

High Quality Wines Expected Out Of This Year's Vintage



BY MEREDITH BLAIR

While machine-picking for harvesting grapes is becoming increasingly popular, the preferred method for picking at McLeish Estate is by hand.

"Handpicking for us is our quality control to make sure only good fruit is harvested," Robert McLeish said.

"In previous seasons we're probably dropping 20 per cent of our fruit on the floor of the vineyard, but this year it's just been everything's going in the bin which is wonderful," Robert McLeish said adding it was a testament to the 2024 quality harvest.

This year's picking started two weeks earlier than usual due to the weather.

"Traditionally in the Hunter you'd start vintage around Australia Day, but we were starting to sample the fruit for flavour and ripeness around January 2," Rob's daughter, Jessica shared with *The Hunter River Times*.

"It meant that the dry season really made an impact on making it clean and there was no disease pressure because there was a lack of ongoing rain.

"Despite there being some quite heavy rain at times, it didn't deter from the early start, resulting in a really quick but quality vintage."

McLeish Estate, located on De Beyers Road in Pokolbin was established by Robert McLeish and his wife

Maryanne in 1985 as a hobby after they experienced the Hunter Valley lifestyle with friends.

In the almost 40 years since the pair bought the property, it has gone from a hobby to a full-time business, building houses, sheds and a popular cellar door on the property that had previously had no infrastructure.

McLeish Estate has a bright future ahead with Robert and Maryanne's daughter Jessica McLeish an invaluable part of McLeish Estate, possessing a Masters of Wine Business and holding the role of wine show judge and educator.

Though hit by hailstorms last year, the results of this year's picking has left Robert McLeish pleased.

"Hailstorms last year

which left our lawns here white did make us lose our Shiraz crop which was disappointing, but the results of our picking this year have just been wonderful," Robert said.

"I was speaking to an older winemaker in the Hunter Valley who said a previous vintage to one like this was in 1982 where it was early, the weather was kind and it was a really great year for the reds."

It's undeniable that the fruits being picked during this vintage are of high quality with high quality wines anticipated from the vintage.

"The quality of the fruit is best that I've ever seen," Robert shared.

"Normally we get downy mildew in the grapes with monsoonal rain and with that you get bunch rot and

when it's got rot in the fruit it doesn't make good wine, but pure juice like we're going to get this year will make excellent wine.

"I can't wait to taste the Semillon which is our first white wine and I think at the end of the day, the winemakers haven't got any excuses to make bad red wines, there really is no excuses this year, it's going to be enormous; I can't wait to taste it."

Jess echoed her father's sentiments regarding forecast of high quality wines from this year's vintage.

"The quality of the fruit for the whites is exceptional and the reds coming in are sitting at a really nice ripeness and flavour," Jess shared.

"After going through La Nina there were those lighter

Work on the harvest at McLeish Estate on the final day of Shiraz picking.

years, where this year is a more flavour driven and a much more concentrated year for the wines, so we're expecting to see exceptional results for the wines across the board.

"You can't make great wine without great fruit, so it all starts in the vineyard and really this vintage, for the whites especially, the winemakers were very much just the gatekeepers, they wouldn't have to do too many adjustments or anything too extreme to fruit like semillon which is all about the purity of the vineyard, so it's a vintage which is really going to speak of quality over anything else."

Rider Training Now Compulsory in Muswellbrook

ANYONE LOOKING TO GET THEIR MOTORBIKE LICENCE IN MUSWELLBROOK WILL NOW NEED TO COMPLETE A COMPULSORY RIDER TRAINING COURSE.

Residents have previously been exempted due to how far away the training was available, but now that Wheel-Skills are set up in Muswellbrook it is part of the requirements.

The seven-hour course is split over two consecutive days, after which participants attend Service NSW for the knowledge test to obtain their learners permit.

Riders stay on their learners permit for a minimum of three months, maximum of 12, before completing an eight hour course to progress to the red provisional licence.

"The pre-learner rider course has been designed for people with no riding experience," Wheel-Skills Driver and Rider Training manager Scott Andrews explained.

"On the first day of the course, you will learn how to mount a motorcycle correctly, where all the major components are and how they are operated, correct use of the clutch, riding through corners and turns, and gear changing.

"On day two you will learn about key road safety strategies that can be incorporated into your daily riding to make you safer on the road."

Anyone living up to 100 kilometres from the training location at Muswellbrook Showgrounds will now be required to complete the course, previously Singleton residents have had to go to Newcastle but now have the option to attend either.

To get more information about the courses, costs and available dates contact Wheel-Skills on 1800 153 571 or visit weekskills.com.au.



Some of the first course participants from the weekend of January 13, Steven Longley, Sherrie Moait, Kyle Longley and Riley Longley. (Photo supplied)

Approval for Bowmans Creek Wind Farm

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"The residents with wind turbines on their properties have already done their individual agreements, and the proponents are saying they have done the individual agreements with landowners, they're happy.

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"But our role as a Council and what we will be pushing for is the broader community impacts, and ensuring that there are right things in place especially with regards to dilapidation of the roads, wildlife corridors, the bushfire preparedness.

"The proponent doesn't have to agree with our VPA but that agreement is something they need to provide the state government to show that, in good faith, they are addressing our concerns." Cr Reynolds said.

Muswellbrook Council

has also asked for rural fire brigades to be equipped with appropriate firefighting equipment for the kinds of fires they may face around the turbines.

Cr Reynolds explained they will be able to battle the resulting bush or grass fires, but won't be able to attack the source if it has been sparked by electrical

equipment or chemicals.

Nigel is also concerned for other communities in the Hunter Valley who may be sighing with relief that the wind project will not be impacting on their families; however, he is aware the wind industry has been in discussions with property owners from Scone all the way down to Vacy.

"If new projects are proposed the wind industry is now indicating the wind turbine height will be in the vicinity of 300m. These communities need to realise the State and Federal Governments are expediting all renewable energy projects with little or no regard for the impacts on the families they will impact," Nigel said.

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