

This dreadful isolation time at least has a positive. It means there's time to catch up on things. And for me, one of those things is the King of the Ranges Australian Horsemanship Challenge and its inaugural Written Bush Poetry Competition.

It was great to have good entries in both the Serious and the Humorous sections and wonderful that a number of the competitors were at the Poets' Breakfast on the Sunday morning to hear the results and to perform their poems.

The Humorous section winner was Beryl Stirling from Morisset, NSW, with a clever little poem about cricket rivalry and written in the vernacular of the dedicated fan. It's entitled 'An Australian History Lesson'. The Serious Section and subsequent overall Champion and first to have her name on the Outback Heritage Trophy, was Catherine Lee who writes from overseas but has a base in Sydney. Her moving and eloquent poem is entitled 'A Stockman's Loss'.

Congratulations all round.

I have done a considerable amount of judging over the years and it's never easy. Choosing the poems that blend 'story telling' entertainment with technical expertise is always a challenge. Recognising and rewarding the 'degree of difficulty' tackled rather than just accepting an overly simplistic, bland ditty that ticks the required boxes but is not necessarily inspiring, can make a discerning judge think carefully. In the humorous category, for example, there were many very funny poems that were, unfortunately, not very well written. Yes, the entertainment factor is vital but do we throw away all that we purport to aspire to in our ideals and standards of Bush Poetry writing? It is, after all, a word-smithing competition. Or conversely, do we reward the technically correct poem that strikes no spark or that is mundane and uninspiring? A judge's dubious decision can negatively impact on the credibility of the competition. The search is for perfection but it is rare and judging is subjective and consequently difficult and sometimes controversial.

Even our winning poems here, one might argue have some minor errors but they are undoubtedly clever, competitive and certainly worthy.

I commend those who asked to be critiqued and I appreciate the responses I received to my critiques. I am concerned that apparently there have been critiques from other competitions that merely gave a few comments – not true critiques. It is vital that if you accept to judge, you are capable and willing to explain clearly all areas where the writers need to improve.

Thanks to the organisers of this competition and to Neil McArthur for his support by way of ABPA magazine advertising and Greg North for website coverage and Wally Finch for eMuse reports.

King of the Ranges is a great event – come along for the ride next year!