

## The Mystery of *Sarcochilus hirticalcar*



*Sarco. Bessie*

*Sarcochilus hirticalcar*, the 'Harlequin Orchid' is a tropical species which according to most sources is found in the McIlwraith Ranges of far North Queensland. It may seem that it only recently began to contribute its genes into the rapidly expanding list of hybrids with the appearance of grexes such as *Sarco. Velvet* and *Sarco. Nicky* and, more recently, their offspring. Surprisingly this impression is very wrong as *Sarco. hirticalcar* was used as a parent in one of the early hybrids when Noel Jupp registered *Sarco, Riverdene* in 1976.

The mystery to the writer is why the massive interval in the use of this most interesting species? One could be forgiven for thinking that it was only recently discovered but it was actually found in 1966 by Malcolm Brown.

As a parent it seems to provide some very desirable traits

- It extends the flowering season into summer and seems to encourage its offspring to produce several flushes of blooms throughout the year. My larger plants of *Sarco. Velvet* are rarely without some flowers.
- Its progeny have excellent flower substance with very thick, long lasting flowers that generally resist reflexing.
- It not only contributes a variety of colours (green, yellow, red) to its offspring but allows or even enhances the colour inheritance from the other parent. A case in point would be *Sarco. Nicky* where *Sarco. hirticalcar* has been paired with *Sarco. fitzgeraldii* to produce a grex of predominantly red flowers.
- When combined with a partner having full shaped flowers such as *Sarco hartmannii* the progeny mostly adopt the improved shape( as with *Sarco. Riverdene*) of the other parent rather than the sparse form of *sarco. hirticalcar*.

So once again it is asked "Why was *Sarco. hirticalcar* ignored for so long by hybridists?" Was it because Noel Jupp had the only plant in cultivation until recently (unlikely)? Was it because its progressive flowering habit was deemed to be a liability (note that breeders were using *Sarco. ceciliae* another noted progressive flowerer during this time)? Was it because it was difficult to grow and died out in collections (seems to be widely grown today) or was it because its offspring were difficult to cultivate (could be as some are a bit 'slow' although *Sarco. Riverdene 'Holly'* seems to have been around for ages but then again most selfings of this clone available over the years from DUNO have been slow growers at best).



*Sarco. Nicky Cheer*

Whatever the reason for the barren period in the use of *Sarco. hirticalcar* as a parent and even its first hybrid, *Sarco. Riverdene*, it has certainly been overcome in recent years with hybridists having produced 39 progeny as at mid 2008. The most notable of these would include the following *Sarcochilus* hybrids; *Riverdene. Topaz*, *Velvet*, *Nicky*, *Cherry Cheer*, *Elise*, *Bessie* and *Duno Nicky's Twin*.

If the idea of year -round flowers of great substance in an interesting array of colours is at all appealing then *Sarcochilus hirticalcar* and its extended family should never be ignored for so long again.

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*Sarco. Velvet x Elise*