



Two of us

ANTHONY BENNETT & JAMES CARROLL

Anthony Bennett (at left), 35, and James Carroll, 34, studied veterinary science at the same university and, since 2012, have run a vet practice together. Both are married and star in the pay-TV show *Village Vets Australia*.

ANTHONY: We met on the first day of uni. James was sitting in front of me on the bus going out to the University of Sydney farm at Camden [in Sydney's south-west], and we started chatting.

Later that week, we were at a vet science social event. Some blokes came up to four of us and said we had been selected to join this elite group, NROC, and to come with them. It was like *Dead Poets Society*. But we went around the corner and [they tell us] NROC is Nudie Run Organising Committee, get your clothes off and go. That's when we got to know each other. Once you've run nude together, you're mates.

After uni, both of us worked near where our parents had farms. I went to Berry [145km south of Sydney] and James to a practice in Barraba [in northern NSW].

The vet boys have a tradition of going to the Test cricket for a couple of days every year. On one of these trips in 2010, sitting underneath sombreros and drinking beer, James and I discussed what his wife, Ronnie, and he were going to do next. By then he'd spent some time in the UK and was working at a small animal practice in Sydney. I'd bought into the Berry practice and my partner was retiring soon. "You should think about coming to Berry," I said.

It was 12 months later at a New Year's Eve party that Ronnie and he announced they were coming to Berry. I thought, "This

is going to change our lives," and it has. Neither of us could have imagined the business and friendship would do so well. He's been here three-and-a-half years and the practice has tripled in size.

Soon after James arrived, I got a call to do a calving. He said, "I'll come with you. I haven't done a calving in years." It was dark, bitterly cold and a severe storm was coming around the hill. He had his arm inside the cow trying to get the calving straps on, and I was thinking, "If this takes much longer, we're going to get soaked." Then the storm hit. Between us we got the calf out, but we were covered in blood, placenta and shit, and drenched. So we got back to the car and stripped off, and were sitting in our undies thinking, "Thank God we were in NROC together, because this is a bit weird."

I admire James's work ethic and his problem-solving ability. He's caring and does the right thing by people. If a bill gets out of control, he'll say, "Okay, we're not charging any more."

James is inherently very funny. We'd always joked about doing a TV show because at parties people stand around listening to why we've got placenta in our arm hair. Before *Village Vets Australia* went to air, we got approached by a publisher to write the book *Village Vets*. If you ask most vets why they became a vet, they'll say they read the James Herriot [*All Creatures Great*

And Small] books. If we could go within 10 per cent of Herriot with our book, that would be a wonderful legacy.

The low salaries and stressful working conditions mean the average work life of a vet is seven years, but we'll be vets for 30 years, all going well. It's great to have someone by your side who backs you up and looks out for you.

JAMES: At the start of university, my first impressions were of Anthony's impeccably white teeth and impeccable hair.

We're both pretty outgoing and we like a joke. But we're also both pretty determined and focused. Anthony is very organised and methodical. I tend to fly by the seat of my pants and run on adrenaline. He likes to be left alone to think and I like to bounce off people. We are both very considered people. We don't jump into things.

I admire Anthony's ability to see things through, even when the going gets tough. He's incredibly loyal. He is a man of integrity and of his word; I trust him implicitly.

In the first two years I was in Berry, we renovated three clinics, which meant getting up at ridiculously early hours to do painting. At 7.30am, we would clean ourselves up and do a full day's work. Then after work, we'd have dinner with our wives and go back and do more painting and renovating. I've always hated painting. One morning at 5am, it was zero degrees and we were painting in this dark box when Anthony said, "If we do this again, we're not doing the painting ourselves." I could not have more thoroughly agreed.

We both have that same work ethic: you don't cut corners and take the easy option. So when the phone rings at 1am and a dog's swallowed a fishing hook, you say, "Bring it in and we'll do the operation." Getting out of a comfy bed is not ideal, but that's what we signed up for.

I am a much more outwardly emotional person. If I'm happy, I'm happy. If I'm cranky, I'm cranky. Anthony is more reserved. But occasionally, we'll switch roles. Anthony poured his heart and soul into trying to save this Hereford cow. Just as he finished the job, the cow passed away. I think it was the culmination of all the effort, the stinking hot day and exhaustion, but Anthony kicked the bejesus out of the nearby steel bucket and lost his rag at the universe, and the farmer had to herd him back to the car and send him on his way.

We're both strong-willed and make a good case as to why we're right, and come at things from different angles. I'm sure Anthony gets frustrated that I haven't done my paperwork properly or on time and conversely, he might finish something but I'll want it done slightly differently. But the fact that I'm a perfectionist and Anthony gets it done means that a matter gets resolved. The partnership is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Despite spending far too much time together at work, we love to go and have a beer. The TV crew wanted to film us drinking a beer at the pub, which we thought was great. When the film crew told us they were finished, we said, "We're actually having a great time chatting and having a beer," and we ended up there all night. ■

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INTERVIEWS BY
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