

## Four legged cast members rehearse too

Believe it or not but the livestock featuring in the blockbuster *Australia* have also had to undergo rigorous rehearsals.

With more than 700 head of shorthorn cattle and 33 stock and quarter horses featuring in the film, it has taken months to source, handle and quieten, train and transport them to Bowen in preparation for filming requirements.

More than 700 head of shorthorn cattle sourced from Aramac and the Kimberley started to learn their movies at the Bowen Turf Club grounds weeks before filming started. A replica circuit of the one they have to follow on the movie sets at the Front Beach was pegged out at the club grounds to get the shorthorns familiarised.

This was followed by numerous rehearsals along the actual streets and movie sets to the lead up of



filming. Temporary road closures were put in place to accommodate the herd.

The cattle did numerous loops around the streets, through the sets and down to the main jetty, each one slightly tighter packed and quicker than the previous. According to production crew the rehearsals ran smoothly thanks to the cattle handling team.

When they're not rehearsing or fulfilling filming duties the cattle are

under the watchful eye of cattle boss Hugh Barnett and his team who ensure the cattle are well cared for including being fed and watered each day.

The 33 horses taking part in the film have been sourced from all over the country through word of mouth and horse dealers, and are mostly stock horses and quarter horses, typical of those used for droving around the time of World War II.

Horse master Craig Emerton and assistant horse

master Frank Green and their crew of 12 have been in charge of putting the horses through their paces for the past few months. Their training began in Sydney about two months ago but in the past weeks the horses have been agitated at the Bowen Showgrounds.

The horses have had to get accustomed to all sorts of noises and sudden movements by both objects and humans to ensure that they are quiet and calm enough not to get startled once on the movie

set where there are microphones, booms, lights, people, props and swirling dust.

It has also been imperative to get the horses quiet enough for Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman and their doubles to be able to ride them without fear of the horses becoming nervous of their movie set surroundings.

Just like the cattle, the horses are well cared for and are housed at the Bowen Showgrounds when not required for filming.

## Excitement and curiosity mounts as movie set comes to life

Local residents knew that filming of Baz Luhrmann's epic *Australia* was inching closer to reality when earthmoving gear started flattening out the section of land near the Village Life retirement units in mid-March, and demountables were positioned.

Soon semis were arriving from various places throughout Queensland and Sydney every day with bits of sets. Then things began to proceed at a frantic pace as the sets for rough-hewn wooden stockyards and a Chinatown took shape.

Chinatown buildings built from scratch include The Territory Hotel, a Chinese laundry, Chinese opium den, brothel, shacks, and a market garden beside Chinatown. The stockyards have been built on the Herbert Street side of the Front Beach block, and a roadway has been formed on the boundary between the stockyards and Chinatown. (See aerial shot of the movie set on pages 8 & 9).

The movie set became its own tourist attraction, with tourists and locals making slow drive-bys to catch glimpses of the progress. They have been delighted to be able to get close to the sets during the building

stage to snap their own movie memorabilia keepsakes.

Opposite the main *Australia* movie set in Dalrymple Street onlookers were enthralled to see the Darwin outdoor cinema raised. It was built on a cantilever and with the support of a crane and machinery, workers winched the edifice up until it was upright. Near to the cinema stands a reconstructed jail.

What began with a small crew of less than 10 in the first week of movie set construction grew to many within weeks, including locals being enlisted to help. When filming started in mid-May many of the crew have continued to be employed to adjust bits of the sets, and probably will do so right through filming.

Although many locals want to preserve some of the sets this seems unlikely. As filming continues over the next weeks, some areas will be redesigned and others will be destroyed as part of the movie, blown up or partly destroyed in the bombing sequences of 1942.

However there are steps being taken to ensure that a permanent reminder of the making of the movie is incorporated in the proposed foreshore redevelopment.

## Ex-army vehicles roll into town for movie

More than 45 ex-army vehicles are rolling into town to be part of the movie. They have been sourced from the Blue Mountains, Dubbo, Mackay and Townsville.

The truck Hugh Jackman will drive in the film has been transformed from an old wreck into a 1930s supply truck.

## The final countdown

In the days before filming started everywhere one looked there were tradesmen painting stonework on buildings, men hauling signage on to modern-day pubs and bales of hay being strewn across the cattle yards. Every meticulous detail of the set was carefully planned and all modern finishings and embellishments were hidden or pulled down. Things you would never have thought needed to be covered to truly resemble a 1940s Darwin.

Even the streetlights have been replaced with more traditional fittings. Authentic looking stone buildings are actually made from plaster that have been cleverly painted and moulded to look like real stone.

The bitumen road and even driveways of nearby residents have been covered in red dirt, reminiscent of the Northern Territory. The dirt has been carefully mixed to find the right colour. It was then sent to Sydney to undergo testing under cameras and lighting before the final shade was chosen.

Many of Bowen's modern buildings had panelling added to create a wartime era look. The newly erected buildings built from scratch on the vacant Front Beach blocks were painted with dirt and water to create a run-down effect.

All in readiness for the first call of "Lights, camera, action!"

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