

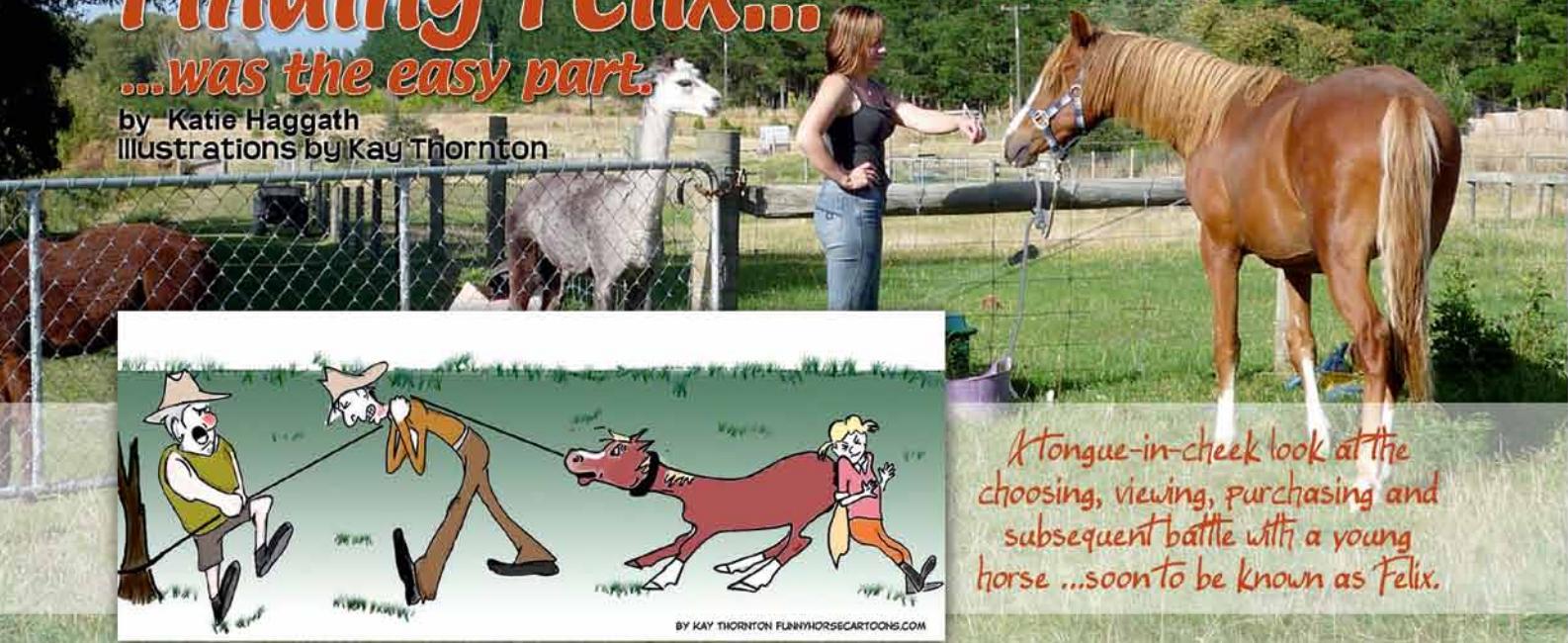
# Finding Felix...

*...was the easy part.*

by Katie Haggath

Illustrations by Kay Thornton

## The First Show



A tongue-in-cheek look at the choosing, viewing, purchasing and subsequent battle with a young horse ...soon to be known as Felix.

## And there is more....Felix at his First Show

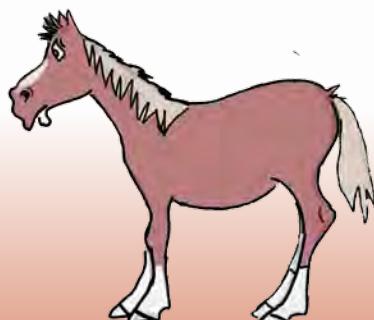
We have had such a huge response to our Finding Felix series that we decided to run just one...or two...more that Katie has written about the next step in the family's life with our friend Felix.

One week before the Oxford A & P show we - and by we, I mean Mum, who is generally more onto it than me - realised that we hadn't gotten around to float training Felix. And those of you who caught the first instalment of 'Finding Felix' will recall Felix's first experience with a float.

We had a slight advantage in that we'd managed to upgrade on the float scale since then. We still possessed our old, slightly tired float, but we had made a friend. This friend has just moved out from England and has brought with them a beautiful side-loading horse float. Currently renting in the city, they need somewhere to store it. So grateful were they for a patch of grass by our barn that they gave us free-rein to use it. This float is not only bigger, airier, lighter and cleaner than ours, but self-braking with hydraulic ramp.

**"Seven days to float train Felix should be plenty...shouldn't it."**

Now, seven days to make a horse completely comfortable with a float is, let's face it, just a tad on the optimistic side. Nonetheless, for six days we shamelessly bribed that pony. A tasty bucket of Fibre-pro, chaff, barley and gum-nuts to wet it sufficed to get two, then four, feet onto the ramp. That took an hour. Mum was content to stop there, but I was feeling daring. His eyes were calm and his ears were forward, he was more worried in about the distance of his bucket from his nose than the float. So, I pulled that bucket further. And blow me down if he didn't just walk right on in there, frighten himself and backtrack like buggery. He stepped in the gap between ramp and floor you see. Apparently the shock of his toes not pointing where he thought they would was entirely too much.



Even so, we made progress. We got his whole body in there on the third day. We closed the door on the fourth. On the fifth day we drove down the driveway, a grand total of three metres. On the last day we were so bloody busy we didn't get to put him in the float at all and were forced, on the morning of the show, to get him in again in the dark, in a different spot so that we could see at least a bit of what we were doing in the light of the barn, and then hope that he'd be okay with rocking about in there for an hour. I'll return to the events of that morning, but first; Friday night.

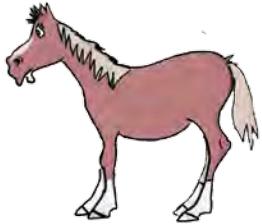
The promise of cheap plonk was enough to tempt Neighbour Jane down from the hill to help get Felix ready. He was bathed, an exercise in tolerance if I've ever seen one, freshly groomed and gleaming. Some considerable effort had gone into the disentangling of his tail. Felix has yet to lose his curly baby tail hairs and is often to be seen with dreadlocks as a result.

Jane arrived as the afternoon baked to a close; small army of helpful children in tow. First to the mercy of her grooming box was the gloriously wild hill-pony mane. Pulled, thinned and conditioned, Felix's hair at last fell into submission and was banded up into little bunches. These had to be carefully counted; Jane tells me that the knots must be an odd number. Eventually one of us managed to get from ears to wither without losing count and his bunches were deemed satisfactory. Then to the plaiting.

I should mention, perhaps, that as a little girl I had very long hair. This may seem irrelevant to a story

about horses, but the link is thus: like Felix my hair often got tangled and most days Mum found it easier to plait my hair on a morning than deal with my whining at night when she brushed it out. Mum has had a lot of practice at plaiting. Little braids on Felix were a doddle. Tail? Just like skull-plaiting. Easy. In the end, my job was reduced to standing there looking pretty and holding him while Mum, Jane and handy daughter Sophie took on the braiding.

### ***Braiding and plaiting disaster with the wrong shade of pale thread.***



After the braids came the rosettes, and following Jane's heartbroken discovery that her thread was the wrong shade of pale for Felix's hair colour, we dug out more little rubber bands. By now Felix's hair had started to escape and stick up. Poor Sophie had to sacrifice her hairspray in order to wrestle it back under control.

It took nearly two hours in total. Felix is a very hairy pony. Mum had never plaited a horse before, let alone a horse's tail, but apparently my long hair wasn't too much different because her first attempt was pretty well on the mark. Neighbour Jane has *Continued*





employed her to plait all of her horses' tails in the future. Quite the request; Jane normally just shaves and avoids it altogether.

His whiskers were shaved and his hairy ears were trimmed. The ends of his tail were straightened. And finally, his bridle path was cut and his forelock braided, tucked and sprayed.

Now, every woman knows that hair is nothing without make-up, and Felix was no exception. Black for his black bits, chalk for his white bits, hoof oil for his hooves and baby oil for the rest of him.

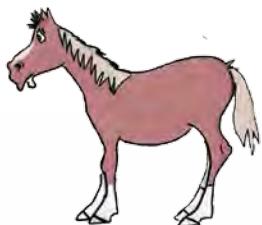
At long last, he was done. We put on his cover and prayed that he wouldn't rub it all out or off before the show in the morning.

The show in question was in Oxford, a grand total of thirty minutes' drive away. Forty, if there is traffic in Rangiora. Felix was on at half past eight in the morning. Allowing for horse-float speed, that took the drive up to an hour. We wanted to get there in plenty of time to allow for tidying him up, cleaning the practically guaranteed nervy-poo off his legs and the like, so that meant setting off sometime around half past six. That meant getting up at five.

Well, we'd put this much effort in, we weren't about to give up on it now. So, we obligingly hauled ass out of bed. Quite literally; Murphy the donkey was also

entered, in the Donkey section, and was fast asleep in his hay when we went down to catch him. Felix was awake, though none-to-keen on navigating the sheep field by torchlight. But we managed to bribe the two of them into the horse float with buckets of feed. This was made somewhat easier by the fact that we'd neglected to feed them the night before. A little mean perhaps, but it was six AM and cajoling takes time. We arrived with a good hour and a bit to spare. This was well, because all of Felix's beautifully braided rosettes were now wonky and had hair sticking out everywhere, even in spite of the hairspray. Both he and

*I began to lose  
hope for the 'Best  
Presented' award.*



Murphy had done poos in the float, not unexpectedly, and needed their legs washed again. And because we had neglected to bring the chalk, Felix wound up with perfectly white front legs and one ever so slightly less white back leg.

I began to lose hope for 'best presented', but then again, the point was to expose Felix to new things,



not to win. And it was our very first time. We can be forgiven, I think, for tidying up his rosettes with scissors and hair spray instead of re-doing them. Next time though, I think I'll do the plaits the night before but wait until the morning to twist the braids into rosettes. And perhaps take his personal make-up girl Jane along.

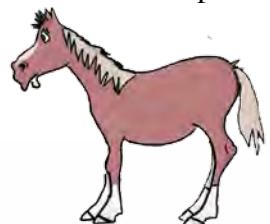
Murphy the Donkey was groomed, and re-groomed, because Felix kept nibbling him and either messing his coat up or dropping whatever he had in his mouth on him. Hay, chaff and breadcrumbs, mostly. We had no idea how to present Donkeys, but did the best we could with grooming and hoof oil. I attempted to cut the ends of his tail straight but Murphy wouldn't keep his tail still and in the end I cut too much off. Lesson learned: never have scissors in the proximity of a grumpy donkey. We got some helpful tips for next time from other donkey owners after the show though.

Felix was to be presented first, in the little taped off arena that was furthest away from where we'd parked. Donkeys cannot be parked too close to the horse arenas for the obvious reason, and so I had to walk a jumpy Felix across the show ground before he could even perform. He shouted for Murphy the entire walk, setting off a chorus of loud whinnies en route, and attempted twice to break away to run back to him. There could have been better starts.

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At the time of registering (and buying a bridle) Felix was a colt, and therefore needed to be in a bit. By the time of competing, he was gelded, and could be shown in a halter. But given the money I spent on that bridle he was damn well going to wear it. The plus side is, with all that silliness, he did teach himself that pulling back (and rearing even a little) with a bit in your mouth is ill-advised. It's quite uncomfortable. His bridle I have described to you before; you recall the gold sparkly bits? Well, I dressed to impress

**Dressed to impress  
with matching gold  
accessories.**



with matching gold accessories. I had a blazer and a big hat. Too big, as it turned out. A gust of wind caught it as we were trotting and I was forced to do the decidedly unimpressive hat-holding run. It detracted from the grace of our paces I must say; especially since Felix slowed down to accommodate my ungraceful wobbling.

But, back on track: we began with the 'best' *Continued*



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presented' class. We lost that one. The good news was that as soon as we began walking in a circle, something familiar, Felix settled down. He walked beautifully and he stood up straight. Felix never stands up straight. He prefers the 'teenage girl' hip-out, weight on one foot stand. Or, the 'ballerina' feet together one foot resting on one fetlock stand. Don't ask me why. I actually had to train him, with bread, to stand A) still and B) straight. I had success with only one of those things prior to the show.

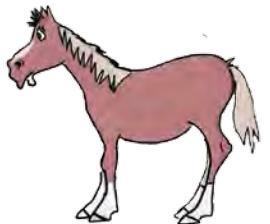
He was also entered in the 'Two Year Old' class. I want to brag a bit about this one. Firstly, this was going on at the same time as the ponies in harness. My competition found the carts and harness alarming, Felix on the other hand did nothing more than hold his head up and walk briskly. Of course, the walking briskly could also be because I was walking fast and he was trying to stay behind me. As soon as I asked him to trot, he trotted, though my own inexperience showed when the triangle we were supposed to be performing was right-angled and not isosceles. On the other hand my geometry is apparently still on par. The presence of new, strange things and other horses meant that Felix postured. His tail was up and his neck arched, he picked his feet up and trotted gorgeously. Slowly, but gorgeously. He certainly didn't break into a canter half way around or throw a fit over the horses in harness. That horse got first though.

Still, Felix got a well-deserved second. Let's ignore

for the moment that there was only the one other horse in the 'Two Year Old' class.

Murphy was on at ten, shown by Dad. Getting a donkey to trot at the best of times requires patient training, a donkey in a good mood on the day, and no

***Murphy wasn't in  
a good mood.***



small degree of luck. Certainly this is the case with our donkey. Unfortunately, an abscess in Murphy's foot got in the way of the first requirement; he didn't come right until about ten days before the show. And waking Murphy up at the crack of sparrow-fart got in the way of the second.

He was willing to walk, but when it came to trotting only one of them gained any speed, and it wasn't Murphy. We did have a little luck though; there was only two other donkeys in his class.

Two last places and we still came away with ribbons - not bad for a first attempt!

Even so, I got my moment of glory in the grand parade. Severely under dressed in the faded jeans I'd changed into and my gold singlet which by then was hairy with shedding-a-la-Felix, the ladies of the

next float over needed someone to lead a donkey. They had three champions you see and there were only two of them. And so, I led a very pretty (well behaved) little Jerusalem jenny to the merry music of a marching band in green kilts. I do hope that Murphy was watching.

Inexperience struck again when we realised that the people who'd parked their floats beside and behind us were there for the duration. Nobody told us: make sure you can get out of your parking space easily. We were stuck until four o'clock. It was twenty six degrees and cold drinks were sold out in every stall except the British Food store, which still had Orangina and Dandelion, and Burdock, both of which are drinks which Kiwi's don't recognise or understand. Nonetheless Dad and I managed to scrape together the change for two hot dogs and a can of each of those drinks, and then obediently followed Mum in search of the sole remaining van that still served coffee.



The real Katie with Felix at their first outing at the Oxford A & P Show in New Zealand.

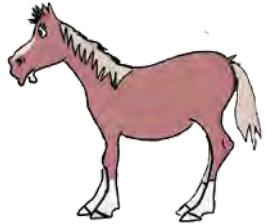
## About The Author - Katie Haggath

Katie Haggath (20) loves writing and horses. She lives in NZ on 10 acres with her parents and a petting zoo's worth of animals. When Katie's article dropped into the email in-box in the office it was one of those 'can't stop reading this' moments. Here was a young rider and writer who publically admitted that she knew very little about handling a young horse, yet has the desire to learn and can see the humorous side of this learning experience. All horsemen and women have had to go through the learning process at some stage in their lives...but not everyone has the writing ability, humour and guts to share this journey with readers of a national equestrian magazine. Katie has recently taken on a young horse, with the aim being to train him (from scratch) and to break him in herself next year so, be prepared to share all the errors and the successes as we follow Katie and Felix over the next twelve months in their journey of learning horsemanship.

INTRODUCING Illustrator Kay Thornton, a very talented artist who was one of the many who responded to our Facebook enquiries for someone to illustrate this series. See more of Kay's horse illustrations at her Funny-Horse-Cartoons page on Facebook.

Mum and I unbraided Felix to the sounds of what was either the Young Farmers Final or the Show-Jumping gone overtime. I'm not certain, I was by the float unbraiding Felix after all. All I know is that the DJ for the Oxford Show must be a genius; he managed to follow up William Tell with ACDC and Crazy Frog without sounding completely nuts. And like any good show goer, after Felix was endowed a glorious afro, we headed to explore the stalls.

**We managed to find the saddlery stalls eventually.**



Eight hours at the Oxford A&P Show and we finally found the Saddlery stalls; I managed to walk away with a brand spanking new red leather bridle for the whopping great price of five dollars. It didn't have reins. They must have been incredible reins if their loss devalued it so much but I wasn't about to argue. I have a pair of dark brown reins that will go nicely with the brown trim. Look forward to seeing that when I break Felix in at last!

We rounded off the day enjoying the terrier races. I assumed, when I heard the race announced, that small dogs would be going for a run. They did. Their owners ran up and down carrying their small dogs. There were a few porky pooches in that race. I can't imagine why, clearly the owners take them for a run quite often.

At long last the people behind us left and we could back the float up. Well thought out treats of bread and apple bribed Felix and Murphy back onto the float and we got the ramp up. Mum carefully fended off the Shetland, pony and donkey tied to the float next door and I called useless directions. Dad backed up and we trundled on home, ready to put the horses away, toss out some hay for the cows, and collapse into bed.

All in all, I think it was a good day!

