

'Cymbidium Chatter'

Edition 21 - September 7 2020



Cym Willunga Royal 'Orange Delight' x Flaming Pepper 'Kirrawee' Photograph: 3 Amigos

Welcome to this edition of Cymbidium Chatter and the good news is that the COVID-19 numbers are beginning to stabilise and decrease! Being in lockdown is no fun, I'm just glad I have a work permit that allows me to work on the bowling greens at Somerville BC each day of the week. Even though the greens are synthetic, they are still prone to algae and fungal infestations, so I have been on a quick learning curve to determine the best products to use in combating and overcoming this problem!

Joshua White has been hard at work and has produced two excellent articles on Cymbidium Death Wish, part one is included in this edition of CC. As always Joshua has researched the information thoroughly, which in this particular case has been quite difficult, as there has not been a lot written about this grex. I found part one extremely interesting and it is good to know that a Cymbidium flower, which had the effect of polarising opinions about it, has at last been recognised - Kevin Hipkins would be chuffed! Thanks for your efforts Joshua!

With Joshua in mind, he is the youngest member of COSV, what is it that orchid clubs/societies must do, to fully engage and maintain the interest of younger and new members alike. I have now been a member of COSV for many years and in that time very little has changed. For many of us, particularly those who have been members for some time, our monthly meetings are a time for catching up with friends and socialising, sure we share the common interest of Cymbidium orchids but is this enough for our new and younger members, quite often it is hard to break into established friendship and social groups. Our new and younger members have a thirst for learning, our younger ones in particular, have probably grown-up with an inquiry approach to learning and need to be actively involved, they come to our meetings to soak up all the information and knowledge they can. I think all clubs can probably do that bit better! The things that I have raised here are regularly discussed at COSV committee meetings but we need your help, please let us know your ideas, working together I'm sure we can meet the needs of all members, new and old alike!

For Melbournians now is a perfect time to be thinking about what it is that you would like your orchid club to deliver at monthly meetings. It is most unlikely that we will meet again this year but here is your opportunity to have a say, perhaps you may consider serving on the committee - fresh ideas are always most welcome! Please share your ideas with me and I will take them to the committee on your behalf!

All contributions, articles and photographs, to grb17@bigpond.com

— Do You Have a Death Wish? —

By Joshua White

Cymbidium Death Wish is probably familiar to many Australian growers (as well as some overseas) and its exotic, spidery flowers are often popular with the general public. Kevin Hipkins, who made the cross, will forever be remembered for this popular grex and other unusual hybrids he created.

To the best of my knowledge, there aren't any articles or blog posts documenting the Death Wish line and so I have attempted to collate the available information on the grex as a reference for future readers.

The Parentage of Death Wish

To fully understand the origins of Death Wish, one must look at the preceding two generations. The story begins in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Andy Easton (then at Geyserland Orchids) bred the parents of Death Wish – Disney Girl and Pywacket.

Disney Girl was originally made as *Cym. tracyanum* X Robin 'Freckles' and was diploid, as Andy Easton did not yet have his 4N *tracyanum* strain (Robin 'Freckles' was eventually converted to 4N, but by that time Andy Easton had moved on in his breeding program and chose not to remake Disney Girl). The results were strongly reminiscent of *tracyanum*, although without the recurved tepals of the species. The grex was registered in 1992 by P. Gomes.

Pywacket is Tethys X *tracyanum* and was also made as a diploid. Tethys 'Black Magic' is probably the most well-known and common selection in Australia today and is a purple-red diploid that often produces large spotting in its offspring. Tethys 'Carrot Top', a brighter orange-red, has been used in the USA; Andy Easton's Tethys 'New Horizon' 4N was from a selfing of 'Carrot Top'. Tethys is reported to be a slow grower, however, and this has been observed in some of its offspring.

Pywacket was registered in 1996 by Weegie Caughlan, who recounted how she came up with the name in Issue 17 of *Cymbidium Chatter*: "Kim Novak's Siamese cat, her familiar as a witch in *Bell, Book and Candle*, came to mind."

Photos: *Cym. tracyanum* at a COSV meeting (top), Robin 'Freckles' at Santa Barbara Orchid Estate (SBOE) (middle) and a Disney Girl selection at SBOE (bottom).





There have been a number of Pywacket selections with a significant range in colouration. Pywacket 'Royale', one of Kevin Hipkin's selections from the grex, is mostly red overlaid on a yellow-green base. One grower who used to have it reported that it was quite fertile and held pods well. It is not the most vigorous of growers, however.

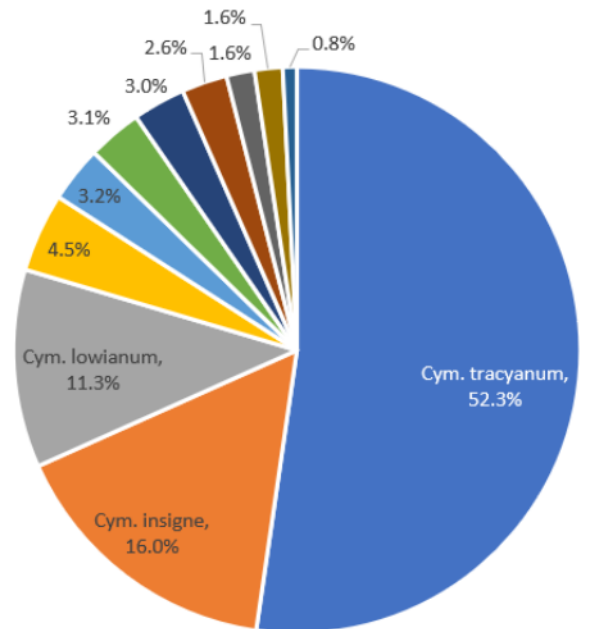
In the late 1990s, Kevin Hipkins crossed Disney Girl and Pywacket to make Death Wish. He saw the prevalence of round, exhibition-style flowers as an opportunity to introduce more species-inspired shapes with fragrance (a decision that was clearly a smart one, given the popularity of his hybrids and the Death Wish line with the general public).



Andy Easton later explained why he never made the cross – *"My feeling then and now is to leave the 'wild things' wild and not take them far forward. I did like several of the Death Wish selections, however. No one person has the monopoly on attractively unusual Cyms! Kevin and I tried to work in different lines just to broaden the range of unusual hybrids."*



Genetic Composition of Death Wish



- Cym. tracyanum
- Cym. insigne
- Cym. lowianum
- Cym. iansonii
- Cym. eburneum
- Cym. schroederi
- Cym. parishii var. sanderiae
- Cym. hookerianum
- Cym. iridioides
- Unknown
- Cym. erythrostylum

Photos: Cym. Tethys 'New Horizon' 4N (top; photo courtesy of Andy Easton), a dark form of *Cym. tracyanum* at Cal-Orchid (top middle), Pywacket 'Evergreen' at an OSCOV Show (bottom middle) and 'Heatherrich Hills' (bottom; photo courtesy of A'na Satara, whose profile of the plant you can read at <https://www.aeorchids.com/orchid-photography/cymbidium/cymbidium-pywacket/>).

Naming

The grex was registered in July 2001 and Jody Cutajar, who worked for many years with Kevin, recounted the story behind its name:

“When Kevin was a teenager, his parents knew some colourful characters. One good friend and a regular visitor to their home was notorious underworld figure Bob Trimbole. One day when Bob was visiting with the Hipkins, Kevin burst into the room, hands clasped out in front of him imitating a gun, and menacingly delivered the classic Clint Eastwood line 'Do you have a Death Wish?'. He said that Bob and the group were startled and could possibly have been reaching for weapons. The look of fear on Bob's face stayed with Kevin all of his life.

It should be noted that the Hipkins were not involved in any criminal activity; they actually met Bob at the races as they were both regular attendees and their friendship developed from their mutual love of horse racing.”

Clearly there was something about the grex that Kevin associated with this memory!

Selections

There are over a dozen named Death Wish selections (although only a few are widely circulated), the most popular of which has to be 'Speckled Spectre' (pictured right). 'Speckled Spectre' varies in how dark the flowers are depending on the growing conditions.

Most of the named selections originated with Royale Orchids and a number have been used in hybridising. Some of the named selections are described below:

- 'Black Cat' – more regular shape than most selections; dark burgundy red with some darker spotting the inner petals; solid red lip with darker spots visible under flash photography
- 'Black Prince' – red with a little of the underlying base colour visible in spots/stripes along the centre of the tepals; V-shaped lip with spotting mostly in a V-shape
- 'Dark Desire' – mostly russet with a little of the underlying green peaking through in stripes; the lip spotting is reminiscent of *tracyanum*, but far more solid
- 'Dark Invader' – very dark red-brown; the lip is almost solid velvet red with cream to pale yellow around callus ridges
- 'Dreamtime' – the tepals are heavily spotted russet (with large spots almost covering the sepals); the lip is almost solid velvet red with cream to pale yellow around callus ridges
- 'First Bite' – green with lots of fine spotting; the spots almost form stripes on petals; the lip is yellowish with strong *tracyanum*-like spotting
- 'Ginger'



- ‘Leopard’ – sand-coloured with some red spotting, particularly around lower half of the ventral sepals and inner half of the petals; the lip is near white with strong *tracyanum* spotting
- ‘Peats Ridge’ – apple green overlaid with russet spots and stripes; solid stripes on top and bottom of petals; lip almost solid velvet red with small patches of near-white around callus ridges
- ‘Red Roger’ – dark burgundy red with faint striping showing the base colour along the centre of the tepals; lip spotted red with yellowish edge
- ‘Royale’ – green with lots of moderately-sized red spots, clustered towards the centre of the flower and lower part of the ventral sepals; the lip is almost solid velvet red with pale yellow around the callus ridges
- ‘Rusty Fred’ – very dark red-brown with a nearly solid red lip (darker spotting on the lip is visible in flash photography) with yellow and red-spotted callus ridges
- ‘Saratoga’ – this is similar to ‘Royale’, but can have more white on the lip and the spots are more evenly distributed on sepals; it also known to be in circulation
- ‘Select’
- ‘Spots’
- ‘Spotted Leopard’
- ‘To Die For’
- ‘Underbelly’ – green heavily spotted in red-brown; lip nearly solid velvet red with some yellow on callus ridges and small off-white patches around them
- ‘Vampire Slayer’ – a dark red/burgundy with a solid red lip
- ‘Withering Glance’ – similar to ‘Dark Invader’ but with a white edge on the lip and a few near-black spots on the petals

The vast majority of Death Wish selections have solid or almost solid red lips, like this one photographed by Andy Easton. All of them have strong *tracyanum* traits due to the species making up more than 50% of the genetics.

Death Wish Today

As of 2020, Death Wish selections still fetch a reasonable amount on eBay in Australia, with ‘Speckled Spectre’ regularly selling for \$70 to \$90 in bloom.

The grex remains popular enough that sibling crosses are made every so often, some of which I have seen offered by various nurseries and occasionally by individual sellers on eBay. Known sib-crosses include:

- ‘Rusty Fred’ crossed with each of ‘Black Cat’, ‘Black Prince’ and ‘Red Roger’ (AON crosses)
- ‘Saratoga’ X ‘Withering Glance’
- ‘Speckled Spectre’ crossed with each of ‘Peats Ridge’, ‘Royale’ and ‘Vampire’ (I was unable to determine if this was supposed to be ‘Vampire Slayer’ or whether ‘Vampire’ is distinct)
- ‘Spotted Leopard’ X ‘Ginger’

To the best of my knowledge, none of these have ever been treated to induce tetraploidy and so all extant Death Wishes are diploids. Death Wish has been used in a number of crosses as well (most of which are also diploids) and I will look at these in detail in a future article.





Two more very shapely seedlings from the 3 Amigos. (Left): Cym Willunga Royal 'Orange Delight' x Flaming Pepper 'Kirrawee' and (Right): Flaming Amber 'Fay'

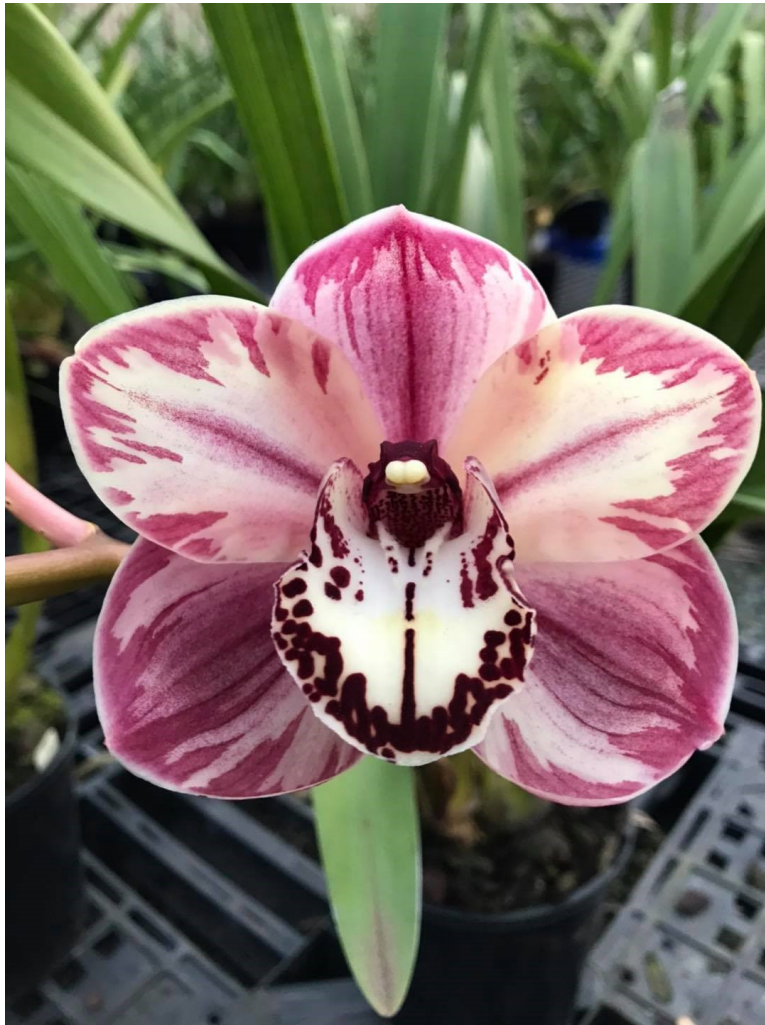
Improving Your Collection

In the last two editions of Cymbidium Chatter I reported on some of the opinions I had received regarding what hobbyists choose to grow. The opinions were very varied.

Probably the most important thing you need to consider in attempting to improve your collection is how often you really evaluate what you grow. If you evaluate your collection thoroughly, culling (getting rid of the plants that no longer meet your needs) is an important first step to take. What you replace the culls with, really gets down to why you grow Cymbidiums. If you grow to show it is hard to go past the seedlings produced by Australian hybridisers, they know what wins shows and a % (a small %) of their hybridising efforts are aimed directly at the hobbyist market. If however, you grow for your own pleasure you may venture further afield and purchase seedlings from overseas hybridisers. Either way, you will be injecting some new life into your collection, hobbyists are always on the lookout for something new and different.

Personally I think it would be unwise to ignore offerings from any of the major hybridisers, we are well catered for - from species, Primary hybrids, to quality show bench Cymbidiums.

A Fine Fancy for the Feathered Fancier



As far as feathered Cymbidium flowers go, they don't come much better than this first flowering seedling, Cym Spicy Khan 'Comet' x Flaming Vulcan 'Dural, flowered by the 3 Amigos, South Australia. I am not sure which one of the three gents is the owner of this beauty but whoever posted the photograph and the accompanying comment, was certainly excited: "*After 9 years, you strike the lotto, a feathered one to call your own.*"

The owner went on to say that they hoped this flower proved to be stable. Stability is important, we are looking at one flower from the spike, one would hope that all flowers were very similar to this one and when it repeat flowers that they are still the same; there is no guarantee with feathered flowers! Looking further ahead I am sure the three Amigos have immediate thoughts of cloning this plant, again stability will come into play, feathered flowered plants don't always clone well, some revert to a plain color. Time will tell, in the meantime, if in fact the flowers are all the same, the owners have the option of growing the plant on and to then offer divisions or backbulbs from the mother plant. Whatever they decide to do I think they are guaranteed of a good return from this plant. If it does clone 'true' I would be inclined to follow Terry Poulton's lead and do what he did with Kimberley Splash 'TeePee', where he grew on the clones until they flowered and then sold them at a premium price! If they opt for offering divisions or backbulbs from the mother plant, I believe they could ask a very high price, somewhere close to four figures would not be unreasonable. Feathered flowers have always demanded very high prices and they haven't always had the superb shape of this one!

Stability Issues

Feathered mutations usually occur during the cloning process, such as occurred with the cloning of Drouin Masterpiece 'Renae'. Drouin Masterpiece 'Kaleidoscope' is a wonderful feathered flower, however efforts to clone it have resulted in the clones reverting back to DM 'Renae'. The only way of obtaining a stable piece of this plant is through a division or back bulb from the mother plant and this is why the divisions have demanded high prices. Even though this flower has been around for a considerable time, you could still expect to pay \$500+ for a good sized division of it.

Now with this new feathered flower the situation is quite different. The feathering occurred in a first flowering seedling, whether this improves the chance of the flower being 'stable' is problematic and the only way to find out is to clone the plant and to flower the clones, hopefully they will be true to the mother plant.

This new flower has superb shape. We have seen another quality flower in Valley Champion 'Superstar'. This flower received an AD/OSCOV in 2018 for David Wain and I have no doubt that it would have received a HCC/OSCOV the following year, had it not been for two small holes in two of the flowers. The 3 Amigos also have a piece of this plant (photograph next page). I believe this new flower is superior to 'Superstar', others will probably disagree but whatever the belief, one thing that is for sure, we have two outstanding feathered flowers that along side Drouin Masterpiece 'Kaleidoscope' set a very high standard in this type of novelty flower.



Top: Drouin Masterpiece 'Kaleidoscope'

Above: Valley Champion 'Superstar'

Photographs: Joshua White

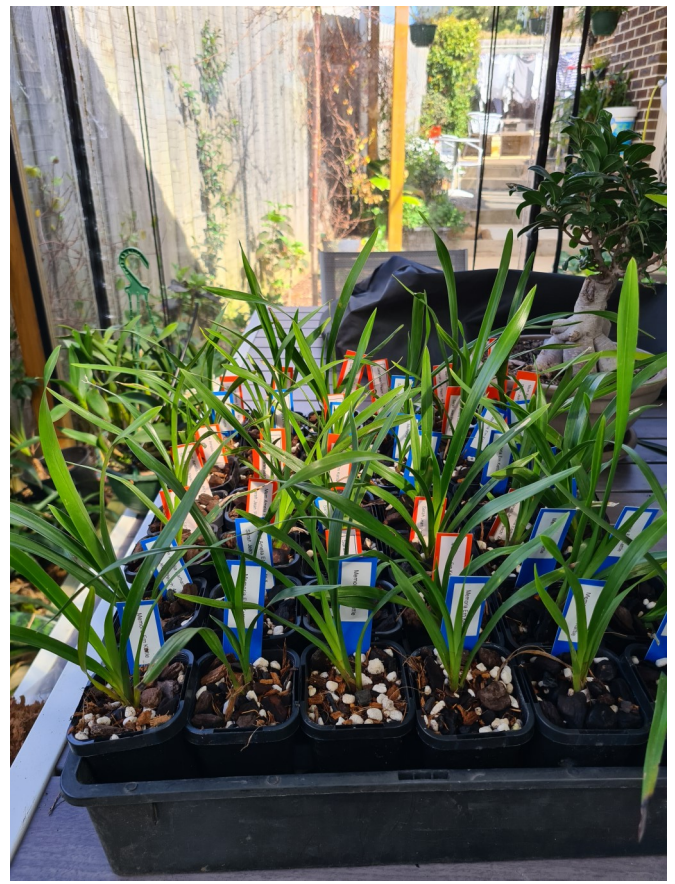


Top left: Cym Valley Olympic 'Feathered Rose' Photograph: 3 Amigos

Top right: Cym Winter Fire 'Frosty Tips' Photograph: L Batchman

Above left: Cym Eaglewood 'Kana Feathered' Photograph: D Wong

Above right: Valley Champion 'Superstar' Photograph: 3 Amigos



I may have been a bit hasty!

In a previous issue of Cymbidium Chatter I mentioned that I was going to try and rescind a Cymbidium registration I had made, Cym Mem Ern Kettle. On closer examination of the plants I observed that they were starting to grow more evenly and they looked quite okay when potted-up singly into tubes. The top two photographs show the plants potted up, the larger seedlings are Cym Mem Amelia Earhart 4n x Sarah Jean 'Peach' 4n but even the smaller plants look fine' The photograph (left) shows just a small section of the remaining community pots containing plants of both crosses, I still have several hundred plants to pot-up. Cym Mem Ern Kettle is (New Century 'Kimberley' x Plush Canyon 'Red Eye' 4n.

I will be keeping a reasonable number of Cym Mem Ern Kettle but the excess will be grown on and offered for sale to members of COSV.

I plan to grow on as many of the Mem Amelia Earhart 4n x Sarah Jean "Peach' 4n seedlings as I can manage, I do have limited space. I am hoping for flowers in the shades of yellow from this cross and spikes that arch without being too pendulous. As they grow I may find that I will have to sell off some of this cross, that is, unless we move again - highly unlikely!