



Phantom at his farewell party.

Photos: Giulio Saggini

Sniffer star retires to the Sunshine State

Along with many other retirees who have seen the light, Phantom has retired to the Sunshine State. After nine years working for the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) at Melbourne Airport, this Beagle now has time on his paws to stop and smell the roses. Janice Holland caught up with Phantom and his handler Dee Scott at their home in Brisbane.



With tell-tale greying features and eye sight just starting to fail, quarantine detector dog Phantom retired in April after years of loyal sniffing service, where he screened more than a million passengers. To mark the occasion a farewell party was held with a special bone-shaped cake, AQIS staff, some of his detector dog colleagues and lots of well-deserved attention.

Phantom will spend his retirement with quarantine officer Dee Scott, who has been Phantom's handler and best friend since he began work in 1998 as a 12-month-old puppy. Dee transferred to the AQIS Brisbane office in 2003.

"The majority of handlers want to take their dog home as a pet when it retires," says Dee.

Although she had visited him since her move, Dee says when they reunited at Brisbane airport Phantom went "ballistic".

"The guys wheeled him out in the crate and he went

nuts, running around in circles. When they let him out he jumped into my arms, gave me a kiss and then started sniffing!"

It's to be expected that Phantom will take some time to stop sniffing and become desensitised as he was among the first intake of puppies trained specifically for contraband detection.

"From 10 months, Phantom was taught to look for contraband – things that are prohibited into Australia – such as fruit and vegetable, plants, meat, eggs, birds, bees, reptiles," explains Dee.

"He was not a narcotics dog. He looked for prohibited fresh items that would create havoc to our agricultural industry."

During his career Phantom achieved an extremely high success rate in detecting contraband. His more unusual finds included a pair of bloody deer antlers, seed pods one and a half metres long, live plants concealed among artificial plants in a passenger's bag, and a bear's bladder!

One of Phantom's more noted finds was in 2003 when he discovered fresh limes that were later identified as

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*Phantom and Dee
at home in Brisbane.*

carrying citrus canker – a significant threat to Victoria's multi-million dollar summer fruit industry. (Citrus canker has had a devastating impact on Queensland's citrus industry in recent years.)

Dee taught Phantom to respond positively and sit quietly when he detected contraband.

"It could have just been a residual odour after someone had done the right thing and thrown out a sandwich or apple on their way into the country," explains Dee.

"I would say 'Phantom show me' and he would use his nose to pin point where the item or smell was, such as in the left hand corner at the back of the suitcase.

"He hit the jack pot when he found sausages and chocolate at the bottom of a golf bag – receiving three to four biscuits."

Phantom was so reliable that even if there was nothing obvious in the bag, the inspectors knew to look long and hard for a concealed item. Furthermore, Phantom gave Dee clues as to whether a passenger was telling the truth about the contents of their bag.

"When you work together so closely you learn to read your dog's body language and you develop your own gut instinct and reaction to people. With Phantom's help,

I could generally tell if someone was lying."

These days Phantom is an old dog teaching young dogs – and handlers – new tricks.

"As a leader in his field, one of his responsibilities before retiring was to help train new handlers and the new dogs coming through.

"He taught the new handlers how to read and respond to him. They all said it was good to have an older dog there ... although he tricked them into giving him biscuits."

In between spending time with his new family – including 13-year-old Heeler cross, Isaac, and family members who had only seen Phantom on television when he starred on the Bert Newton Show – Phantom now applies his talents to Dee's Positive Response Dog Training school.

"Phantom plays with the dogs, which are aged from eight weeks to 10 years, and in doing so teaches them social manners," says Dee.

"Through his body language the other dogs learn what's acceptable

and what isn't. He is basically being a grandfather and teaching the younger dogs how to behave." ®

Phone Dee Scott at Positive Response Dog Training on 0424 058 450.

