

THESE BOOTS WERE MADE FOR WALKING

As the official boot fitter for R.M. Williams, Steven Harris has touched the famous feet of rock stars, supermodels and sportsstars. He's in town next week for the launch of new Buderim store Threads 4556 to fit Coast locals with a brand spanking new pair of boots.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR YOUR UPCOMING VISIT TO THE SUNSHINE COAST?

I have been invited by John and Kylie, owners of Threads 4556, to visit their new Buderim fashion store. I met John and Kylie at the R.M. Williams Winter 2015 Stables showing last August, and again a few weeks later, when they came to the Adelaide factory to see first-hand how the boots were made. They totally embraced the boot story and wanted to bring it to Buderim. We will be busy with three days of personal fittings starting next Thursday afternoon. In between the fittings, I am hoping to spend some time at the beach and enjoy some great local restaurants.

YOU'VE HAD A 30-YEAR CAREER WITH R.M. WILLIAMS. WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE COMPANY INITIALLY?

I arrived home in the early '80s after travelling in Europe. By chance, I was offered six weeks work in the R.M. Williams Castlereagh Street, Sydney store. When the six weeks was up, Mike Williams – R.M.'s youngest son and store manager at the time – asked me to stay on. I loved my first experience in retail and was eager to learn more. The craftsmanship of the boots is a unique story. It all begins with a single, handpicked piece of leather in the Adelaide factory to the template laid down by R.M. himself. Each boot goes through 80 hand-held processes, just as they always have. One boot, one piece of leather.

DID YOU MEET R.M. WILLIAMS?

Yes, I have had the pleasure, on a number of occasions of meeting the late R.M. Williams. He was an incredibly generous and humble man. He often walked between his Sydney retail stores and always had time to stop for a chat and spend time with you. I was privileged to have had the great honour of dressing R.M. for the 100 Living Legends Dinner he was hosting in Sydney many years ago.

WHAT TRAINING DID YOU DO IN ORDER TO BECOME A BOOT FITTER?

Training was on the job. We sold so many boots back then and fitting each boot was part of the training process. We



IMAGE: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

fitted true whole and half sizes. Twenty years of fitting boots while managing the Sydney Castlereagh Street store and subsequently the George Street store was constant training as we were learning every day.

YOU ARE NOW FITTING BOOTS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE. WHAT DOES THAT INVOLVE?

The Armed Forces are currently replacing the lace-up style patent leather boot with a new R.M. Williams parade boot which is a fully stitched, elastic-sided boot with a grain leather design. As part of that process, Jason Ogden another long-time employee of R.M. Williams and myself, are presently visiting all Army Units across Australia to conduct individual fittings for soldiers. This is a three year roll-out program which we will complete at the end of this year. When this project comes to an end, we will have fitted a total of 40,000 Army personnel with boots – 700 fittings is the most fittings we have done in one day.

HOW DOES FITTING BOOTS FOR THE DEFENCE FORCE DIFFER FROM FITTING BOOTS FOR FARMERS OR LAYPEOPLE?

Everyone is treated the same. The most exciting thing to evolve from this project has been the opportunity to introduce the renowned Craftsman boots to the Armed Forces personnel. Country folk have grown up with the

R.M. Williams brand. It's an Australian icon, a name synonymous with the outback, a name synonymous with meticulous quality, authenticity and durability.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE WHEN FITTING BOOTS?

All feet are different! The challenges are easily overcome with the R.M. Williams made to order boot service. Once your size and width is determined, customers can select from an array of leathers, colours, soles, heel styles, toe shapes, patterns and more, to create a bespoke pair unique to one's own personal style. There are over four million different configurations of made to order boots.

HAVE YOU FITTED BOOTS FOR CELEBRITIES?

When managing our Sydney stores, I was privileged to personally fit Greg Norman with his Crocodile and Ostrich skin Craftsman boots. I've also fitted many well known Australian and international identities with their boots including supermodel and businesswoman Elle Macpherson, the late Michael Hutchence, former politician and Midnight Oil lead singer Peter Garrett, and American musician James Taylor. Willie Nelson and Rod Stewart were also in-store and made boot purchases.

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL FAVOURITE R.M. WILLIAMS BOOTS?

Craftsman black, chestnut and mallee boots are the boots I wear.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE R.M. WILLIAMS' REPUTATION OVERSEAS?

R.M. Williams is an Australian icon with a strong and loyal following worldwide. This is evident by the thousands of international travellers who visit our Australian, London and New York stores every week. The company is world renowned for its premium handcrafted footwear and accessories, as well as a comprehensive selection of apparel for men and women. Our boots are worn by global leaders, international film stars, world sporting champions and thousands of people around the world seeking quality, comfort and style.