



Moolmanshoek – The place where champions are bred.

Photography by Martin Coetzee

By Lizet Kotze

A visit to Moolmanshoek is a most definite memorable experience; the breath-taking scenery, majestic mountains, hospitable people, awesome atmosphere, the curious meercats, challenging 4 x 4 adventures, delightful horse trails, luxury four star lodge, excellent cuisine, exclusive wedding venue and most of all the impeccable impression of the Moolmanshoek's horses!! Moolmanshoek is a unique 'all in one packaged' venue!

Entering the gates to the Moolmanshoek Private Nature Reserve, where a sandstone cross was erected by owner, Willie Nel, leaves you with a feeling of entering holy grounds. The cross symbolizes the centre of hope, creative power, a final purpose, a point on which anyone can focus on to give then sense and direction in their lives.

One's first impressions of the breathtaking Moolmanshoek Valley of more than 3 000 hectares, surrounded by the majestic Witteberg mountains which embrace the valley's floor in a horseshoe formation, are of speechless enchantment. The outstretched valley with lush green grass, underbrush, mountain streams and crisp blue dams forms a harsh contrast with the impressive spear points of the mountain's as backgdrop, with Visierskerf the highest peak of this mountain range at 2 407 meters above sea level.

Situated in the eastern Free State, bordering Lesotho and nestled in the Ficksburg district, this is prime land for horse breeding, plains game which, are indigenous to the area and a variety of more than 230 bird species. The reserve was also declared a Natural Heritage Site (#199 in 1994), mainly due to the fact that the extremely rare African Bamboo grows in the Moolmanshoek valley.

Under the management of Willie and Miemie Nel with their son, Wiesman and Mafie Nel, Wiesman's wife, the Moolmanshoek estate became a tourist's paradise with more activities one could wish for. This is also home for more than 200 horses; South African Boerperd horses and Arab horses, which are mainly bred for endurance riding.

Wiesman Nel and Leon Liversage, believe that good genetics, the right breeding programme and a good environment, are the main ingredients to breed outstanding endurance horses. Their policy showed off fantastic results as Moolmanshoek Moya, Moolmanshoek Sweep, Moolmanshoek Pula (exported) and Moolmanshoek Roes, all competed in National Endurance Teams.

The Moolmanshoek breeding programme started about 15 years ago when Willie and Wiesman bought the stallion, Olford Silver Tu Penny, sired from Amyr. The dam lines were selected from specific bloodlines, with good athletic conformation and mares with solid maternal instincts to have the abilities bond and stimulate their foals in their natural environment. Leon Liversage introduced additional stallions to generate a new bloodline on all the Penny mares. These stallions were handpicked and selected purely on their endurance abilities.





Foals are kept with their mothers for the first eleven months since birth, in their natural habitat where they can roam freely in big mountain camps to develop naturally and adapt to their environment with no interruption by human beings. In this stress-free situation, foals also tend to wean naturally from their mothers.

After the natural weaning process, foals are moved nearer to the farmyard where sufficient supplements are given until their eighteenth month. From then until they are three and a half years old, the young horses stay in an 800 hectare mountain camp where the colts are selected for gelding or otherwise and the fillies are monitored for temperament and conformation for possible use in future breeding programmes. At this stage, careful handling and halter training is initiated.

This development phase in an environment with extreme weather and mountainous terrain, conditions the horses to be comfortable on all terrain and footing they might find in future. It also helps develop naturally strong muscle tone.

Horsemanship is of utmost importance to Wiesman and Leon and with their own natural horsemanship's abilities, they believe in building a trustful relationship with each horse and to imprint a good foundation and expand on this step by step. These two excellent horsemen believe in the following; "Our main goal is to achieve an equine athlete that is able to maintain a competitive and sound career for several seasons, reaching their peak during the ages of ten and twelve years."





Wiesman's and Leon's objectives and goals certainly compliment the record books along with their excellent endurance riders; Mariaan and Lindi Liversage and later Leon himself. Moolmanshoek Moya with rider Mariaan, was the top FEI horse for several years and following in his steps, the formidable Moolmanshoek Sweep, also with Mariaan as rider, broke several 100-miler records in South Africa. Moolmanshoek Pula became a legend in 2005, when he won every 120 km ride he entered and also won the Africa Championships in Namibia in a record time over 130 km, with rider Lindi Liversage. Pula was exported to Bahrain and in 2007 was the number one ranked FEI horse in the world. Furthermore, Moolmanshoek Roes with Leon as his rider, were the number one FEI combination in world during 2008. There are more champions in the making; Moolmanshoek Sambok, Moolmanshoek Kameel, Moolmanshoek Silvano, Moolmanshoek Frangelico, Moolmanshoek Nishker and many, many more.

I asked the Moolmanshoek horse experts if endurance horses are made or bred; "Both they are bred and then made. Daily environment, nutrition, conditioning, good fundamental training and a trustful relationship with their master are all aspects to take in consideration in the making of an endurance champion".

The Moolmanshoek horses are high in demand in endurance circles and for tourists, visiting this estate, it is a highlight to explore the reserve on horseback and for the more daring ones, to challenge the mountain trails. There are even full moon trips on horseback available with well-trained guides.

The natural beauty and tranquility of Moolmanshoek can also be explored on foot as there are three hiking trails alongside beautiful dams and natural mountain streams. Fly-fishing in clear spring water is another attraction to this diverse and unique place. Abseiling and 4 x 4 eco routes are also on the adventure list of activities but for nature lovers who just want to renew one's mind and soul, this is surely the place to be!

Moolmanshoek once was productive farm land, but with Willie Nel and his supporting family member's dreams, their ideas were transformed into a vision to develop a unique conservation area and game reserve. Not only did they achieve all of this and establish a high ranking tourist paradise, they also managed to develop an excellent gene pool to ensure proven bloodlines for future prospective endurance riders.

The endurance world is looking forward to more up and coming Moolmanshoek endurance horses; the place where champions are bred!

