

PEOPLE NEWHAM VIC

David treats Jack, a chestnut Arabian.

FACING PAGE Karen and David have two dogs: chihuahua Lulu and a mini fox terrier called Minnie (not shown). Australian cattle dog Memphis works on the property.



healing hands

A LIFE STORY FULL OF TWISTS AND TURNS LED DAVID FAIRCLOUGH TO OPEN AN ANIMAL OSTEOPATHY PRACTICE IN NEWHAM, VICTORIA.

WORDS HANNAH JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY MARNIE HAWSON



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David and Karen's four-hectare property offers plenty of space and freedom to wander, horseride and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature.

DAVID FAIRCLOUGH KNOWS MORE THAN MOST the healing power of animals. Nine years ago, after a series of life-threatening strokes, he used his three horses as a kind of rehab to get his body and brain back on track.

"I had to learn to walk and speak again," David says of the four strokes he suffered in 24 hours back in 2012. But he used his richly diverse life experiences to help him make a full recovery – and embark on a new career.

And those experiences are extraordinary. Born in Lancashire in the UK, David started his professional life as a builder who was also a keen student of kung fu. This brought him to Australia for the first time, in 1986, to study with William Cheung, the teacher of famed martial artist and actor Bruce Lee. It was kung fu that led David towards osteopathy. "At the higher levels you do something called dim mak, which is the death touch, where you start attacking pressure points," he recalls. "I started learning that idea, but decided I was going to fix people instead. That's how I got to healing."

He trained to become a sports therapist in the UK, then moved to Australia permanently in 1995, meeting his wife Karen in a shop in Sunbury, Victoria (although as it turned out, she too was a Lancastrian, having grown up just half

an hour away from his childhood home). His thirst for knowledge led him to study osteopathy at Victoria University, and he gained his bachelor's and master's degrees in the discipline. He and Karen, a clinical masseuse, then opened their own osteopathic practice, Gisborne Osteopathy, which has been going for 20 years.

So why the turn towards non-human patients? "I've always loved animals," says David of the recent addition of animal osteopathy to his repertoire of skills. "My sister had a horse, years ago, and I've always had dogs."

About 18 years ago, he and Karen bought a house near Newham on four hectares, and took advantage of the space by adding horses to the family – they now have three: Jack, an Arabian; Harry, a quarter horse; and a thoroughbred called Bobby. "Once you're into horses, it's hard to get out," says David. "You just get too attached."

So when he realised he was treating a lot of horseriders, he naturally began to think of extending his practice towards their animals. "If a rider is struggling to get into a right lead, say, you look at the body and you think, 'Well, I can understand that – the pelvis is twisted the wrong way.' So I'd work on that. But then I started thinking, 'Maybe the horse is also a bit twisted.'" So once again, >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Native flowers on Karen and David's property; David treats his horse Jack; dogs Memphis, Lulu and Minnie; Karen holding chihuahua Lulu; Jack gets a health check. David says horses respond well to their treatments and enjoy the attention, which helps greatly with positive outcomes in their movement and mental attitude.



David says people usually contact him after noticing their pet is lame, vocalises pain or behaves strangely – for example, a horse that is sore while saddling up. **FACING PAGE** Clever cattle dog Memphis is trained to do tricks for the film industry.



“The animals enjoy their treatments because it makes them feel better, and it’s very satisfying for me, too.”



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FROM TOP David and Karen say that their beautiful horses, Jack, Bobby and Harry, are “very much part of the family”; Karen and David work together treating horses around the Macedon Ranges; Lulu and Memphis.



David started studying, and in 2016 completed the Animal Biomechanical Medicine course at Box Hill Institute. “It took me nine years of study before I could touch a horse,” he emphasises, keen to point out that while ‘animal osteopath’ is a job title that’s not strictly regulated in Australia, only those who have qualified as osteopaths on humans first, then separately studied animal biomechanics, as he did, can correctly claim it.

But for those with the passion and the commitment to become properly qualified, it’s a worthy investment of time. “I love getting horse and rider moving well together, as one unit,” David says. “The animals enjoy their treatments, because it makes them feel better, and it’s very satisfying for me, too.”

The obvious difference between treating animal and human patients – the fact that animals can’t tell you what’s wrong – is in fact a moot point, David says. “Osteopathy is about observation and palpation – touching the patient,” he explains. “Even if a patient never said a word to me, I could probably work out what’s wrong, just from watching the way they walk in the room and sit down. Animals are the same – you observe, then you touch problem areas to find any inflammation or pain.”

Just as with humans, he’ll locate the problem, test range of motion, work on inflamed areas to pump away inflammation, and use soft-tissue techniques and joint manipulation to start the healing process.

Although his animal practice (he still works half the week on people) is usually horses and dogs, David has had a few more unusual patients. “I’ve treated the occasional cat, and someone asked me to treat their Highland cow. Once I had a chicken with a leg that wouldn’t come down.”

Not only does David help animals, but they’ve helped him, too. Riding bareback around his property helped him learn balance again after his devastating strokes, as did returning to his building roots to create structures on his land. These exercises were all part of his self-devised rehab program, which was informed by his time teaching neuroscience to master’s students at Victoria University.

Yes, David is a man of many talents – when asked if he’s also by chance had careers as a circus performer or rocket scientist, he says with a smile, “Well, I do play the soprano cornet in a brass band.” Truly a renaissance man – and a healing pair of hands for any animals (or humans) who might need him. *CF*

Learn more about David’s work with animals at rangesabm.com.au, and people at gisborneosteopathy.com