

WHO SLEPT WITH WHOM?

(The Secret life of Hybrid Camellias)

By Barry Johnson ©



Hi-Ho Silvia



I was driving down the road in the rain when this creature in a hotted-up Nissan Silva, wearing a baseball cap backwards, fishtailed off at the lights and sped off into the distance. This got me thinking about his breeding and ultimately, the breeding of our camellias.

What is a hybrid? First there was Ma and Pa Kettle and then there was Dave and Mabel. The latter being the hybrids of their respective parents. Or, go look in a mirror and looking back at you should be some pretty

racey looking hybrid (in your opinion). To be scientifically correct a hybrid is a cross between two different types of things. Reflecting back to that driver, if you cross a moron with a moron you'll still end up with a moron (maybe a bigger one). Another by-product of many hybrids can be sterility and as in the case of the hoon driver we can only hope so. By way of example, when a donkey was crossed with a horse we ended up with a mule, which are sterile. Many hybridised plants can also end up sterile. This can be an advantage or a disadvantage.

For breeding purposes this is an obvious disadvantage but, breeding 'improved' sterile versions of some 'invasive' cultivars can keep new and attractive forms of these plant cultivars in general circulation e.g. some lavenders, ornamental grasses etc. Sometimes, with new flower, foliage and growth formed hybrids we can also lose out in the hardiness stakes from the original species and sometimes, this can be the opposite effect. Apart from increasing the chances of sterility, the effects on hardiness can also be the case with our camellia hybrids. Apart from the obvious (new flower forms), hybrid camellias have resulted in an exciting range of foliage and growth forms such as dwarfs, groundcovers, weepers and even the 'weird' and 'wacky'.

Hybrids & History

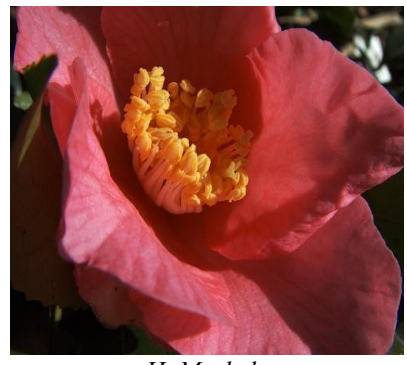
Like all plants, camellias have their own gene pool of species cultivars from whence it all began. Apart from bees being the natural hybridisers, man's intervention has, and is still having, the greatest impact upon creation of new cultivars. From times of antiquity, the Chinese and Japanese revered the camellia plant and flower and discovered the virtues of *Camellia Sinensis* as a herbal tea. Western man then discovered China, Japan, camellias and tea and said 'How long this been going on? By the 17th century tea and the 18th century, camellias made their way back to Europe etc. whereby, excited tea-drinking, horticultural enthusiasts set about manipulating them for their progeny. One of the notable exponents of this was John Charles Williams who, planted seeds of *Sp. Saluensis* in Cornwall. Williams then set about crossing these with other camellia cultivars e.g. Japonicas, to produce cold hardy hybrids and these were called the Williamsii hybrids. Varieties include Caerhays; Muskoka; Monica Dance; St. Ewe; Mary Jobson and Mary Larcom. Two of his cultivars still very popular in Australia are Donation and Cornish Snow. Many other hybrids of Williamsii origins have been produced globally. Of course, camellia breeders all around the world have been going hell for leather interfering with camellias sex lives ever since. It's a wonder our hybrids are not playing banjos and whittling wood.



Sp. Saluensis



H. Mary Larcom



H. Muskoka

Hybrids in OZ

Leaving Crocodile Dundee and Dame Edna Everage out of the equation, hybridising in Australia has had a famous history and is still a work in progress. Professor E. G. Waterhouse was one of Australia's most notable camellia hybridising pioneers. At his heritage-protected garden at Eryldene, in Sydney, Edgar produced many great cultivars such as E. G. Waterhouse; Margaret Waterhouse; Crinkles; Clarrie Fawcett; Shocking Pink; Ellamine and Bowen Bryant.



Margaret Waterhouse



Clarrie Fawcett



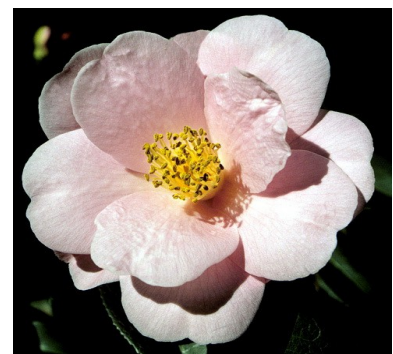
E. G. Waterhouse



Ellamine



Shocking Pink



Bowen Bryant

Similarly, Tom Savige also from NSW, bred many hybrids with a particular emphasis on the smaller flowered and leaved cultivars. Some of these include the 'Wirlinga' series; W. Bride; W. Belle; W. Princess; W. Gem; W. Cascade; W. Ruffles; W. Jewel and H. Bogong Snow.



Wirlinga Jewel



Wirlinga Bride

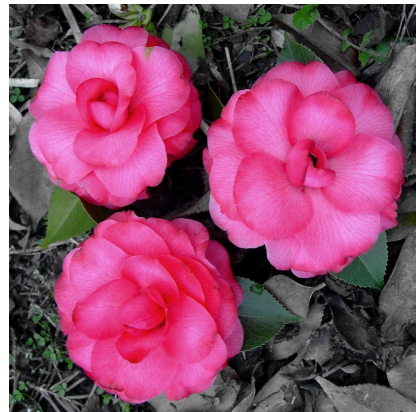


Wirlinga Plum

In our own Victorian patch, one of the pioneers of hybrid camellia breeding was Edgar Sebire of Wandin. Edgar produced an outstanding array of hybrids which include; Winter Gem; Adorable; Pink Cameo; Annette Carol; Bright Eyes; Pink Ruffles; Pink Cameo; Pale Opal. Similar to Savige he also produced some lovely small flowered and leaved cultivars such as Alpen Glo; Snowdrop; Gay Pixie; the two weepers; Mandy and Our Melissa. Two of my particular favourites have also been his compact Pittardii Pittardii hybrids; Fairy Bouquet and Sprite.



H. Adorable



Winter Gem



H. Annette Carol



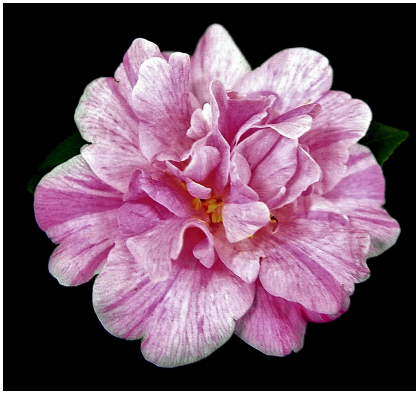
H. Pale Opal



H. Alpen Glo



H. Bright Eyes



H. Gay Pixie

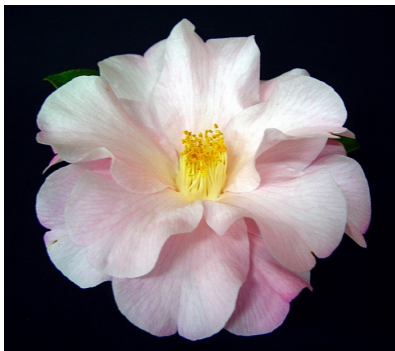


H. Fairy Bouquet bush



H. Pink Cameo

Some of our current members have also been busy breeding hybrids with Ray Garnett wowing us with Sweet Jane, Sweet Emily Kate and Transtasman; Neil Saltmarsh with Pink Bounty; Peter Edwards with Spitfire; Col Baird with Bridal Bouquet and Graeme Atkins with Wills Wonder.



H. Pink Bounty



H. Sweet Emily Kate



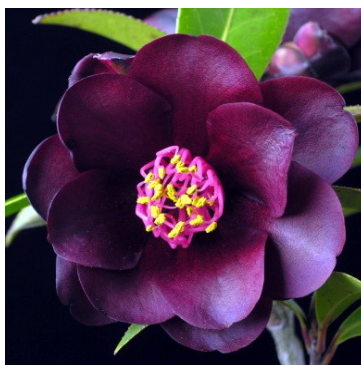
H. Spitfire

Ditch Delights

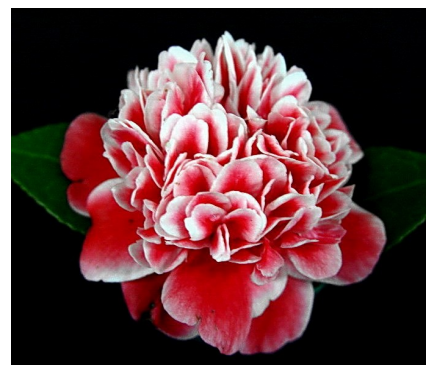
Our woolly cousins across the ditch in New Zealand have also been producing stunners like; Elsie Jury; Pale Jury and Mona Jury; Anticipation; Volunteer; Baby Bear; Waterlily; Dream Boat; Gay Baby; Nicky Crisp; Nightrider; Peggy Burton; Prudence; Quintessence; Snippet; Scentuous; South Seas and Wynne Rayner. Not a bad role call for starters, even though we sent them some possums to try and even up the ledger.



H. Elsie Jury



H. Nightrider



H. Volunteer



H. Peggy Burton



H. Waterlily



H. Nicky Crisp

Rocky Horror Hybrids

From our own point of view and in light of the prohibition upon the importation of many plant species, including camellias, it is even more important that we continue hybridizing to enhance our stocks and maintain our breeding reputation. It is also important to remember that Australia is still one of the few horticulturally 'clean' growing environments and, that in itself can open enormous opportunities to send our progeny to the rest of the world. The ongoing hybridizing of camellias continues to throw up interesting cultivars and adds to the beauty, appeal and versatility of plant. Flower and foliage forms, growth habits and planting aspect diversity have been expanded and enhanced by their creation by those, in most cases, amateur Dr. Frankenfurters, with their pollen brushes. May they ever continue to dabble.



Where's my pollen brush