AWARD OF MERIT 2017presented by Jill Reader

The Award of Merit is the IPPS New Zealand Region’s most prestigious award. It is decided by a panel of 3 committee members: the president (that’s me), the secretary (Glenys, who’s competing in dragon boating in Bali at the moment), and the 2nd VP (Antony). There are 3 criteria that we as the panel have to look at when we consider our choice of who this may be awarded to. These criteria are:

* Meritorious service to IPPS New Zealand
* Meritorious service to New Zealand horticulture
* The person must be an active member at the time of presentation

Now that’s explained I’ll talk a bit about this year’s Award of Merit winner, starting with his service to New Zealand horticulture.

This person is a long standing member of the New Zealand Rhododendron Society. With his interest in a large number of plant species, he has also been a member of the Tree Crops Association and a member of the New Zealand Olive Growers Association, plus he served on their Canterbury committee for 5 years. For a couple of years he was on the Growers Group of the old NGIA as well.

In addition, and in a gesture of giving back to the local community, he joined the local fire brigade at one stage, but according to my sources that only lasted two weeks – perhaps he was worried about having to attend callouts on a Tuesday when he was half way through a painting! Some of you here may have been in these other horticultural societies alongside him, and some of you here may have modelled for him on a Tuesday…

The most important of these 3 criteria for the Award of Merit is meritorious service to IPPS New Zealand.

This member has been very active in IPPS for many years, including a long stint on the executive committee. Visits to his nursery are legendary, and each time a group is hosted around the nursery there is something new that he has been working on – this may be the fog versus mist debate, it may be mega cuttings, it may be how green waste or the water is recycled on the property, but you can guarantee something major will have changed since you’ve last visited. And that’s because he seems to like challenging boundaries and challenging accepted practices.

And then there are the talks at conferences over the years where he shares his knowledge. Jeff is so passionate about his subject he’ll sometimes drop the odd F bomb in his talks, you can guarantee his talks are never dull. He gave a talk in 2010 about his career and how it started with an old window from the neighbours before he graduated to using his brother’s old parakeet cage as his second go at a prop unit.

I remember that talk well, and the paper that followed. Who else would write:

“I was 21. I had a hot prop bed, I was ready to root anything I desired.

And I pretty much did, I was a legend in my own mind”.

I was editor at that time, and he wanted to call this paper “A hot bed for a good root”. I couldn’t talk him out of it, and was not sure the reaction I’d get if I sent it through to the International Editor. So before I did agree to this I thought I’d do a bit of a survey, and looked through all the Black Books from the past 10 years to see if there were any other dodgy titles that set a precedent. I only came across one – a paper Jeff had previously published called “Practical workshop - How to make a hormone”!

Jeff Elliott, you’re an editorial nightmare but you’re also a bit of a legend in IPPS. Please come up and accept this very well deserved Award of Merit.