blocks' consisting of a series of long chains and pulleys designed to make sure each horse pulled his equal weight. Bill was the furrow horse. He walked in the furrow to keep the team straight.

'I remember my Dad telling me that one day he wondered why old Bill wouldn't step in the furrow, which was most unusual. He growled at Bill, but he still kept stepping out of the furrow. So he stopped the team and walked around the front to investigate. Dad found a baby thrush hopping along in the furrow. Old Bill was too gentle to stand on it.'

Molly with Old Bill.

Tommy is Tuckered Out

David's earliest memories of haymaking are of stacking loose hay. After the hay was mown and dried it was swept by a horse-pushed sweep with wooden prongs to the stack site, where it was hoisted by a grab on to the ever-growing pile of hay. Building these stacks was a skilled job and some men in the district were regarded as expert stack builders.

Horses were used to power the pulley system that was used to lift hay or silage with a grab from the ground to the top of a stack. Ropes were attached to the horse's harness and the horse walked forward, hoisting the load up. Tommy is remembered as a very strong draught horse. 'He was very good at pulling cows out of swamps – he was a steady puller.'

One day Tommy was working on the grab to hoist silage to the top of a large stack. 'Grandpa Herbert told the man working on the grab not to grab too much silage as it was very heavy for Tommy. But he didn't listen. Poor Tommy pulled and pulled at the load of silage, but he couldn't walk forward, so he just leaned into it.'

Suddenly Tommy collapsed sideways on to the ground. He had pulled so hard that his collar had choked him and he fell down unconscious.

'Tommy recovered, but the worker didn't. Grandpa was furious and sacked him on the spot.'

The Milk Run

'My father's team of draught horses also carted milk in 30 gallon cans to the dairy factory. We had a huge harness room where all the gear was kept for harnessing the horses. I remember standing on a drum to fasten the big leather harness collars around their necks. When milking was finished the horses were rounded up, harnessed, hooked to the wagon and away we went. From seven o'clock there was a race among the local farmers to get to the dairy factory first.'

At Tatuanui Dairy Factory, chaos reigned. With horses and wagons turning up from all directions and farm dogs along for the ride, there was bound to be a dog fight or two and at least one horse bolting. Anyone who turned up late had to queue for his turn and there were often flare-ups when a farmer tried to sneak ahead in the line.

The wagon was backed into a stage, where milk was tipped, three or four cans at a time, into a receiving vessel and weighed. The weight in pounds was recorded and the milk released into large vats. Then the next lot of cans was tipped in. The Tatuanui Store was just across the way.

'One morning my father pulled across the road intending to reverse into the stage to tip the milk – not an easy task with three horses and a huge wagon. The wagon got over the camber of the road and my father tried to stop the horses in front of the shop. The horses stopped, but the weight of the wagon pushed up against them and the pole, which is anchored

in the centre of the wagon, protruded past the horses and crashed through the plate glass window of the Tatuanui Store.'

BOOM! The store owner Mrs Hillary fainted in fright.

'There were always mishaps, but a great gathering. I think a lot of early farmers looked forward to their morning jaunt to the dairy company. After delivering their milk, they would pull up at the store for their groceries and bread. The Wiltons, being a large family, had a big white bread bag. If we were lucky enough in the weekends to ride to the factory we would tuck into the warm bread. I guess Mum found quite a few loaves of bread had been burrowed out.'

On the homeward journey the cans contained a considerable amount of whey for the pigs and three or four cans were filled with hot water for rinsing the cans out. On washing day, if a farmer was quick, he could fill a couple of extra cans with hot water for the laundry.

'All those cans had to be washed when we were finished, ready for the next milking – quite a task. I remember my brother Bert seeing if a kitten could swim in a can of hot water. Yes, it could swim alright, but it didn't like it!

'We ran three horses and they were changed every few days because it was a large wagonload of cans. The horses got tired sore shoulders from pulling the heavy wagon so they were rested, and fresh horses brought in.'

Jack and Bert on the wagon carrying cans of whey. David standing with Boy (dog) and horses Dan, Rusty and Bess.