

Story by: Alice Hansen



# POLO IN TASMANIA





**A**t 2,500 years old it is thought to be the world's oldest team sport. But it's new to most Tasmanians. Polo ponies have been bred and the game played for about 220 years here, but only recently has its popularity boomed.

This ancient sport of kings is galloping its way into the lives of Tasmanians as young as 13. But it's not just youth that are intrigued by this 'stick and ball' fun but a growing number of folk who love getting out of town on a Sunday.

Locals are lured by the beautiful rural location, the excuse for a picnic with bubbles, and a day that promises the company of good friends and beautiful polo ponies.

In Polo, horses are referred to rather quaintly as 'ponies' despite being some of the fastest and most agile thoroughbreds you are ever likely to see.

You don't have to talk long to those involved with the Tasmanian Polo Association, Sam Steven, Justin Couper and Matthew Webb, to get a feel for the passion they hold for the sport and for the potential for polo in Tasmania.

"For me it has something to do with the fascinating military history of Polo, it's almost got a mythical quality to it," explains Sam, "there's adrenalin, there's the glamour and there's the beauty and majesty that the horses bring."

And polo is perfectly suited to Tasmania. There is an established thoroughbred industry, excellent riders and breathtaking locations. All the ingredients are here. Polo has the potential to put Tasmania on the map within a global sporting community that is growing every year.

An Olympic sport until 1836 (with gaining momentum to be re-introduced into the Olympic arena), today Polo is played professionally all over the world. The modern game, created by the English in the 1800s, has been played in Australia since settlement.

In early days, Polo was played by Australia's 'Squatocracy', and some of the country's most influential individuals including Banjo Patterson, who penned 'The Geebung Polo Club' as a celebration of the drama and excitement of bush polo in Australia's mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the last 10 years polo has gained popularity as a sport not only for dynastic land barons and captains of industry but also for urban dwellers. This is thanks to the emergence of playing fields and coaching facilities close to

Australia's capital cities.

Sam and Justin are quick to add that thanks to quiet, well-trained polo ponies and expert coaching, it doesn't matter if you've never ridden a horse. The Hobart Polo Academy, just 10 minutes south of Hobart offers a year-round Polo School to people of any age, gender or experience. Everything is supplied, including horse-power.

The Academy boasts highly ranked ex-professional player, Englishman Matthew Webb, as chief coach. Matthew has competed with the world's best in England, Argentina, Europe, Japan and New Zealand and was instrumental in developing one of the largest and most successful polo academies in Europe.

Matthew, based in Hobart, offers locals a rare opportunity to be taught by one of Polo's most experienced international coaches. Typical of the instant appeal, Hobart based youngster Jock Taylor went from having never ridden a horse to playing regularly, and acquiring a beautiful grey mare - 'Minty'.

An exciting new development for polo in Tasmania is a collaboration between polo enthusiast Justin Couper and Richard Sattler of Barnbougle Golf Club fame. The two are progressing with plans to construct a full size, world-class polo field adjacent to Barnbougle. The vision is to combine the famous Barnbougle golf experience with a truly special polo experience.

Couper has also implemented a polo pony breeding and training facility at nearby Cape Portland where he is based. Couper has a horse trainer and groom who works full time on managing and training a string of polo ponies for use at Barnbougle, Hobart and at tournaments around the country.

To its merit, the Tasmanian Polo Association has also just become part of the Australian Polo Federation. Now officially part of the Australian polo scene, this means that Tasmanian players can represent the state at a national level.

At an elite level, a professional polo player might bring





20 horses to a game. This is to keep the horses fresh, as a player can interchange his pony as many times as he wishes during a game that can last up to an hour and a half.

At family club level which is the nature of Tasmanian polo, a minimum of two horses are typically utilised per player, which are alternated between each seven-minute 'chukka.' Family level polo games are made up of 4 chukkas and officiated by two mounted umpires. At the elite level, four players make up a team, while in family polo teams can be three a side.

"What all Tasmanian polo players have in common is a love for our horses," explains Sam. "The sport revolves around the horses and their health, fitness and training. It is a massive commitment but the reward is an experience and a lifestyle that is totally unique."

Polo in Hobart is enjoying a warm response to its first official season, with lessons and practice games available every Sunday. All visitors are invited to bring along a picnic and enjoy the afternoon's play. The skill of those who have spent many hours in the saddle, connecting mallet to ball from a moving animal, is quite something to witness.

For more information about play schedule, practice games and learning to play polo in Tasmania, visit [www.taspoloassociation.com](http://www.taspoloassociation.com)

#### **And what might one drink at a Polo Game?**

When you've backed your car into position beside a magnificent polo field lined with stunning poplars, what's next? Your tailgate picnic is not complete without some national award-winning Tasmanian cider of course. Frank's

Summer Cider, recently launched at the Tasmanian Beer Festival, is the perfect complement to a summer day at the polo.

Tasmania's only cider to have one a national award (and make that three gongs) is a crisp and delicious creation from Franklin. It's made from apples and pears grown on 'Woodside', 40 minutes' south of Hobart.

Cider from the centre of  
the apple universe.



[facebook.com/frankscider](https://facebook.com/frankscider)

And with any Tassie success story comes an intriguing tale dating back to 1836 with a land grant to the Clark family, the 5th and 6th generation living there today. The cider's namesake - Frank was the third of six generations to grow apples and pears at Woodside; little would he know that in 2012 cider made from the apples from those very same orchards would pick up two medals and a 'Best in Class' at the 2012 Australian Cider Awards.

The Huon Valley is renowned as an apple growing region, with Frank's Cider boasting apples from trees more than 80 years old, planted by the hands of Frank's great grandfather. Add vigneron Julian Alcorso to the mix as 'maker,' remove even the slightest drop of concentrate, and you have in your hand one of the most refreshing, crisp drops you'll come across.

It's no surprise that cider is the fastest growing alcoholic category in the country, but don't just settle for any. Frank's Summer Cider, apple or pear, is the ideal accompaniment to any lazy, warm Tasmanian afternoon. A bottle of pure Tasmanian goodness.





For another truly unique polo experience, visit the beautiful Piermont estate just south of Swansea. Hosts Juan Maiz-Casas, a keen polo player and his wife Marie have built a beautiful polo field within the stunning grounds of their 250 acre coastal holiday property. Juan is available to give lessons to anyone who is interested in combining a few nights at Piermont with an introduction to polo.



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Polo players and those just learning to play the game who travel from outside Hobart will need a luxurious place to rest their weary muscles after an afternoon in the saddle. Just a hop, skip and jump away from the Hobart Polo Academy, Villa Howden has become a firm favourite for visiting polo players. Located just a three minute drive from Hobart's only polo field, guests can jump off their polo pony, be in their stunning suite for a warm shower and refresh and then into the bar quicker than you can say 'what time do chukkas kick off tomorrow'. The estate offers Stay and Play Polo Packages and can also provide tailored private catering such as gourmet picnics field-side, creating a truly unique polo experience just 15 minutes from Hobart city.