

Pride And His Joy

The unassuming duo who scaled racing's highest peak


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MAGAZINE
2024



The Empress who ruled Spring | The Jewel in Peter Walsh's crown | Australian mares deliver

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THINK ABOUT IT

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Cover Image Trainer Joe Pride with 2023 Everest winner Think About It.
Photo: Georgia Young

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Photo: Sharon Lee Chapman



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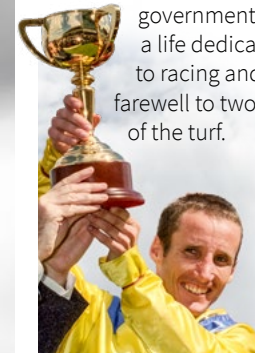
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Chairman's Message

This has been another incredible year. Picking a single highlight from 2023 is near impossible, but from an industry perspective, the Everest is difficult to top.

Being the richest race on turf is always headline-grabbing in its own right, but the level of engagement for this race is simply phenomenal. It certainly wasn't lost on Royal Randwick attendees, nor the massive TV and social media audiences, that the first and third horses home in the Everest – with a collective \$20.7 million in prizemoney between them – are both syndicated and were purchased as yearlings for \$70,000 and \$62,500.

The rapid rise of the Everest – from the inaugural base camp of \$10 million in 2017 to its current \$20 million peak – mirrors the tremendous increase of Australian prizemoney.

Indeed, stakes in Australia have increased by 45 per cent in the last five years (compared to just six per cent in Britain or France), while the Everest is among 95 million-dollar races to be staged in Australia throughout 2024. That's up from 21 races just 10 years ago, and is the equivalent of a million-dollar race every 3.8 days!

It's clearly not just the quantity that sets us apart, but also the quality of the horses on offer, given that Australia has hosted more of the world's top-rated Group One races than any other jurisdiction in four of the past five years.

While Australia has produced a host of middle-distance legends in recent years – Winx

and Hong Kong superstar Golden Sixty to name just two – our dominance of the sprinting ranks is simply phenomenal. In the past two decades alone, 16 Australian-breds have been crowned world's best sprinter and there is a good chance that we will top the list again this year.

Sadly, we bid farewell to Nature Strip in 2023 (and also his great sparring partner Eduardo) following a career which realised nine Group One victories: perhaps most memorably the King's Stand at Royal Ascot in 2022.

Full marks to Aushorse CEO Tom Reilly and his team once again for their promotional initiatives throughout the last 12 months, especially with the branding of the London black cabs leading into Royal Ascot to mark the 20th anniversary of Choisir's trailblazing campaign. The Aushorse logo on that most iconic of English

vehicles certainly caught the attention of horse racing fans across the globe.

Perhaps Imperatriz will continue the Royal Ascot run in 2024 after her thrilling success in the Champions Sprint to close out the Melbourne Cup carnival... one of six Group Ones in 2023 and eight overall.

Bred and sold in Australia and racing initially in New Zealand under the famous Te Akau banner, Imperatriz, coincidentally, is one of nine individual gallopers from Australian-bred mares to capture a Group One outside of Australia throughout 2023.

“There is so much to look forward to during the next 12 months and beyond, particularly in terms of tomorrow's stars”

Indeed, there is so much to look forward to during the next 12 months and beyond, particularly in terms of tomorrow's stars.

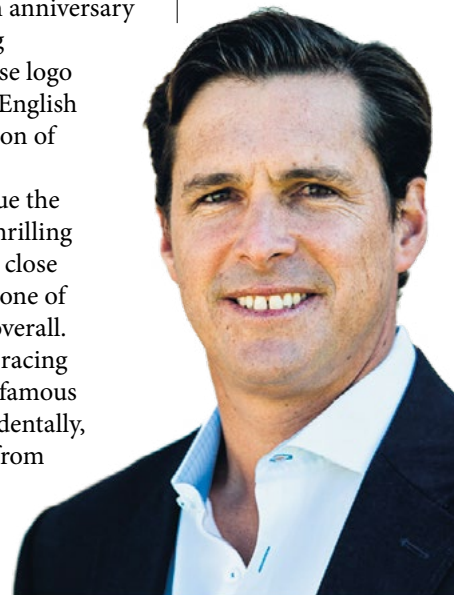
Magic Millions has again assembled an exciting line-up for the Gold Coast yearling sale in January, and all eyes will be on the sales ring at the Riverside complex when the Pierro filly – the very first yearling out of Winx – goes under the hammer at the Inglis Easter Yearling sale in April. An offering of this calibre is testament to the fact that Australian breeders really do sell their best stock. In fact, 65 per cent of Australian-bred Group One-winners over the past three years were offered for sale as yearlings – more than any other jurisdiction.

The Australian dollar has seen a downward trend for most of 2023, and this looks set to continue given the current strength of the US dollar. This represents a fantastic opportunity for foreign buyers to capitalise on the low exchange rate from investment and travel perspectives; what better time to visit our sunny shores for both business and pleasure.

On behalf of my fellow directors and all the staff at Aushorse, we hope you enjoy this year's edition of the magazine – and its sister publication, the Investor's Guide – and wish you every success with your thoroughbred pursuits in 2024.

“Australian breeders really do sell their best stock”

**Antony Thompson,
Aushorse Chairman**



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Antony Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Pride And Proven

For almost a decade Joe Pride and Jamie Walter have been in partnership. Despite modest budgets their horses have succeeded on the biggest stage, writes Malcolm Knox

Trainer Joe Pride with 2023 Everest winner Think About It. Photo: Georgia Young

Joe Pride likes to say, “There’s no such thing as an ugly thoroughbred.” But one bay yearling colt at the 2020 Melbourne Premier Sale was not far off. By So You Think from the Flying Spur mare Tiare, the colt was lean and plain with a star on his forehead. Little caught the eye.

Pride remembers the hesitation at first sight. “To be brutally honest, there was nothing particularly attractive about him,” he says.

The yearling’s plain looks put him in the wheelhouse of Pride and one of his main owners, Jamie Walter of the syndication company Proven Thoroughbreds. Walter and Pride go to sales to find racehorses, not future stallions. Cheapies and bargains that they can send away to mature slowly without the pressure of chasing stud value as juveniles.

Pride stayed in Melbourne overnight to look at Walter’s shortlist. Walter was buying a lot of yearlings in 2020 and, as he says, “was only passively interested in him. I looked at him a couple of times because he was on my shortlist and also Joe’s.”

Walter left Melbourne before the auction. “I didn’t love him enough to bid on him.” After the colt was passed in, Irishman Jim Carey, acting for the vendor Newgate Farm, phoned Walter who “threw in a modest bid” of \$70,000 – well below the average he was spending that year. “Thank Christ it was accepted!” Walter says with 20/20 hindsight.

In spring 2023, the colt, now a five-year-old gelding named Think About It, has just won his owners \$7 million in little over a minute. He’s still a light and unprepossessing horse, weighing 40kg less than Private Eye, the black ball of muscle poking his nose over the stall wall. They are separated by



“Winning isn’t all that matters, but it’s pretty close”

Joe Pride, Pride Racing

about a neck, the same as at the post for the Everest.

To go into the Pride-Walter partnership that won \$9 million one day in 2023, we have to travel back to when the late trainer Guy

Walter brought these two bargain-hunters together.

From contrasting social backgrounds, Jamie Walter and Joe Pride both came to horse racing through a love of the punt.

Walter, the son of an accountant, had been sent from the family home at Mudgee to board at the Shore School in Sydney. After leaving school and dabbling with careers in radio announcing and futures trading, he rounded up \$900 with some of his mates and bought a horse, Docalter, which won three races in the city. Walter was hooked. Travelling in the USA and Europe in his 20s, he worked in racing stables. His elder brother Guy was making his name as a respected trainer and although their father “inwardly scowled” and

Think About It pictured as a yearling. Photo: Newgate Farm

was “concerned” that two of his four children were entering the racing industry (the other two steered clear), Guy and Jamie found some encouragement from their mother, who had grown up among horses outside Quirindi.

Jamie Walter loved the challenge of punting, but did not want to turn professional. He worked in Guy’s stables and knew he wanted to be in the industry, but still didn’t know how. He considered being a race-caller for a time. In his late 30s, his marriage failed and, looking for new direction, he saw an opening for syndication. As the costs of racehorse ownership increased, the risk had to be spread around. Walter began forming syndicates to race tried horses. “It was only really a hobby with four or five horses at a time, more about fun than money-making, but it gave me a deeper involvement than punting or doing bits and pieces for Guy. Syndication was about keeping the cost low, but having just as much buzz, whether you owned 52 per cent or two per cent. You do it with friends – how good’s that?”

He founded Proven Thoroughbreds in 2001 and found his niche in the market’s bargain end, spending low and hoping large. It wasn’t overly rewarding, but in 2014 came a bigger crisis when Guy, 59, suffered a fatal heart attack. Jamie said in his eulogy, “Guy was a lot of things – but never fast.”

The patient elder brother had some fast horses, however. Among Guy’s 36 Group One winners were the champion Tie The Knot and, winning the Doomben Cup the weekend before Guy’s death, Streama. Days after the funeral, Sir Moments won the Queensland Guineas.

Once the grief subsided, Jamie looked for a trainer in Guy’s mould: patient, systematic, hard-working, trustworthy.

Guy had been mentoring Joe Pride, a young trainer who had come up under John Size. >>

PRIDE AND PROVEN

Pride, born in Queanbeyan, was the son of a tradesman and a bookkeeper who attended Mount Druitt High. It was a long way from North Sydney and the Shore School, but Pride, like Jamie Walter, loved to punt with his friends and was intrigued by the many variables that go into every horse in every race. “Punting is the one thing that’s accessible,” Pride says. “Once you’ve invested your money, you have a right to comment on everything. I still love form analysis. The day I’m not fascinated by it, I’ll find something else to do.”

Whereas Jamie Walter had dodged further study, Pride gave it a year, “hating” psychology at Sydney University before asking his dad if he had any regrets. His dad said yes. Joe replied that if he didn’t go into horse racing, he would always regret it. “It was a bit of a trick question,” he acknowledges. Like Jamie Walter’s, Joe Pride’s parents were worried.

Soon after Guy Walter’s passing, his Sydney metropolitan horses, some of which were owned by Jamie’s syndicates, went to Pride.

Says Pride, “Jamie’s the dream owner. Guy often had long chats with me on Sunday mornings. He was always very interested in what I was doing. He was a very caring person and took me under his wing. Measured, reasonable, great racing people, good company. There’s so much pressure and tension in this game, you often feel everyone wants a piece of you. But Jamie, like Guy, just gets it. He makes it as easy for me as he can.”

Jamie says, “Having a brother as a trainer made me appreciate the role of the owner in that relationship. There’s nothing a trainer abhors more than an owner telling them where to run the horse, who should ride it, how to ride it, blah blah blah. I’m very respectful of Joe as the trainer. He’s also respectful of my experience, so we often discuss things. I’ve never overruled him.”



“I’m a buffer between the trainer and the owners. A syndicate manager’s role is to ensure that there is good quality communication on the horse’s progress. Owners don’t want to hear a horse is going fantastic only to hear the next week that he’s going to Townsville. I have learned how to communicate to owners frankly. I know how most owners are going to react, because I’ve been there. How delicately you’ve got to handle some things, and stand your ground on others.”

“Primarily I see my role as educating and informing the owners. I have to sell shares, so I can’t be negative, but I have to be very careful I don’t exaggerate their potential. Most of them won’t make the grade.” Walter quips that his main job is as “a manager of disappointment”.

The partnership hit a first high point in 2022, when Private Eye, also a cheap yearling buy at \$62,500 from the 2019 Adelaide Magic Millions,

Joe Pride and Jamie Walter (from left) with Private Eye who finished third behind Think About It in the 2023 Everest. Photo: Georgia Young

wore Pride Racing’s red bridle and Proven Thoroughbreds’ lime green and black colours – chosen to stand out from the crowd – to second place behind Giga Kick in the 2022 Everest.

Private Eye had won \$2 million in a minute, and Walter had a bunch of celebratory owners, but Pride admits he was gutted – “Money is important, but winning is everything, you can’t replace it. Winning isn’t all that matters, but it’s pretty close. I absolutely hate losing.”

Jamie Walter was more sanguine. When Private Eye was a yearling, he had been unable to on-sell 10 per cent of the syndicate. He donated it to a charity auction, where it was bought by the City Tattersalls Club. The club has been satisfied with its investment.

The emotions were a mix in October 2022, but neither the syndicator nor the trainer had an inkling of what was around the corner. >>

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FIRST YEARLINGS SELLING 2024

PRIDE AND PROVEN

In the spelling paddock was the So You Think-Tiare colt, now gelded. Having been held back for a year following a right hind tendon injury, Think About It entered his racing life by winning sprints at Kembla Grange and Wyong before a third placing at Warwick Farm. Pride knew he had something good. “Maybe not an Everest horse, but he was shaping up well.”

In the summer of 2022/23, Think About It won all five of his starts, culminating in the Liverpool City Cup under Sam Clipperton, who had taken over the ride from the heavyweight jockey Rory Hutchings when the horse was carrying lighter weights. When Think About It went to Brisbane and won the Stradbroke Handicap, expectations were set for an Everest slot.

Meanwhile, neither Pride nor Walter had forgotten Private Eye, who had won the sequel to the 2022 Everest – the Nature Strip Stakes – but disappointed in his interstate campaign before winning The Shorts at Randwick. He too was Everest-bound, if only he could get a slot.

The slot-holding system of entering the Everest is unique in Australia, but Pride, having run Eduardo in three Everests, had learned “that there’s no panic about getting into the race. Don’t burn the horse out trying to get there. There will be slots open in the last couple of weeks if they’re good enough. Just get your horse ready and peaking in the middle of October, and the slot will take care of itself.”

Sure enough, Think About It was chosen for the slot owned by Newgate Farm, in a nice tying of the bow for the horse’s original vendor. There was also a portent in Private Eye getting the Max Whitby-Neil Werrett slot, with Whitby having worked with Jamie Walter on the futures floor all those years ago.

On race day, Pride says, picking a favourite between the two “was a very popular discussion



in the stable: there was Team Spade [Private Eye’s stable nickname] and Team Spud [Think About It’s]. I tend to go for the underdog, so I had a feeling for Private Eye, but I knew I had two strong chances. I just wanted to win it, badly.”

A six-furlong sprint passes by in a blur, and the race itself is the least part of the story. Once those gates open, Pride says, “There’s nothing I can do.” In the elation following Think About It’s win, just in front of Private Eye, “I had to remember we work hard over the year.” Even if the money for that 70 seconds is more than the rest of the year put together.

Walter, meanwhile, juggled two successful syndicates. “I felt a bit bad for not getting a chance on the day to sympathise with Private Eye’s owners. I was swept along with the Think About It euphoria. But Private Eye’s owners did okay.”

Even though it all came to a head in those 70 seconds, the philosophy of long-term patience remains for both Pride and Walter.

On a whiteboard behind his desk, Pride has two columns reminding him that the year is about

Think About It (inside) holds off a fast-finishing I Wish I Win (middle) and stablemate Private Eye (right) to capture the world’s richest race on turf. Photo: Ashlea Brennan

more than 70 seconds. It shows the stable’s progress against its annual target of 18 stakeswinners and 50 metropolitan winners. “I focus on that mark more than one winner.” For Pride, it was also a chance to reflect on the bargain of a lifetime. “It’d be nice to have more money to spend and not get knocked off on horses you want,” he says, “But there’s something very satisfying about winning the Everest knowing the horses weren’t desirable at the [yearling] sales.”

Jamie Walter, an overnight success after 22 years in syndication, says he’s “realistic about the ebbs and flows of racing. Two years from now, on Everest day I might be at Wyong. Your measure in racing, whatever you do, is longevity. If you’re even surviving, you’re doing okay. I’ve had a lot of years of hacking away at surviving, so this is a lovely moment. I’d like to get better, but I’m realistic enough to know that luck plays a major role. There are so many variables. Dealing with animals makes it challenging and charming at the same time. It’s absolutely fascinating; I live and breathe it as much as ever, 100 per cent.” ■



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Imperatriz ridden by Opie Bosson
on her way to winning the Group One Manikato Stakes.
Photo: Bronwen Healy/The Image Is Everything

Empress Of The Track

Style and substance combine in Imperatriz, an elegant sprinter born to rule, writes Helen Thomas

What's in a name? In the case of Australasia's sprinting sensation Imperatriz, perhaps a great deal. Translated as Empress in Portuguese, the moniker could prove the poetic key to the mare many believe is the finest sprinter in the world – the female ruler of the thoroughbred dominion.

Her record certainly bolsters this theory. Winning 17 of 23 starts and \$5.3 million in prizemoney, this daughter of I Am Invincible has also become the “winningest” horse in the world at the elite level this year, having accumulated six Group One victories – including the A J Moir and Manikato Stakes at Moonee Valley and the Champions Sprint at Flemington through the 2023 Spring Carnival.

The latter was actually her eighth Group One triumph. According to the Thoroughbred Racing Commentary's Global Rankings (Nov 12, 2023) she's the best mare in the world, as well as the highest-rated Australasian galloper, holding fifth position – rare air indeed – behind only the top-rated Equinox (Japan), Elite Power (US), Cody's Wish (US) and Ace Impact (Ire), and ahead of 'Aussies' Think About It (11), Giga Kick (19), Mr Brightside (20) and Alligator Blood (22).

Despite this international acknowledgment – and local racing media's relentless speculation about whether she would contest Sydney's



Te Akau's assistant trainer Ben Gleeson with Imperatriz at the beach. Photo: Bronwen Healy/The Image Is Everything

\$20 million Everest – the five-year-old raced solely in Melbourne this Spring, based at Te Akau Racing's new facilities at Cranbourne. The New Zealand operation's principal David Ellis and trainer Mark Walker insist this was best for the mare at this stage of her career.

What's next is even more tantalising for the team to assess and they maintain that “nothing's been decided and everything's on the table”. While it seems likely Imperatriz will kick off 2024 in the Group One Black Caviar Lightning, a global path could be tempting later in the year, perhaps to Royal Ascot. Some of our greatest sprinters – Black Caviar, Choisir and Nature Strip – have scorched that turf before.

If she makes that journey, she appears to be the kind of horse who will cope with the travel. All who know her remark on her intelligent demeanour, as well as her great athleticism. Almost from the day she was born, she indicated she could fulfil the genetic promise of her sire and dam, Berimbau, and more than hold her own on centre stage.

Bhima Thoroughbreds' Mike Fleming recalls her “very good presence and attitude” even as a weanling, before overseeing her yearling preparation in 2020. Again, “nothing was a problem – she prepared very well, she handled >>

EMPRESS OF THE TRACK

the pressure of the sale and being paraded every day very well. [But] there's no way of knowing. When you're selling a yearling, you know you're selling a dream really."

This one cost David Ellis \$360,000 and it quickly came true. But the filly proved a "hard sell" come syndication time. Te Akau's Karyn Fenton-Ellis and her husband were perplexed. Karyn, especially, was always convinced the filly was special from the time she first saw her on their farm. "I wouldn't usually say this, but it was love at first sight," she confesses, still bewildered by the initial lack of support for the youngster. "She was beautiful and I gave her the stable name Berri, after [actress] Halle Berry, because she's a beautiful woman and the filly was exquisite."

Yet, while "there was just that presence about her – people would turn and look at her a second time – that's why we were so amazed the shares were just so hard to sell in her. We probably syndicated maybe 70 or 75 horses that year and she was the last one to sell... there was so little interest in her." Fenton-Ellis now manages the Te Akau Invincible Empress Racing Partnership that includes 17 other shareholders. And Imperatriz is the centre of attention, on and off the track.

She certainly looks the part of a truly global equine star: dazzling dark brown in colour with a distinctive white diamond on her face that can sometimes, if the light's just right, be taken for a shamrock. Not that she needs luck, Irish or otherwise. Like all outstanding gallopers, this mare does it her way, and though that's sometimes the hard way, she makes it look easy. Her wins look smooth, albeit jet-propelled as she lengthens and quickens in the stable's tangerine and royal blue silks.

Her name somehow conjures this juxtaposition of style and substance. But finding it was initially frustrating for her new owners. As often happens,



they had trouble coming up with one not already in use in NZ and Australia. So Karyn Fenton-Ellis started researching. "I thought I really want to find a name epitomising her poise, presence and grace," she says. "I was trawling the internet and thought about her being a queen and came across Imperatriz, and the definition is, of course, a woman who rules her empire. I remember I said to the owners: 'This is the rationale; I really hope that her empire is the racetrack and that she will indeed rule her empire.'"

From that point on, things have been pretty straightforward. "She's intelligent, super intelligent. Sometimes you hear stories about [how] some of the very best fillies can have a difficult streak in them. She's extremely kind, affable; she wants to please, loves her humans. She's such a pleasure to handle and doesn't have a difficult bone in her body. She's carried those traits right throughout her racing career. She's pretty much bulletproof."

Imperatriz's remarkable Spring campaign culminated in winning the Group One Champions Sprint (above) down the straight at Flemington. Photo: Brett Holburt/Racing Photos

But even strong rulers have setbacks; last year, Fenton-Ellis says, "she just had a couple of little niggles with her back and we didn't see the best of her in that early Spring in NZ... so we just went back to the drawing board with her and Mark [Walker] changed the whole training regime". This included different exercise elements like swimming and more treadmill work. "She's never looked back, she's just not the same horse."

Ben Gleeson, Te Akau's Melbourne-based assistant trainer, says from the moment she arrived at Cranbourne at the end of August, Imperatriz has been remarkable to work with. "Since the first day she stepped off the plane, I've never had a bad one with her. She's eaten, she's done her work, she's been sound and healthy. So she is literally any trainer's dream."

This extends to her mental attitude. "Her demeanour off the track is just second to none. >>

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EMPRESS OF THE TRACK

She has the most professional attitude of any horse I've worked with. She's a darling in a box; she just knows she's there to eat, knows she's there to sleep. She does those things without a turn. And she's so gentle in her demeanour. Once you're going out to do some exercise, she switches on a bit, she gets a bit on edge – but just in the manner of white line fever. She goes out there [and] gets excited. She'll always give a buck and a squeal when she first canters off."

For Gleeson and the team, this provides clear indication about how the mare is feeling. "You'll certainly know the day that something's wrong if she doesn't do that, but she literally does it every single day at the exact same point. So she's very smart, she knows her routine every day; you know, she gets some honey every morning down her throat and she opens her mouth in anticipation."

On race day, it's much the same. "Once she's at the races, she's fantastic until she gets saddled. Once you get [her] saddled, she gets a bit jig-joggy and a bit on edge. But it's all in the right manner. I think she just wants to get out there and be competitive. She's certainly got an incredible will to win and competitive nature about her. You'll see once Opie [Bosson] gets on her, she sort of arches her back up and bucks all the way down to the starting line."

Ahead of two of Imperatriz's important Spring assignments in Melbourne, she nearly unseated the premier rider. But even this doesn't faze her connections. "Again, if we didn't see those signs, we'd be worried," Gleeson says. "We do everything to get Opie down [to the barriers] safely... with the [clerk-of-the-course] pony and just try to restrain her, to compose her and conserve her energy."



"Imperatriz has the most professional attitude of any horse"

Ben Gleeson, Te Akau Racing

During a race, of course, that energy is explosive and Mark Walker's young assistant says Imperatriz takes "a lot of managing" post-race, not unlike Peter Moody's Black Caviar did. "I was lucky enough as a younger

fellow to work with Moods and [saw] the maintenance and care they put into their horses," he says. "This mare takes the same maintenance. She puts in so much to all her races. Sometimes it might look easier than what you think, but with the extravagant stride that she has and the way she moves and changes legs etcetera, she uses every inch and muscle in her body. Therefore, she can pull up feeling it."

Throughout this campaign, she's seen the stable's physio and chiropractor each week and, while Gleeson describes her as sound and the preparation "smooth", her feet also require attention. This is one of the reasons she's spelling in Victoria. "We're going to keep her close by. The farrier does a lot of work with her and we need

Jockey Opie Bosson with Te Akau's Karyn Fenton-Ellis and Ben Gleeson on Champions Day at Flemington. Photo: Brett Holburt/Racing Photos

him to be able to go out and see her and help manage her feet. They're not perfect, by any means; she's just a bit soft in them, which is certainly an issue." But she's in good hands. Farrier John Bunting also worked with Winx, another equine queen.

While just two to three weeks in the paddock doesn't seem a long break, given all Imperatriz has achieved this year, it's again in her best interests to keep it short. "She just does very well in the paddock," Gleeson laughs. "She eats every blade of grass you can see and puts on weight very easily, which is a good thing, you know, she's going to go out and enjoy herself. But we don't want her getting too heavy. She won't be out for too long"

Like his stellar charge, nothing seems to perturb this 28-year-old. He exudes a quiet confidence. Nevertheless, he found the media coverage of the Te Akau star's Spring exasperating. Conjecture swirled, not just around whether Imperatriz would run in the Everest, but also how she'd handle the tight track at the Valley, the long straight at Flemington, night racing under lights and coping with the large crowds.

"We know the media [covering] Australian sport, certainly racing, love to try and find chinks in anyone's armour. It's all about speculation and basically stirring the pot as much as they can," says Gleeson. "As soon as a horse loses a race, [they're] not as good as we think they are. But sometimes those horses are still champions. So we've been pretty good at just ignoring the doubters this preparation, knowing how she's going. We count ourselves so lucky to have her in our stable and to all be working with her. It's an absolute privilege. Yeah, I [sometimes] do think 'You're training one of the best horses in the world'. You honestly pinch yourself and she's the reason you get out of bed in the morning. Which says enough." ■

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Jewel In The Crown

Peter Walsh played Aussie Rules as a pro, but the success of his home-bred mare is eclipsing anything he achieved on the footy field, writes Andrew Rule



When Peter Walsh was an apprentice butcher who played a bit of pro football, he reckoned he was going well if he didn't cut off any fingers at work and kicked a few goals and backed a winner on Saturdays.

Some things have changed since his 20s, including Walsh's idea of success – although he's still partial to backing a winner. But the bets are much bigger these days. In their understated way, Peter and his brother Greg have pulled off a rags-to-riches story.

After he quit footy, Peter coached for a while in his home district of Busselton, near Margaret River in Western Australia. Then he took over his father Vern's tiny abattoir and it went so well he lured Greg, an accountant, to come home from Perth. Greg handled the books and Peter hired good people, many of them his former players.

The Walshes built the abattoir into a powerhouse export meat business that has since bankrolled several spin-off ventures: a vineyard, a tavern... and a horse stud.

Cynics label horse breeding as a quick way to redistribute wealth made by more conventional means. That makes the story of Peter Walsh and the star graduate of his Amelia Park stud farm even better. In his case, breeding horses is an encore to a brilliant business career.

Not that creating Amelia Park was a cold-blooded business decision. When the meat expert went in for good horse flesh, he was following his heart rather than his head.

Walsh inherited his fondness for racehorses from his father and his paternal grandfather, Reg,

“Amelia’s Jewel could be poised to become the brightest star”

a bush barber who ran an SP book “down the back”. Peter, middle child of five, was still a teenager when his father won first up with his first galloper, Swift Wind, at Ascot on Perth Cup day in 1972.

Swift Wind was a mare. Maybe that success made Walsh keen on the equine females because, decades later when he started breeding, he kept fillies and sold colts. Which means he now has the best mare out of the west since Miss Andretti.

Had Walsh's biases run the opposite way, he would have sold his filly and raced the expensive



Peter Walsh with wife Annie. Photo: Western Racepix

Main image, left: Amelia’s Jewel. Photo: Bronwen Healy/The Image Is Everything

colt he bred the same year, a colt that hasn't set the track on fire. That means someone else would now be racing the electrifying Amelia's Jewel – arguably set to become the best race mare in Australasia over anything past the brilliant Imperatriz's pet sprint distances.

If Imperatriz can be compared with the likes of Miss Andretti, then Amelia's Jewel, still young and lightly raced, could be poised to become the brightest star since Winx.

Not only has Amelia's Jewel put together a string of wins in classy company, she's done it with ease, like a teenager playing against younger kids. She's shaping up as one of the rare few that can seemingly win races from any position in the field, ridden hands and heels.

At the time of writing, Amelia's Jewel has just set a 1600-metre track record at Moonee Valley in a Group Two on the night that Imperatriz broke the 1000-metre record in the Group One Moir Stakes. Imperatriz is at the top of her game — and Walsh's gem is rising fast.

With maturity and all necessary luck, Amelia's Jewel should get the chance to show the world why astute racing people are lauding her.

Her trainer, Simon Miller, shakes his head at what she does on the track. It's much the way Chris Waller was awestruck by Winx, and likewise Peter Moody stayed amazed by Black Caviar's casually brutal acceleration.

Miller says of Amelia's Jewel: “On the track she'll run two in 22, break 11 for the last 200 — but does it in neutral.”

Fast horses can run those times, but it's the effortless edge of Amelia Jewel's that fascinates and astounds.

Miller and Walsh are still bemused about what the mare's best distance might ultimately >>

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

be. Is she a natural sprinter who can stretch to the Cox Plate's 2040 metres – or even further? Or is she a gifted middle-distance performer that happens to also be brilliant enough to mix it with sprinters who would faint if pushed past 1400 metres?

Last December she won the Group One Northerly over 1800 metres, despite her early wins in sprints. Then she spelled and returned to win a Group Three race over 1100 on April 1 as a pipe opener for more serious engagements.

Such wonderfully versatile gallopers are rare. The great Tasmanian entire Malua was one, winning the Newmarket, Oakleigh Plate and Melbourne Cup in the same year.

Mahogany was a modern all-rounder, winning two Lightning Stakes and two Derbies in the 1990s. In the 1970s, Family Of Man won from 1000 metres to the classic distance of the West Australian Derby and was rated the world's best 1400-metre horse by Brent Thomson, who won one of his four Cox Plates on him.

Kingston Town proved himself a champion for the ages at virtually every distance Tommy Smith threw at him, except when his jockey fumbled a Melbourne Cup.

Amelia's Jewel has many scalps to take before she can be mentioned with those all-time greats. But she's clearly on the launching pad of a career that promises what few modern racehorses can — to transcend the sport by attracting fans from outside the industry bubble.



The Amelia's Jewel story starts with a grand holiday tour in the Australian winter of 2018.

Two years earlier the Walsh brothers had inked a huge deal for an abattoir in inner



Amelia's Jewel pictured as a foal.
Photo: Bronwen Healy/The Image Is Everything

Mongolia to supply the China market. It was a giant leap even for what was already an extraordinarily successful Australian export business.

Peter Walsh's wife Annie, originally from Beijing, thought the man who has almost everything should take in Royal Ascot to catch an English summer of racing royalty. So the former footballing butcher found himself in a morning suit watching perfectly groomed thoroughbreds line bred from a select few ancestors – and that was just the people in the royal enclosure. The horses were even better.

But Walsh hadn't crossed the world just to go racing. He went to Newmarket to see Frankel and his barn mate Kingman. And he crossed the

channel to the Aga Khan's stud in Normandy on the recommendation of his friend, bloodstock agent Louis Le Metayer, a Frenchman operating in Australia.

At the Aga Khan's, the grooms led out several of Europe's finest stallions. Only one riveted Walsh.

This was Siyouni, at the time not the top of the stud hierarchy. But the big bay played king of the beasts. He was snorting, neck arched, on his toes like a heavyweight champ before a title fight: machismo with menace and masculine good looks.

That night, "over a few drinks", Walsh kept talking about Siyouni and how he'd love to breed a foal by him.

Annie Walsh knows less about horses than her husband. She retorted that if he wanted to breed foals on the other side of the world, "then just grow some balls and do it".

So he did. Walsh first asked Le Metayer to buy him a suitable broodmare, maybe two. Le Metayer went to Tattersalls and paid 75,000 guineas (\$130,000) for Bumbasina, an Irish-bred mare virtually straight off the track. He also bought a Street Cry mare, Bound Copy, for 45,000 guineas (\$79,000).

Bound Copy went to Frankel's barn mate Kingman, a star son of Invincible Spirit. And Bumbasina went to Normandy, to Siyouni.

Both mares were served Southern Hemisphere time, then flown to Australia. They foaled down at Segenhoe before returning to Amelia Park, the stud Walsh has established on land at Vasse he'd bought from his father some years before.

The story of how the property and the Walsh export business got the Amelia Park name is linked to local history.

>>

“She had her sire's substance and her dam's quality”



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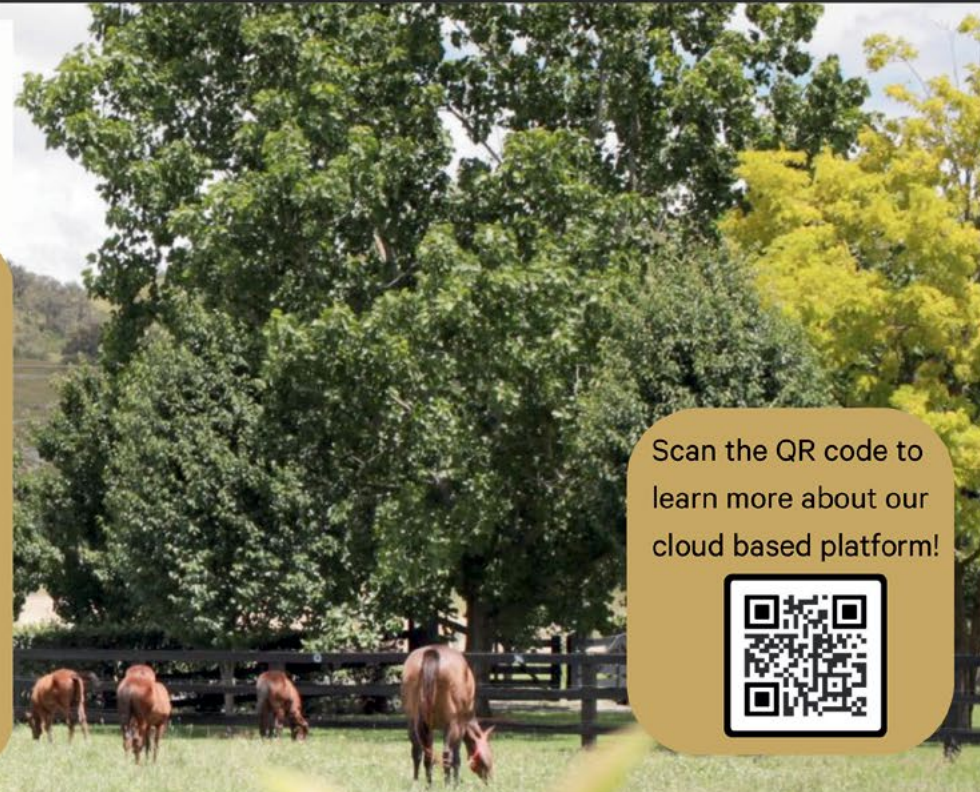
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JEWEL IN THE CROWN

The Curtis family was among the earliest settlers. One of them, an old woman named Amelia Curtis, ran her own cattle farm and flour mill until she was very old. “Miss Curtis” as she was known, eventually sold her farm to Walsh’s father Vern for £10,000 in the 1960s.

Later, when the mineral ilmenite (source of titanium) was found there, Walsh senior sold the place for five times his purchase price. He offered half the huge profit to Miss Curtis, who thanked him but declined.

Vern Walsh was touched by the old lady’s grace and was grateful for the good fortune she’d brought his family. So when he bought a 250-acre property nearby, he named it Amelia Park in her memory. When Peter bought that property from his father, he kept the name for both the farm and the business.

By the time Bumbasina and her mate arrived in Australia, she looked ordinary because she hadn’t travelled well. Walsh recalls his stud staff laughing at his venture into international bloodstock. But when the foals were dropped, they were such good types that the teasing stopped.

Bound Copy’s colt made \$600,000 at the 2021 Easter Sale in Sydney, and her next colt foal by So You Think made \$380,000.

Despite his big outlay, Walsh was in the black. And he still had his filly.

Ignoring the prejudice against first foals, he liked Bumbasina’s daughter from the start. By the time she was educated and starting to run in jump-outs and trials, he was delighted. She wasn’t overly tall, but she had her sire’s substance and her dam’s quality.

There’s a saying that no good horse has a bad head, which perhaps shows owners and trainers can be as forgiving, or perhaps as blind, as the fondest of parents. But it’s true that Amelia’s Jewel



Amelia’s Jewel ridden by Patrick Carbery wins the Group One Northerly Stakes in December 2022. Photo: Western Racepix

is easy on the eyes; some might argue the epitome of the modern thoroughbred.

Her head looks as if an artist drew it: generous jowl and throat, classic dished nose, eyes “you knock off with a stick”, as old timers used to say, and flaring nostrils big enough that a child could hide a fist in them. She is a solid bay all over bar a tiny dab of white on one pastern.

Peter Walsh’s princess has the look of a handsome sprinter-miler, well muscled and beautiful. What nobody can know for sure is how well she can play against type. Those closest

to her hope rather than expect that she would get the Cox Plate distance.

But if she fails to smash 2040 metres against the best, or isn’t asked to, it’s no hardship to have a four-year-old with freakish ability and, racing gods willing, three good seasons in her legs.

It is an era of champion mares that race on. Winx, Sunline and Black Caviar all raced at seven.

Apart from everything else, there’s this \$20 million race that happens in Sydney every year. And plenty of Group One spoils to be had. Just ask Imperatriz’s connections. ■

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2023 Highlights

This year we celebrate strong government support, a life dedicated to racing and bid farewell to two legends of the turf

Canberra Backs Thoroughbred Industry

A pivotal chance to showcase the vibrancy, integrity and national importance of the thoroughbred horse returned to Canberra in 2023 with federal politicians reaffirming their bipartisan support and critical understanding of Australia's racing and breeding industries to the national economy.

More than 40 MPs joined leading industry figures at Parliament House for the event hosted by Thoroughbred Breeders Australia (TBA) and the Parliamentary Friends of Primary Producers, which was held in October for the first time since 2019.

TBA chief executive Tom Reilly said it was vital the industry was able to meet formally and informally with federal members of parliament and government departments about a range of issues affecting the industry, including the potential impact of proposed wagering reforms, biosecurity, horse traceability and equine welfare initiatives.



MP Bill Shorten, Tom Reilly and MP Michael McCormack. Photo: Supplied

“In breeding and racing, we have lots of touchpoints with the federal government and these can throw up some complex issues to deal with,” Reilly said.

“To have the people who make decisions on policy in the room and listening and engaging with people from breeding and racing is a great opportunity. I was delighted with the turnout of over 40 politicians, including senior members of the government and opposition.”

The cross-party event was hosted in the private courtyard of Speaker Milton

Dick and run by co-convenors, Western Australian Liberal MP Nola Marino and NSW Labor MP Meryl Swanson, with the trio declaring their mutual love of racing.

Agriculture Minister Murray Watt addressed the gathering, publicly backing the thoroughbred industry.

“It’s an important opportunity for us to celebrate this important industry and I want to convey to you the support from the Albanese government for your industry,” Mr Watt said.

“There’s a lot of collaboration going

on between our government here and the industry, and I look forward to continuing to do that in the future.”

Nationals Leader David Littleproud added: “The thoroughbred industry is so important, from the city to the bush. It plays not just a financial role and an economic one in jobs, but it’s our outlet, an outlet for so many Australians to come together.”

The Member for Oxley in Queensland, Mr Dick emphasised that the Corfield Cup in north-west Queensland is as important to the region as prestigious the Caulfield Cup is to Melbourne, while Ms Marino underlined the significance racing holds for country communities in her electorate in Western Australia’s south-west. “I know this industry employs thousands, but it’s critical to underpinning many rural and regional economies as well, and the employment opportunities that go with that,” said Ms Marino, herself a thoroughbred breeder.

The Australian thoroughbred industry creates more than 80,000 jobs, while the breeding sector alone is responsible for 11,500 employees, nearly all of which can be found living and working in regional Australia.

Sun Sets On World Champion Sprinter's Career

In the months before her death, Queen Elizabeth II picked up the phone to speak to master trainer Chris Waller.

She had watched Australia's fastest horse annihilate Europe's best sprinters in the King's Stand Stakes at Royal Ascot, and couldn't believe what she was seeing through her television screen at Windsor Castle.

Her Majesty wanted to know how Waller moulded Nature Strip, the best horse on the other side of the world, to so arrogantly toy with his rivals in their own backyard.

"She was amazed at how big he is and how powerful he is," Waller said.

"Even Princess Anne said exactly the same thing, and she's a great horse person. She was there the day he won and she was just blown away by how big, strong and healthy he looked."

The phone call wasn't a complete bolt from the blue for Waller. He had come to know Queen Elizabeth and trained for her in Australia, even dining with the monarch on a previous visit, complete with corgis resting under the table. It was confirmation Nature Strip, one-time wild thing of Australian racing, had conquered the world.



Nature Strip winning the Group One King's Stand Stakes at Royal Ascot in 2022. Photos: Racing Fotos

Rarely is a racehorse's career linear, but that only makes it more interesting. Nature Strip rode the roller-coaster like no other.

By the time he had his 13th start, he was onto his fifth trainer in Waller, who would be the horse's last. He was electric and exciting, one good enough to lure legendary All Blacks rugby union coach Steve Hansen into the ownership, but also an enigma.

In the early days, you could see he was fast for half a race, but that's almost all he was. A horse every punter would scratch their heads over; lose when the betting market said he should win; and win when the market said maybe he shouldn't. By the end he had one of his part-owners, the late Jack Van Duuren, leaping out of his wheelchair to celebrate his 2021 win in the \$15 million Everest.

The numbers didn't lie: 22 career wins; nine Group Ones; twice an Australian Horse of the Year; almost \$21 million in earnings; and crowning glories in the Everest and a day where he blew the top hats off half of Royal Ascot under James McDonald.

It was enough to be crowned the world's highest rated sprinter in consecutive years – and have royalty wanting to know more.

Recognition For A Life Dedicated To Racing

John Brady was at Tulloch Lodge before Tulloch – he’s been there longer than the stable’s founder, the late Tommy Smith, and was mucking out boxes at the same training yard before the current proprietor, Gai Waterhouse, was even born.

And 70 years after he arrived as a 15-year-old, he’s still there.

The man known to generations of Randwick early-morning regulars as ‘Crewy’ was part of the rise to the top of a racing stable that dominated the game in Australia. He is also a precious link to the champions of several eras – and especially to Tulloch, the horse he is adamant was the best of them all.

Crewy began work at Smith’s stable in Bowral Street, Randwick in 1953, the year Smith won the first of his 33 consecutive Sydney trainers’ premierships, and was there when he won the last of them in 1986.

But for Crewy, all of that has been superseded by the personal recognition he received when named winner of the Dedication to Racing and Thoroughbred Excellence Awards at the 2023 Australian Stud and Stable Staff Awards (SSSA).



John ‘Crewy’ Brady. Photo: Sharon Lee Chapman

“This is one of the greatest things that’s ever happened to me,” Crewy said as he received his awards at the Gold Coast earlier this year.

“To think that after all of these years people notice what you’ve

done and give you some recognition, it’s very, very satisfying.”

The memory of Smith and the old horses remains as clear as ever to Crewy, who recalls his former boss as a hard man with a great eye.

“TJ was always ahead of the others, he thought differently,” Crewy said.

Smith also had a novel way of rewarding his most faithful employee: “I was lucky I had the same sized feet as the boss. Every time he got a new pair of shoes, he gave me the old ones.”

As the winner of the Dedication to Racing Award, Crewy received \$10,000, plus a further \$5,000 as winner of the overall Thoroughbred Excellence category.

Winners in the other categories of the SSSA included Kayleigh Walsh from Fernrigg Farm in the Hunter Valley, who received the Dedication to Breeding Award, Emile Fredericks of the Hunter’s Widden Stud, (Horsemanship), Mary O’Neill from another venerable NSW stud, Newgate Farm (Administration and Ancillary Services) and James Green of Armidale Stud in Tasmania (Newcomer).

Each received a trophy and a cheque for \$10,000 at the awards staged jointly by Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, Racing Australia and Godolphin, and sponsored by Inglis, Magic Millions, the Australian Turf Club, the Melbourne Racing Club Foundation, Racing Queensland, Thoroughbred Industry Careers and Marcus Oldham College.

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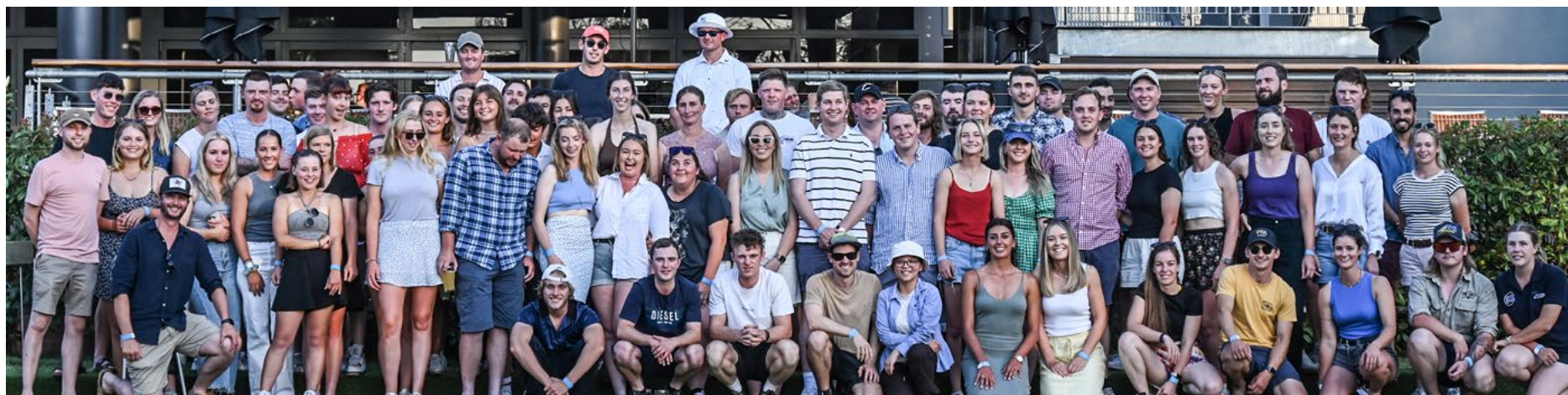
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TBA Next Crop Creating New Generation Of Breeders And Leaders



Members of the NSW chapter of TBA Next Crop. Photo: McKoy Loomis

Forging future leaders and increasing engagement and participation in the thoroughbred breeding industry are at the heart of Thoroughbred Breeders Australia's (TBA) Next Crop initiative.

Set up in May 2023 and aimed specifically at those aged 35 and under, TBA Next Crop is free to join and is designed to open doors and create pathways for personal and professional development.

The group already boasts more than 300 members who have taken part in a range of national networking opportunities and exclusive events which brought together like-minded young people who work in the industry or have an active interest in breeding.

The events included stallion parade tours at several leading stud farms

across New South Wales and Victoria, including Newgate Farm, Godolphin and Yulong, as well as a series of workshops and webinars covering off a range of topics related to the breeding industry.

TBA Education and Project Manager Madison Tims is a staunch advocate of the program, which aims to have a presence in every state of Australia.

"TBA Next Crop provides great entry level opportunities for young people who are interested in breeding and want to get involved, as well as the chance for anyone already working in the industry to meet people of their own age and build friendships and share ideas and information," she said.

"Next Crop is built on the three pillars of meet, grow and lead. It allows members to further their education and build a network, which will help them along their chosen career paths, and also enables anyone with experience of the breeding industry the chance to hone their leadership skills."

Lachlan Pethica, who began his thoroughbred career on TBA's Fast Track program before going on to Godolphin's Flying Start, helped develop the plan for Next Crop when on Sheikh Mohammed's flagship graduate program. He presented the innovative concept to the TBA board who were more than happy to support funds for the project.

Pethica, who is now working with the nominations team at Newgate Farm and has helped organise Next Crop events in the Hunter Valley, said he was excited by the response to the launch of the group.

"The events we've held have been really well attended and have given staff from lots of different farms the chance to meet, have some fun and learn something. Everyone involved in Next Crop is looking forward to growing this project in 2024 with the aim of supporting young people in breeding."

Next Crop will be holding an event at the Magic Millions in January, as well as other yearling sales around the country in the first months of next year.

For more information and to join TBA Next Crop, visit tbaus.com/next-crop.

Damien Oliver Announces Retirement After 35 Years

It didn't matter how many millions of people were watching on television, like they do every year, or how many different horses they had drawn in sweeps, it's safe to say there's never been a Melbourne Cup where everyone had agreed they only wanted one horse to win.

Jason Oliver never got to win a Melbourne Cup, but his breeches did. Down the side of his brother Damien's gear in the 2002 Melbourne Cup was the name J Oliver. As Irish stayer Media

Puzzle stormed to victory, Damien looked skyward and blew a kiss before shouting, "My boy". It was a reference to Jason, who had died six days earlier after a horse he was riding broke down in a barrier trial.

"The Melbourne Cup doesn't mean anything to me anymore," Oliver cried straight after the race. "I'd give it away right now to have my brother back.

But I know it was the right thing to ride. Jason would have wanted that. This has made me think of how dangerous this game is, but I knew my brother would have wanted me to be here."

The next day, Oliver flew back to Perth for his brother's funeral, leaving his Melbourne Cup trophy on the coffin. His father, Ray, a jockey, died after his own race fall in 1975. Oliver was just three.

Rival jockeys even admitted to hoping Oliver could win the 2002 Melbourne Cup if they couldn't, and he duly did. The late Les Carlyon, horse

Damien Oliver lifts the Melbourne Cup after winning the race aboard Media Puzzle. Photo: Bronwen Healy/The Image Is Everything

racing's finest wordsmith, admitted if Damien Oliver's Melbourne Cup win was a Hollywood script, you could argue it would be too rich. They ended up making a movie about it.

After a career in which he won more Group One races than any other Australian jockey – including three Melbourne Cups – Oliver announced his retirement during the 2023 Spring

Carnival, drawing an end to a 35-year career that included more than 3,000 winners and the grand slam.

Such was his longevity, Oliver only missed riding in three Melbourne Cups after his first in 1989: one to injury, another through

suspension and the last when his horse missed the race. He was inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame 15 years before his retirement.

There were self-induced hiccups too, like the time he was banned for eight months in 2012 when he was found to have bet \$10,000 on a rival horse in a Moonee Valley race in 2010.

He came back the following year and won Gai Waterhouse's first Melbourne Cup on Fiorente, deferring to the master trainer in his own muted celebrations.

"I knew my brother would have wanted me to be here"

Damien Oliver on winning the Melbourne Cup in 2002 after brother Jason's death





Photo: Donald Lee

Hong Kong Hero

In troubled times, a new champion emerged, changing the history of racing and the lives of many, writes Michael Cox

Hong Kong trainer Francis Lui is relaxing in the passenger seat on an off-season visit to the Hunter Valley in NSW, gazing upon fields that are the birthplace of many champions to have graced the Sha Tin turf.

At ease, days after the intensity of another season affected by restrictions – hopefully the last like it after three years of emotional strain – it is an ideal time to take a breath and reflect on the first time he laid eyes on the champion that emerged during that testing time, Golden Sixty.

“I remember seeing him for the first time in his stable and what I thought was that he was the ideal size for a Hong Kong horse,” Lui recalls of the horse that changed the trajectory of his career. “He was not too small – horses need to be big enough to carry the top weights in the handicaps in Hong Kong – but not too big either. Honestly, I thought, ‘Nice horse’, but I wasn’t too excited. Even after his first gallops and trials I thought he was just above average. But after a while we started to see he wasn’t just average.

“But what you can’t see when you look at a horse is what is inside. How competitive they are. It’s the heart that counts.”

The softly spoken 63-year-old is travelling with his son, Vincent, a trackwork rider in his stable. They are in the Hunter Valley to visit Lui’s 21-year-old daughter, Angie, who is at Coolmore Stud on a work placement to complement her bloodstock and performance management studies in England.



Lui, a former mid-table trainer, is enjoying a late career flourish. He has just completed a season in which he came out a fast-finishing second to the great Australian trainer John Size.

“A champion horse like Golden Sixty changes everything,” Lui says of his own rapid rise.

Lui averaged 26 wins per season in his 20 campaigns before Golden Sixty came into the picture. In the four seasons since then, Lui has trained 63, 61, 55 and 67 winners, never finishing

Trainer Francis Lui says Golden Sixty is the horse that “taught him how to train”.
Photo: Donald Lee

below third in the championship during that Golden Sixty-inspired run.

“Of course, owners want to come to your stable when you have a horse like Golden Sixty,” Lui says. “But really, I think Golden Sixty has taught me how to train. He tells you what he wants to do; when to back off and when to push. Golden Sixty is very wilful and he likes his routine. He does what he wants out on the track – he almost trains himself.”

The Hong Kong connection – from Lui to jockey Vincent Ho and owner Stanley Chan – is strong. Lui is a former Hong Kong Jockey Club apprentice jockey and son of a mafoo (strapper). That Golden Sixty is trained by a local might seem unsurprising given the rise of local trainers in recent years.

John Size took a record 12th championship in 2022/23 – his fifth title in eight years – but the four places behind him in the standings were trainers born-and-bred in Hong Kong. Seven of the top 10 trainers in the premierships were ‘locals’.

There was a time not so long ago when a struggling mid-table local trainer such as Lui would be under pressure to keep a horse like Golden Sixty away from the expats.

It was a pattern Lui learnt for himself when he lost the then up-and-coming champion Ambitious Dragon to South African trainer Tony Millard, after the still-developing horse was defeated in four starts as a three-year-old. >>

HONG KONG HERO

Admittedly, Golden Sixty's owner, Stanley Chan, has never had much of a reason to consider any other trainer than Lui.

Golden Sixty – a bargain \$120,000 purchase from the 2017 Magic Millions Gold Coast Yearling Sale – won his first three starts as a three-year-old and was defeated as favourite late in the season. That marked the last time that Golden Sixty would be beaten in 566 days.

After returning as a four-year-old, Golden Sixty ran roughshod through the Hong Kong ranks, rising 37 ratings points and winning a dramatic 2020 Hong Kong Derby.

Golden Sixty's 16-race winning streak was just one short of the fellow Australian-bred champion Silent Witness.

The title of the Greatest Of All Time – and its modern day acronym, G.O.A.T. – sparks heated debate throughout the sporting world. In basketball, the pundits argue the claims of Michael Jordan and LeBron James. In tennis, the debate rages around Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. In football, Pelé, Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi. In Hong Kong racing, for the best part of two decades, there was no debate. Silent Witness was the undisputed, all-time champion of the city.

Built like a tank and the winner of his first 17-races, Silent Witness was famous for not only his on-track exploits, but for becoming a symbol of hope in troubled times. Much of what Silent Witness achieved was during a period of fear and uncertainty as the SARS virus brought death and economic ruin.

At a racecourse where crowds are famously unsentimental, a bronze statue of Silent Witness at the top of the Sha Tin straight stands as testament to the sprinter's transcendent fame. The statue is the first port of call after fans walk through



the nearby public entrance, with many stopping to pose for selfies with the icon.

Nearly two decades after Silent Witness brought hope to a city, the parallels are impossible to ignore with Golden Sixty: he is the horse that gave people something to cheer for during the unprecedented upheaval of COVID.

It isn't lost on Golden Sixty's connections that much of what he achieved was in front of eerily empty grandstands. But maybe the fact the wins were in front of thousands of empty seats – without the trademark roar of a packed Sha Tin crowd cheering for an odds-on favourite – is what made Golden Sixty's impact even more profound.

At a time when Hong Kong was suffering through a period of unprecedented uncertainty, Golden Sixty emerged as a constant. His winning streak began on September 1, 2019, at the height of the social unrest that rocked the city, and through some of the world's strictest COVID restrictions.

Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated cities on the planet and thousands

Vincent Ho pilots Golden Sixty to victory in front of an empty grandstand in the 2020 Group One Hong Kong Classic Cup. Photo: Lo Chun Kit/Getty Images

would have stood and cheered in their apartments as the short-priced favourite saluted.

So, is Golden Sixty Hong Kong racing's G.O.A.T.? It is one for the Hong Kong racing pundits to argue and for the social media masses to debate, but what does Golden Sixty's trainer think?

Lui pauses, almost pained by the weight of the question. "I think so," he says. "He is the best; his record, the Derby win and the way he has done it over different distances."

The numbers make a compelling case for Golden Sixty, but what of that social impact? Does Golden Sixty match the statue-inspiring greatness of Silent Witness?

"That is hard for me to say," Lui says. "But what I do know is that when I go out in Hong Kong, the only thing people want to talk to me about is Golden Sixty."

What isn't a matter of opinion is that even compared with all of the great Hong Kong champions before him, Silent Witness included, in the 2002/23 season Golden Sixty achieved >>

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HONG KONG HERO

something no other horse had: he won a third Hong Kong horse of the year award.

Hong Kong owners have earned a reputation over the years as being as unsentimental as those rowdy fans in the Sha Tin outer. Those owners have been, after all, the one signing the transfer papers that sent the up-and-coming horses from locals into the bigger expat stables. But what is even more commonplace than a stable transfer is booking a foreign jockey to replace a Hong Kong rider. When Golden Sixty's owner openly wept on stage at the gala presentation in Kowloon in July 2023, his raw emotion spoke to his pride, the "spirit of Hong Kong" and Golden Sixty's legacy.

"Sorry, I'm so excited because it is the third time for this horse," Chan said.

As a lifelong racing fan, Chan grew up one tram stop from Happy Valley. His heroes were local jockeys Tony Cruz and Eddie Lo, so it goes without saying he takes particular happiness in the fact that his champion horse has been ridden through every start in those four record-breaking seasons by a local jockey, Vincent Ho.

"Of course I want to support the local jockey; each season we have less and less local jockeys. If we do not support the local jockeys then maybe in five years it will just be the gweilos," Chan said recently in an interview with *Asian Racing Report*, good-naturedly using the Cantonese slang term for an expat – "gweilo". "Vincent was the jockey from day one, he was on the horse in trackwork in the morning right from the start, so why should I change the jockey?"

Like Lui, Ho's career has struck a serious upward trajectory since combining his experience with Golden Sixty.

Before Golden Sixty, Ho had ridden his share of top horses as they progressed through Hong Kong's highly structured handicap system, only



to lose out to foreign riders, including Zac Purton, João Moreira, Brett Prebble and Douglas Whyte.

Golden Sixty's rise was a turning point though, as Ho's reputation gathered momentum alongside the steed collecting accolades.

The 33-year-old jockey had not ridden a single Group One win before Golden Sixty, but as of the end of 2022/23 season, they had combined for nine, plus the three legs of the four-year-old series. Ho has slingshotted off that success with three straight Tony Cruz Awards as leading local jockey and ridden Group One wins on three other horses. In 2022/23, Ho finished second to Zac Purton in the jockeys' championship, riding 96 winners, well clear of third-placed Hugh Bowman on 62.

"I'm nothing without him – all credit to Golden Sixty," Ho said after the Champions Mile, the horse's 25th career win [another record]. "He's such a superstar. I'm very happy for him. He looks around and enjoys the crowd – it's his home turf.

Owner Stanley Chan with a mural of his champion Golden Sixty in Hong Kong. Photo: Asian Racing Report

"I told myself before the race to try to enjoy every moment with Golden Sixty because he's seven now. We don't know when he'll retire, so it's best to enjoy every step with him."

As of that day, and the end of the 2022/23 season, Golden Sixty had won HK\$148 million (AU\$29.1 million), moving just past Winx as the most of any horse in horse racing history.

As the sun sets on a glorious August day in the Hunter Valley and the light catches the ridges, Lui knows his champion's magnificent career is closer to the end than it is the beginning.

He also knows that Golden Sixty's career means more than money, statistics or awards. Or even whether or not the horse that changed his life is considered the "greatest".

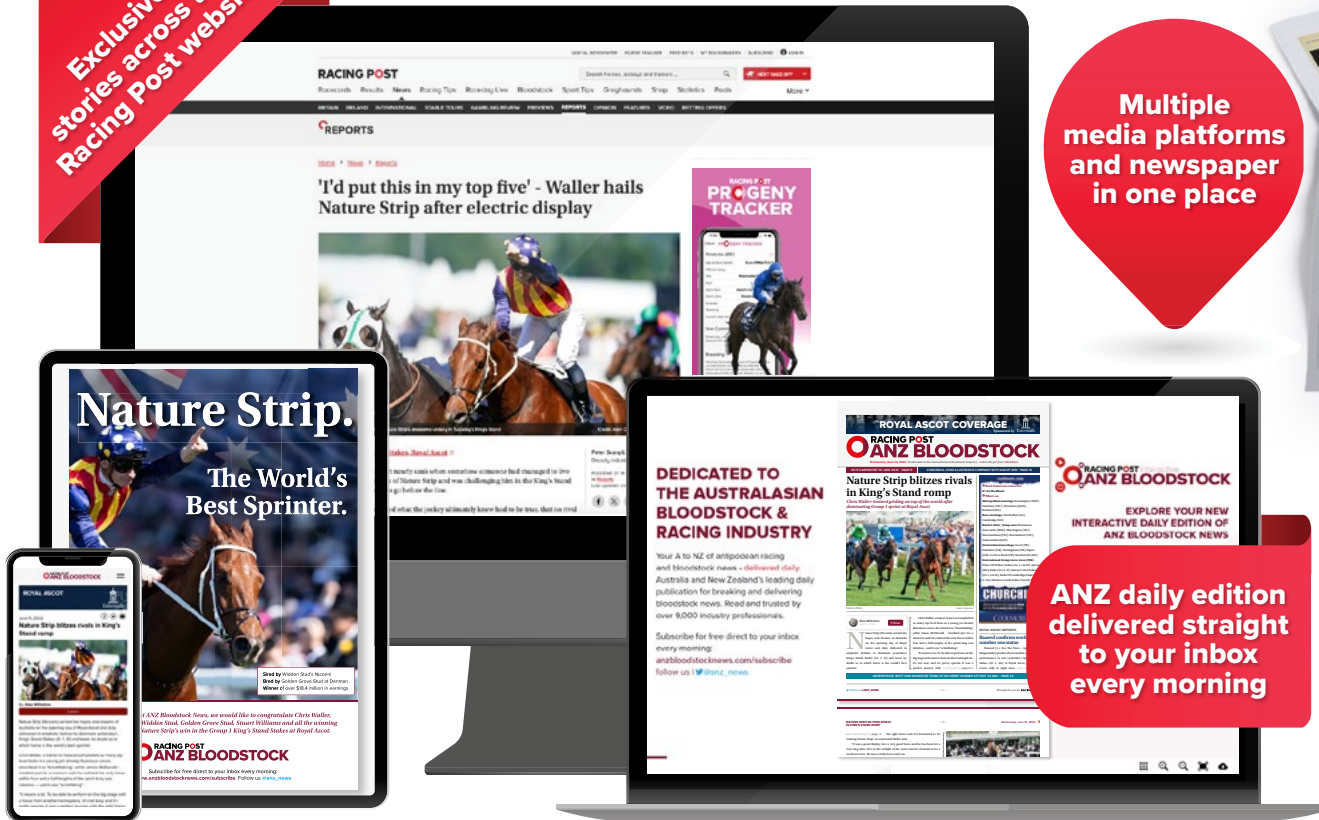
"He is my greatest, I know that. This horse has helped a lot of people," he says. "The owner Stanley, his jockey Vincent and myself, but maybe many other people as well. He is a special horse." ■

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Celebrating Choisir

It's been 20 years since the Australian sprinter's historic Royal Ascot campaign, paving the way for a parade of performers to follow, writes Adam Pengilly

Choisir was the first Australian racehorse the United Kingdom had barely heard of, let alone seen. As he walked into the paddock at Royal Ascot, his chestnut coat glowing, punters' eyes darted up and down from the race book to his large rump, trying to work out if this was serious or a sideshow. One of the world's best trainers, John Gosden, did a double take.

"The one thing I thought is, 'You could have a pretty good dinner over his hind quarters,'" Gosden recalls. "You could have had two or three plates [balancing on there]. The width of his hip and strength [was phenomenal]."

Four days later, the first Australian-trained horse to ever travel for the Royal Ascot meeting had won not once – but twice – and instantly made an insular and often parochial industry open to all.

It's been 20 years since Choisir created history with his King's Stand Stakes and Golden Jubilee



double run down the famous straight in 2003, but it was only by accident it happened in the first place.

NSW trainer Paul Perry, who is based out of Newcastle just two hours north of Sydney, had initially intended to travel Choisir to Singapore for the Krisflyer Sprint. But the race was cancelled

Choisir, ridden by Johnny Murtagh, gallops to victory in the 2003 Group One King's Stand Stakes at Royal Ascot.
Photo: Trevor Jones

after the outbreak of the SARS virus, prompting Perry to think further afield. And so he took on a challenge Australian connections had barely contemplated, let alone followed through with.

On the first day of the royal meeting, legendary Irish jockey Johnny Murtagh was asked



“Without Choisir, it’s hard to think Australian horses would have had such success”

Tom Reilly, Aushorse CEO

Choisir might not have been better on the Saturday in the Golden Jubilee, but he didn’t need to be. He won again.

“Step aside, Phar Lap”, roared prolific broadcaster Jim McGrath in the commentary.

It was the first time a horse had won twice at the same royal meeting since 1983... and it was a horse from the other side of the world whose country had never tried travelling a competitor to Royal Ascot before.

From then, they kept coming and coming and coming. As part of the 20-year celebrations of Choisir’s historic Royal Ascot campaign, Aushorse held a promotion where two London taxis were adorned with Australian champions on the side, including Takeover Target, Nature Strip, Black Caviar and, of course, Choisir himself. The taxis featured on the ITV broadcast of the 2023 meeting, showcasing the country’s flourishing industry to millions of viewers around the world, as current competitors Coolangatta, Artorius, Cannonball and The Astrologist flew the flag again for Australia, along with Hong Kong-trained Wellington, also Australian-bred.

“Without Choisir, it’s hard to think Australian horses would have had such success and been able to showcase how robust our breeding and racing industry is on the world stage,” Aushorse chief executive Tom Reilly says. “His story is one of a remarkable adventure on behalf of connections who had steadfast belief our breed can match it with Europe’s best.

“It’s been a special time to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of that memorable week. To have our industry so prominent on the streets around London and Newmarket, and on the worldwide >>

to ride Choisir in the five-furlong race. Perry told Murtagh Choisir had two speeds: slow and very fast. By the time he’d cantered down to the stalls, Murtagh knew why. After breaking cleanly when sent off at 25-1, Choisir ran his King’s Stand rivals into the ground – an instant Australian trailblazer.

Celebrating past Australia-bred Royal Ascot winners in London as part of the 20th anniversary of Choisir.
Photo: Stridyl

Sure, Australians were used to winning at cricket and rugby over in the United Kingdom, but horse racing on the Queen’s track?

“We’ll run him again on Saturday and he will be even better,” Perry told Murtagh after the race. Murtagh simply shook his head.

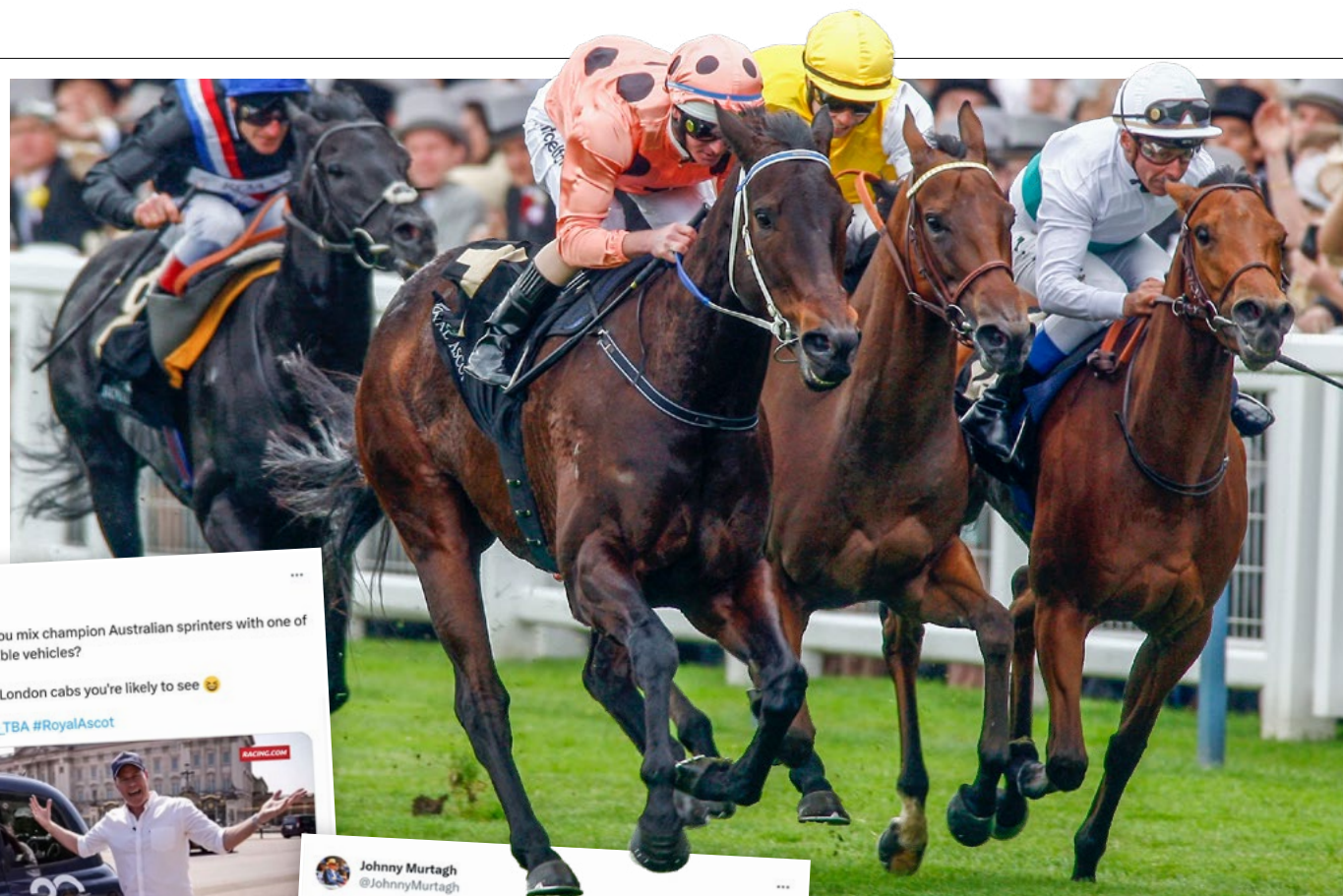
CELEBRATING CHOISIR

telecast, is a testament to what's been achieved since that groundbreaking trip in 2003."

In years following, Australia's Royal Ascot honour roll has been overflowing: a taxi driver who bought a horse for \$1250 and met the Queen; a West Australian who was almost withdrawn hours before his race as his papers hadn't been sighted by stewards; an incomparable mare who survived an attack by a swarm of bees and won by the proverbial when her rider dropped his hands in the final stages; and a ball of muscle who slept on cardboard rather than hay due to his hay fever tendencies.

In the 20 years since Choisir's win, Takeover Target (2006), Miss Andretti (2007), Haradasun (2008), Scenic Blast (2009), Starspangledbanner (2010), Black Caviar (2012) and Merchant Navy (2018) have all won at Royal Ascot. Black Caviar won the Diamond Jubilee Stakes on the final day of the meeting when, by her trainer Peter Moody's admission, she was "only firing on three cylinders". She scrambled home with jockey Luke Nolen trying to ease her to the line. Though once he realised the danger with the onrushing Moonlight Cloud, Nolen would later say: "I duly s--- myself." So, too, did the rest of Australia watching. It was Black Caviar's 22nd straight win and she would retire unbeaten in 25 starts as the most famous Australian to compete at Royal Ascot.

Last year, Nature Strip picked up where all those had gone before him with a scintillating win in the King's Stand Stakes under James McDonald. Training the horse hadn't been easy. For various



Above: Luke Nolen rides Black Caviar to her 22nd straight win in the 2012 Diamond Jubilee Stakes at Royal Ascot. Photo: The Racing Post

reasons, he was recycled through trainers at the start of his career. By the time Hall-of-Famer Chris Waller had his hands on the speedball, he worked out he needed to do away with the traditional hay base for the horse's stable as it affected his allergies and cluttered up his airways too much. By the time he stamped himself as the world's best sprinter, he only had a riderless horse for company in the Royal Ascot photo finish as he obliterated his rivals.

The irony was not lost: a bold, front-running chestnut whose hindquarters were so large his trainer would often ask for a barrier extension because he could barely fit in a starting stall. You could probably fit a few dinner plates on him, too. ■

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The Lyndhurst Legacy

When it comes to standing stallions, generations of good management and good luck has proved a winning combination for the Kruger family, writes Jessica Owers



Third-generation studmaster Jeff Kruger pictured with Champion QLD Stallion Better Than Ready.
Photo: Sharon Lee Chapman

No one can guarantee a stallion, but you'd forgive Jeff Kruger if he thought he could. At Lyndhurst Stud in Queensland's Darling Downs, on a broad bend of the Condamine River, he's had good stallion after good stallion – the kind they call “farm makers”. From Sequalo to Celestial Dancer, Smokey Eyes, Grand Chaudiere and The Buzzard, this property has stood them all up to today's unlikely hero, the charcoal-coated Better Than Ready.

For this corner of Queensland, competing as it does with the muscle in New South Wales, Lyndhurst's stallion success is amazing. They've been tough horses with robust constitutions and a talent for siring winners, and the Krugers have been the most practical of studmasters. But nothing is guaranteed.

“We always seem to have a good sire on our roster, and you can go back year after year and the list will go on,” Kruger says. “But I don't know about expecting the next one to be like the rest of them. You make every effort for it to work out that way, but it won't always happen, will it?”

Jeff Kruger is the son of Merrell ‘Mick’ Kruger, who in turn is the son of Percy Kruger. It was Percy, alongside his brother Ted, who bought Lyndhurst Stud in 1956 from the McDougall family. The Krugers had split interests in timber and manufacturing alongside bloodstock, and they were highly successful. The name lingers in the citizen annals at Ipswich and nearby Warwick, as it does in the Queensland Hall of Fame.

In those early days on Lyndhurst Stud it wasn't so challenging to import the



Ted and Percy Kruger (from left) purchased Lyndhurst Stud (above) in 1956. Photos: Sharon Lee Chapman; Supplied



calibre of Smokey Eyes by Stardust or Celestial Dancer by Godswalk. “Things have changed a lot,” Kruger says. “Once upon a time, we could afford to go abroad and import a good horse, but in a lot of cases now you need 10 to 20 million to set up a Group One-winning stallion. The whole ballgame has really changed for a farm like us.”

Smokey Eyes led the Australian sires' title (for winners) for 12 consecutive years from 1961 to 1973. Celestial Dancer was Queensland's champion sire seven times, while Sequalo was also a title-winning stallion through his 18 years at Lyndhurst Stud. Into their shoes has stepped Better Than Ready, a horse as though filled with the wisdom of the last 70 years.

“Despite the history, we're no different to every other farm that takes a stallion,” Jeff Kruger says. “We may have been afforded good luck along the way, but you could say it's been a combination of good luck and good management.”

Better Than Ready was retired to Lyndhurst Stud in 2015. He'd been a marvellous racehorse, winning four stakes races and running third in Group One company. He handled the wet, the dry, the inside and outside rails, and he seemed to consistently show up, winning half of his 16 starts. As a stallion, he has behaved similarly. In season 2018/19, he was champion first season sire by winners, and it was only Sidestep, via his Golden Slipper winner Kiamichi, who pipped him for the overall title by earnings. As it was, he and Sidestep were the only two freshman sires that accumulated in excess of \$2 million in progeny earnings that year.

In 2015, Better Than Ready's service fee started at \$9,900 (inc GST). It's now significantly >>

THE LYNDHURST LEGACY

higher. Season on season, the son of More Than Ready has vied for the lead in the two-year-old sires' premiership by winners, equalling I Am Invincible last season (with 20) and winning the title outright two years ago. He's had nine stakes winners, including the Group One-winning Apache Chase, and like Not A Single Doubt and I Am Invincible, Better Than Ready has clattered right away from his modest starting fee.

The near-black thoroughbred has stood at Lyndhurst Stud alongside Barbaric and Rothesay since 2015. "We were approached by Yarramalong Park to stand Better Than Ready," Jeff Kruger says. "They didn't have the infrastructure to stand the horse, so we put a plan together where Lyndhurst stood and syndicated the horse and Yarramalong maintained a quarter-share of him. We've had to work hard to put him in place here and you could say we got lucky again."

Is it luck when luck happens this often? Better Than Ready is, without argument, one of the best horses ever to have stood at Lyndhurst Stud.

"Apart from Smokey Eyes and, God permitting we can keep him going, Better Than Ready may very well be the best we've ever had here," Kruger says. "I don't think any of our stallions will surpass Smokey Eyes. He sired classic winners, he sired Derby winners, and there actually hasn't been a Queensland stallion that has sired the classic winners as he did. I don't know if there'll ever again be a Queensland stallion like Smokey Eyes. He must rank as the best, but we would consider Better Than Ready to be the next best to have gone through our barn – and it's only early days."

Yarramalong Park is a distance up the Cunningham Highway from Lyndhurst Stud. It's owned by Richard and Joanie Foster who have been loyal to Better Than Ready since day dot. In the horse's first crop, the Fosters received nine

STARS OF THE LYNDHURST ROSTER



THE BUZZARD (GB)

Spion Kop (IRE) x **Valescure** (GB)

1926 – 1952

Two-time Champion Sire of 42 individual stakes winners, including Melbourne Cup-winners Old Rowley and Rainbird, and Caulfield Cup-winners Buzalong and Basha Felika.



SMOKEY EYES (IRE)

Stardust (GB) x **Celestial Light** (GB)

1947 – 1974

The foundation sire for the Kruger family who led the Australian sires' table (for winners) for 12 consecutive seasons. Champion Broodmare Sire in 1970/71 and the sire of outstanding juvenile filly Eye Liner.

individual two-year-old winners, among them the stakes winner Better Reflection. Year on year, they have upgraded their broodmares to support Better Than Ready and that sort of loyalty from inaugural investors has certainly helped Better Than Ready off the blocks. It's also clearly been appreciated by Lyndhurst Stud.

"A decent service fee is generating the good mares, and those clients with the good mares are doing well from it," he says. "Yarramalong, for example, are constantly upgrading to support the stallion and that's what you want from your shareholders. Richard Foster has sent the horse some wonderful mares and, between us all, we've been able to guarantee Better Than Ready good numbers, which is essential to a horse standing

a good chance of being in that winners' category. Those horses that aren't afforded that opportunity with early numbers, they will never appear on the sires' list for winners. They might appear on the earnings list because they'll strike one good one, but for being a prolific sire of winners, you've got to have that initial support at stud."

Of the 40 shareholders in Better Than Ready, the bulk are still in the horse. It was the same for Sequalo, who died in 2014 with 45 shareholders, 40 of which were the original investors. Of Better Than Ready's original shareholders, two cashed out when offers proved too good to refuse after the stallion's first batch of two-year-olds, and a further two cashed out in the last six months. The movement opened the door for a pair of >>

Photos: Bluebloods

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STARS OF THE LYNDHURST ROSTER (CONTINUED)



GRAND CHAUDIERE (CAN)
Northern Dancer (CAN) x **Lachine** (GB)
1968 – 1993

Imported from Canada in 1972 by the Kruger's, making him the first son of the great Northern Dancer to stand in Australia. Sired the 1977 George Ryder Stakes-winner Pacific Ruler, whose dam was Eye Liner.



CELESTIAL DANCER (IRE)
Godswalk (USA) x **Oulanova** (FR)
1979 – 2007

A stakes winner in France and a Group Three winner in Germany prior to joining the roster at Lyndhurst. Sired 14 individual stakes winners. By Godswalk, the first shuttle stallion into Australia.



SEQUALO (AUS)
Rustic Amber (IRE) x **Dash Around** (AUS)
1990 – 2014

Multiple Group-winning sprinter who retired to stud in 1997. Sired the dual Group One-winner Spirit Of Boom, who is a four-time Champion QLD Stallion and leading sire of 2YO winners in Australia in 2022/23.

new, heavily commercial investors that otherwise might not have wriggled their way in.

“Two major farms have come onboard, and they’ve obviously got the right mares to get into the major sales,” Kruger says. “We’re very happy about that.”

Early in 2023, the landscape changed a little when Henry Field, the master of Newgate Farm, went to \$530,000 for a colt by Better Than Ready on the Gold Coast. It was the highest price ever paid for a Better Than Ready yearling and it was suddenly obvious that the southern studs were paying attention. Better Than Ready’s shareholders have deflected big money offers to relocate the horse to the Hunter Valley, as did Eureka Stud with Spirit Of Boom’s early crops.

Photos: Bluebloods

It’s a windfall for Queensland that Better Than Ready will stay put on the Darling Downs because that’s what studmaster dreams are made of, right? It’s what the Krugers do best, if history has any weight in the discussion.

“If we didn’t have him, we’d be like ducks in the lake with our heads bobbing in and out of the water,” Kruger says. “He generates agistment and stallion income, and any improvements being done on the farm right now are off the back of Better Than Ready, no doubt about it.”

At 83 years old, Merrell Kruger kicks about in witness to Lyndhurst’s latest success story. It must be fascinating to have his living memories and to compare them to Better Than Ready today. Left-field thinking is generational in the Kruger

family, going back to Grand Chaudiere being the first son of Northern Dancer imported into Australia. Celestial Dancer, later on, was brought in off the back of Godswalk, his sire being the first shuttle horse into Australia. Percy Kruger was responsible for one, Merrell Kruger the other.

“It’s a lot harder these days to think left field,” Jeff Kruger says, and there’s no doubt about that. Competition for stallions is now higher, the margins are now lower and the centralisation of the breeding industry is more challenging, especially for outlier studs like those found in Queensland. But it’s as if no one told Better Than Ready that the odds were stacked against him. At any rate, even if they might be, he seems like a horse that loves a challenge. ■



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The Australian Influence

The results speak for themselves – Australian mares are punching well above their weight on the international stage, writes Jessica Owers

At the Keeneland September Yearling Sale in the American autumn of 2019, a Curlin colt changed the landscape of Australian breeding. Hip 274 was a neat, well-mannered youngster for breeder Stonestreet Farms, but it was still a shock when he sold to Godolphin for US\$4.1 million.

“He’s been perfect from day one,” said Stonestreet owner Barbara Banke, who was mobbed by cameras in the aftermath of the sale, largely because of her colt’s unusual breeding. He was the first foal from the Australian mare Bounding, and never before had an Australian mare lit up an American sale ring like this.

Bounding, then nine years old, was a four-time Group-race winner. She was by Lonhro, and had gone to Kentucky after her AU\$1.9 million purchase by Stonestreet at the Magic Millions National Broodmare Sale three years before. Bounding was a half-sister to the 2019 Epsom Derby winner, Anthony Van Dyck, and the dam of both horses



was the Coolmore-based Australian Exceed And Excel mare Believe‘N’Succeed.

Hip 274 cast a spotlight on the merit of his Australian page, but he was also a landmark moment for the credibility of the overseas Australian broodmare.

“It was the awakening of a sleeping giant Down Under,” says Glenn Burrows, whose Willow

Liberty Island, pictured after winning the Japanese Oaks, is out of the Australian-bred Group One-winning mare Yankee Rose.
Photo: Shuhei Okada

Park Stud operation bred, raised and sold Bounding after sourcing Believe‘N’Succeed. In Burrows’s opinion, Bounding and her dam represented new international respect for maternal colonial lines.

“Previously, our best mares had been undervalued in respect to the best of the Northern Hemisphere mares, who had always

THE AUSTRALIAN INFLUENCE

the European stakes-winner Lipizzaner, who appeared in the same catalogue as Bounding's Curlin colt. There is also the tale of Sea Siren, a daughter of Fastnet Rock who was a triple Group One-winner in Australia and is now, courtesy of a date with Galileo, the dam of the Yorkshire Oaks and Prix Vermeille-winner Warm Heart.

"Coolmore has invested so much down here in Australia with phenomenal success, but now it's taking top-end Australian mares to Europe and mating them accordingly," Burrows says. "That success has been fantastic and it's hitting the Northern Hemisphere elite right between the eyes because the strike rate, from what I can see, has been terrific."

Dotted across Europe and North America, Australian mares are earning their oats. For Darley, Porto Roca is the dam of Dubai World Cup-winner Monterosso. In Australia, Porto Roca won the Group One Coolmore Classic, while Brom Felinity, who was exported by Darley from Australia to England in 2013, is the dam of Walton Street, a winner of the Group One Woodbine Canadian International Stakes.

In France, Nicolas de Chambure, the master of Haras d'Etreham, has a number of Australian mares on his storied farm in Normandy, including the Foxwedge matron A Mist Opportunity, whose producing record includes Islandsinthestream, twice second at Group One level.

In Japan, the presence of Australian bloodlines has become unmistakable as breeders, including Katsumi Yoshida, have carefully cherry-picked Australian catalogues for years. Star siblings Funstar and Youngstar were bought for Japan, joining the likes of Mosheen, Shamrock, Kirramosa and Southern Speed, who all made their way north – and the fruits of these investments have been glittering. Aussie-bred New Zealand Oaks-winner More Than Sacred, who was exported to Japan >>



been highly sought-after for monumental amounts of money. But here, suddenly, you had an Australian mare producing an English Derby-winner, and her daughter producing a US\$4 million yearling. Things were changing."

Believe'N'Succeed was exported to Ireland in 2015. She is one of a handful of Australian mares that Coolmore has brought to its Tipperary fold,

Seen here winning at Royal Ascot in June, Warm Heart is one of nine international Group One-winners in 2023 out of Australian-bred mares.
Photo: Liesl King

joining the likes of Atlantic Jewel – whose story is just as good. Atlantic Jewel was a champion racehorse in Australia and, in Ireland, she foaled the multiple Group One-winning Hong Kong champion Russian Emperor. Coolmore also brought its Thousand Guineas-winner Irish Lights to the Northern Hemisphere. In Kentucky, this mare, already a Group-winning producer, foaled

THE AUSTRALIAN INFLUENCE

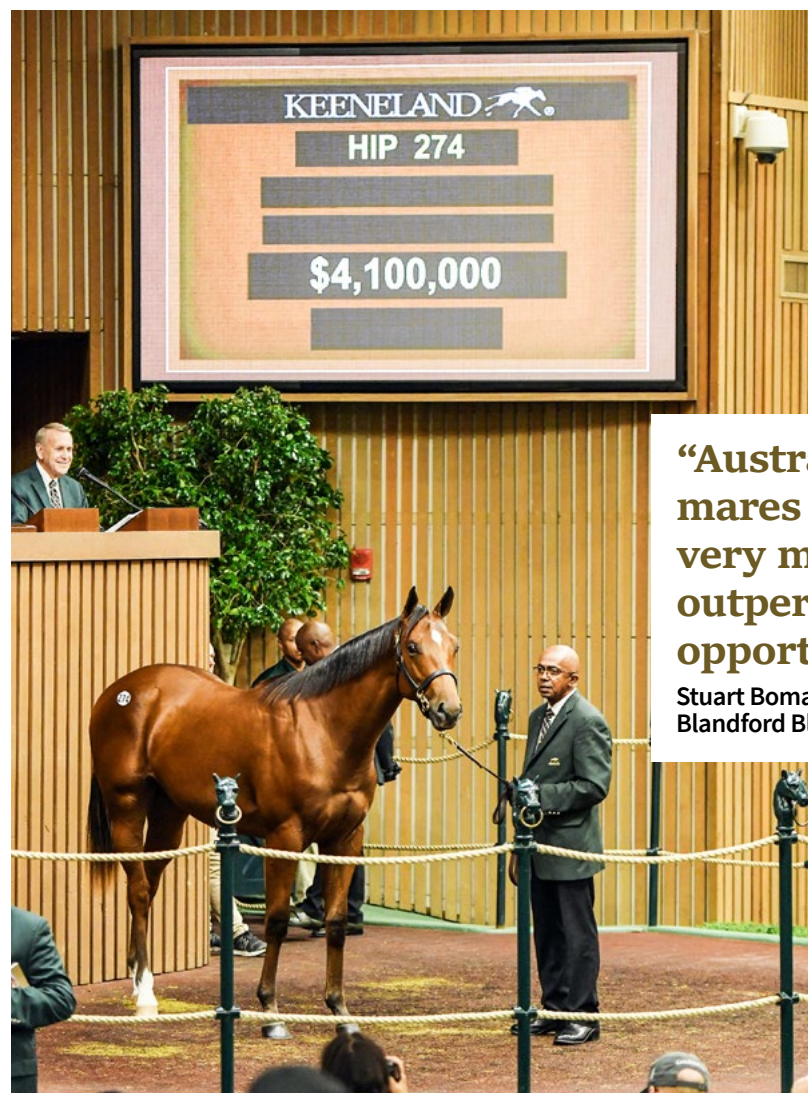
in 2014, is the dam of this year's Kikuka-shō (Japanese St Leger)-winner Durezza, while Yankee Rose, Sydney's bonny little dual Group One-winner, is now the dam of the triple Group One-winner and pin-up Japanese filly Liberty Island.

"A good Australian race mare will bring speed into Japan," says Satomi Oka, a Sydney-based Japanese bloodstock agent, who has witnessed Japan's steady success with Australian lines. "In Australia, like in Japan, they're chasing speed on turf, whether it's 1200 metres or 1600 metres. Japanese breeding is always trying to improve the speed of horses, and, in the case of Mr Yoshida, he recognised that in Australia's bloodlines."

Japan is a melting pot of the world's best bloodlines, and it's not just the Australian product that's working there. However, breeders such as Northern Farm have actively targeted certain Australian types, like the zippy Kiku, a Zoustar daughter Yoshida bought for AU\$1.46 million in early September. In Europe, where the market is famously more selective, agent Stuart Boman, of Blandford Bloodstock, says the Australian product is punching above its weight. Australian-born Boman, now based in England, admits it's a slow burn getting European breeders to look this way.

"Generally speaking, any of the Australian mares that come up here are better credentialled, so they're going to the better stallions," he says. "But when you look at the small number of them that are here, the level of success is extraordinary. Ultimately, the market in Europe – particularly England – is quite snobbish when it comes to pedigree. It can be unaccepting of anything that it doesn't recognise, which is a shame because Australian mares up here are very much outperforming opportunity."

Florentina is one such mare – an Australian daughter of Redoute's Choice who was sent by her



breeder, John Camilleri, to England in 2017. The following season, she foaled In Italian by Dubawi, who became a Grade One-winner at Saratoga.

"Why do these mares work in Europe?" Boman asks. "Well, you've got the outcross angle, but also the Danehill element, with that influence limited in Europe these days. A lot of these



"Australian mares are very much outperforming opportunity"

**Stuart Boman,
Blandford Bloodstock**

successful mares are by Fastnet Rock and Exceed And Excel, which shouldn't be ignored. But there's also the durability, the toughness and the

speed of the mares introduced. These are elements that are often lacking in mares up here, who are bred for stamina. The Aussie mares that come up are fast, they're tough and they're big – and it seems to be working."

By mid-October, when Liberty Island won the Shūka Shō in Kyoto, she was the ninth Group One-winner outside of Australia in 2023 to come from an Australian-bred mare. She followed Durezza, Warm Heart, In Italian, Russian Emperor in Hong Kong, Al Muthana in South Africa, and Mustang Valley, Imperatriz and Skew Wiff.

"There are years of bias to overcome in certain parts of the world," Boman says. "But the success is there and, compared to opportunity, these Australian mares are far achievers from numbers that I know are very, very small. Their results are well in excess of what they probably should be." ■

Above: The Curlin x Bounding colt that sold for US\$4.1 million in 2019. Top right: Bloodstock agent Stuart Boman. Photos: Keeneland; Magic Millions

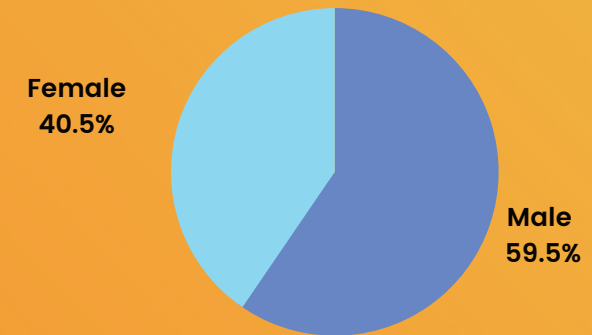
12 Months of TTR AusNZ



Since November 14, 2022, 298,962 avid readers have actively contributed to 692,588 sessions.

Readership Demographic

Gender



Top 5 Countries



Australia
261,950
Sessions



New Zealand
60,060
Sessions



United States
20,963
Sessions

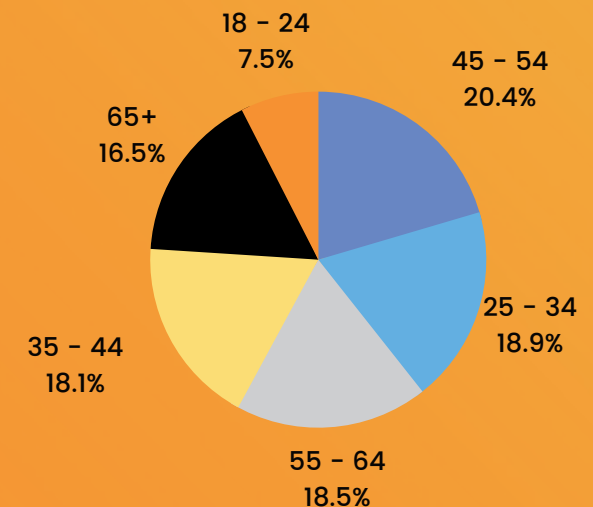


United Kingdom
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Sessions



Ireland
6,960
Sessions

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Magic Millions Gallery

Buyers and vendors alike had plenty to smile about at the Magic Millions sales in 2023



Top row (from left): The iconic barrier draw and beach gallop; Jamie Walter; Shunsuke Yoshida.



Second row (from left): Matt Houldsworth; Louis Mihalyka.

Third row (from left): Sam Fairgray and Livia Wang; Chris Waller, Denise Martin and Brett Howard.



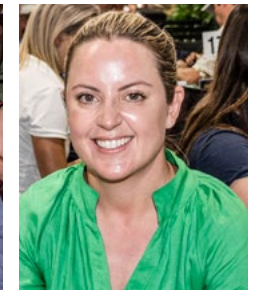
Fourth row (from left): Grania, Scott, Angus and Harry McAlpine; Barry Bowditch and Antony Thompson.



Fifth row (from left): Sheamus Mills and Rochelle Adams; Jim Carey, Henry Field and Steve O'Connor.



MAGIC MILLIONS GALLERY



Top row (from left):
Gai Waterhouse and Lea Stracey; Hubie de Burgh; Tim Stakemire and Tom Magnier; Ben and JD Hayes.

Second row (from left):
Peter O'Brien, Annabel Neasham and Anthony Mithen; Lizzie Jelfs.

Third row (from left):
Gerry Harvey; Colum McCullagh, Paul Snowden and Will Johnson; Sam Pritchard-Gordon; Halina Fedchanka, Tammy Rigney, Phil Bauer, Richard Rigney and John Moynihan.

Fourth row (from left):
David Ellis; Ciaran Maher; Danny O'Brien and Luke Wilkinson; Michael Kent Jnr and Mick Price; John Foote.

Fifth row: James Harron.



Invest In The Best

With a million-dollar race every 3.8 days, there has never been a better time to invest in the Australian industry, writes Tom Reilly

There was no question about it, the big race lived up to the hype. As the leaders reached the shadow of the post, three favourites in the Everest hit the line with just three-quarters of a length between them. In five of the past six years, the race was considered the world's highest-rated sprint and this looked like another vintage renewal.

Everest Day at Randwick – bathed in warm spring sunshine – typified so much of what is great about Australian racing and breeding: Think About It, a winner bred locally in the Hunter Valley, will vie with another Aussie-bred, Imperatriz, to be crowned World's Best Sprinter and cement Australia's dominance in this field; a big group of owners – more than 20 – had shared in a life-changing experience, witnessed by a sell-out crowd of more than 46,000 people (the majority of whom were aged under 35); and, of course, there was the little matter of the AU\$20 million in prizemoney, too.

For anyone looking on and considering involvement in racehorse ownership, the question had to be: "Why not?" And for owners based overseas: "Why aren't I racing a horse in Australia?"

Of course, not every horse will be good enough to line up in one of the 12 Everest slots.

Average Price For Top 50 Colts And Fillies At Auction

5 YEAR AVERAGE COLTS (2019-2023) \$US



\$1,049,733

USA

\$966,699

UK & EU

\$764,986

AUSTRALIA

*FIGURES IN \$US.

5 YEAR AVERAGE FILLIES (2019-2023) \$US



\$834,250

USA

\$858,045

UK & EU

\$573,976

AUSTRALIA

But in Australia there is more opportunity to run for big money than in any other jurisdiction.

In 2024 there will be an astonishing 95 races in Australia with prizemoney of AU\$1 million or more. This is the equivalent of a million-dollar race every 3.8 days.

To provide some international context, in America there were 64 races worth AU\$1 million or more in 2023, while across the whole of Europe (including the UK), that number was just 24.

And it's not just at the very top end of racing that prizemoney is strong. The average race value is AU\$50,800, a hefty sum that means all owners – even those with an average horse – get a chance to recoup their expenses.

This prizemoney has grown by 45 per cent in the past five years – by far the biggest increase of any major racing nation.

On top of these riches, there are significant bonus schemes that reward owners. These include

AU\$53 million in state breeding schemes, as well as lucrative race series run by the two major sales companies: Inglis and Magic Millions. Taken together, such schemes add another AU\$83,500,000 to owner returns.

With such hefty returns it's no surprise that so many people are choosing to get involved in racehorse ownership in Australia. Across all registered owners (which doesn't include those involved in micro-ownership), there are about 105,000 individuals who own a racehorse or share in a racehorse. A hefty sum that seems even more impressive when there are an estimated 30,000 owners across the whole of America and only 14,000 in the United Kingdom, despite both countries having far bigger populations.

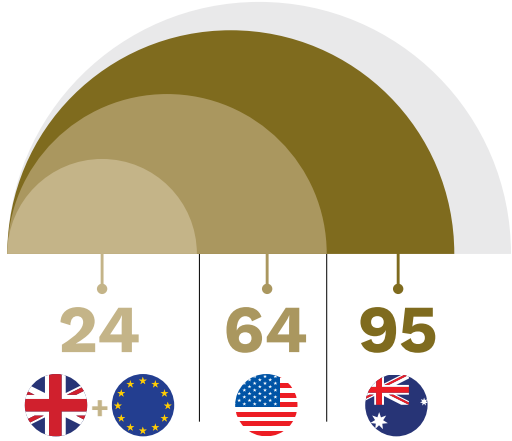
The nature of ownership is different in Australia, too. Whereas in Europe and North America many horses are owned by individuals or small partnerships, Down Under even the



wealthiest owners are happy to race with larger groups. A good demonstration of this difference is in the ownership structure of the Everest field and that of the Arc de Triomphe. In the Arc, the 15 runners had 28 named owners, whereas in the Everest – even with a quarter of the 12-runner field being owned by the behemoths of Godolphin and Yulong – there were 119 names in the racebook.

The Everest typifies all that is great about Australian racing.
Photo: Paul McMillan

Number Of Races Worth AU\$1 Million Or More In 2024



*EXPECTED FIGURES FOR EU/GB & USA BASED ON 2023.

Of course, this shared experience can make for a great atmosphere on the major race days, and also allows those overseas wanting to test the vast waters of Australian ownership, to get involved at a high level.

And that high level is more affordable than anywhere else. Buying the best yearling prospects is never a cheap exercise, but the Australian market offers more value than any other.

Those sourcing a leading prospect from yearling sales – either colt or filly – would have paid far less here than in either America or Europe in each of the past five years.

With the Australian dollar having decreased significantly in the past 12 months, 2024 offers international investors a wonderful opportunity to invest at the top end of the market.

There can be no doubting the quality on offer at the Australian yearling sales and on our tracks.

Each season the world’s official handicappers gather to rate the top 100 Group Ones of the past 12 months and in four of the past five years Australia has hosted more of these races than any other country.

This excellence is built on the back of our local breeding industry. Of course, we are famed for our excellent sprinters. It’s likely that Think About It or eight-time Group One-winner Imperatriz will both be in the running to be crowned the world’s best, following on from fellow Australian-bred Nature Strip, who demolished a quality field in Royal Ascot’s King’s Stand Stakes in 2022.

In fact, in the past two decades, some 16 Australian-bred horses have been crowned as the world’s best sprinter.

But superstars, including Hong Kong’s champion Golden Sixty, demonstrate the incredible versatility of Australian-breds. Similarly, 2022 Cox Plate-winner Anamoe was rated among the world’s middle-distance elite after becoming Godolphin’s all-time leading Group One-winner with nine top flight wins, and wonder-mare Winx was rated the best globally for much of her career.

If you look at the races that are considered Australia’s breed-shapers – the Golden Slipper, Blue Diamond, Caulfield Guineas, Golden Rose and Coolmore Stud Stakes – in the past 15 years all but one of these 75 races have been won by locally bred horses.

And the influence of Australian bloodlines is significant across the globe. In 2023 there were some nine individual Group One-winners foaled down overseas from Australian mares, including Japan’s best three year old, Liberty Island, and Warm Heart, winner of the Prix Vermeille and Yorkshire Oaks.

All in all, it’s safe to say there has never been a better time to invest in Australia. ■

Inglis Gallery

Another exceptional year of results for Inglis had everyone celebrating in 2023



Top row (from left): David Redvers and Hannah Wall; Lauren Dunning and Damon Gabbedy.



Second row (from left): John Foote; Henry Field and Michael Smith; Philip Campbell; Peter Moody; Shane Wright.



Third row (from left): Greg Hickman and Sebastian Hutch; Jo Griffin; Marie and Boone Yoshida.



Fourth row (from left): Steve Grant and Rob Petith; Michael Wallace and Kuldeep Singh Rajput; Jason Stenning; Dermot Farrington.



Top row (from left): Yueshang Zhang; Chris Watson and James Mitchell; Blake Ryan, Francis Cook, Mick Malone and Christine Cook; Craig Rounsefell.



Second row (from left): Shingo Hashimoto and Katsumi Yoshida; MV Magnier; Sally Williams.



Third row (from left): Mick Flanagan; Jo Lindsay, Henry Plumptre and Brendan Lindsay; Ross Lao.



Fourth row (from left): Hilton Cope; Sean and Cathy Dingwall; Guy Mulcaster, Chris Waller and Jim Carey.





2024 Sales Calendar

*With exceptional quality on offer
and soaring prizemoney, there
has never been a better time to
attend a sale in Australia*

Photo: Sharon Lee Chapman

9-16 January 2024

Magic Millions Gold Coast Yearling Sale

(Queensland)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	877
Lots Sold	790
Clearance Rate	90%
Aggregate AU\$	230,161,000
Average AU\$	291,343

Top Price AU\$ 2,700,000

Breeding & Vendor

I Am Invincible – Anaheed colt
(Segenhoe Stud, NSW)

Book 2

Lots Offered	263
Lots Sold	222
Clearance Rate	84%
Aggregate AU\$	13,775,000
Average AU\$	62,050

Top Price AU\$ 250,000

Breeding & Vendor

Exceedance – Croation filly
(Baramul Stud, NSW)



I Am Invincible – Anaheed colt



Written Tycoon – Sylvia’s Mother colt

11-13 February 2024

Inglis Classic Yearling Sale

(New South Wales)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	644
Lots Sold	560
Clearance Rate	87%
Aggregate AU\$	57,478,500
Average AU\$	102,640

Top Price AU\$ 550,000

Breeding & Vendor

Written Tycoon – Sylvia’s Mother colt
(Berkeley Park Stud, NSW)

22-23 February 2024

Magic Millions Perth Yearling Sale

(Western Australia)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	161
Lots Sold	148
Clearance Rate	92%
Aggregate AU\$	13,575,000
Average AU\$	91,723

Top Price AU\$ 350,000

Breeding & Vendor

Bue Point (IRE) – Single Spice filly
(Yarradale Stud, WA)

*All dates subject to change

Photos: Magic Millions and Inglis

2024 SALES CALENDAR

26 February 2024

Magic Millions Tasmanian Yearling Sale

(Tasmania)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	129
Lots Sold	111
Clearance Rate	86%
Aggregate AU\$	3,969,500
Average AU\$	35,761
Top Price AU\$	105,000

Breeding & Vendor

Stratosphere – Ehor filly
(Grenville Stud, TAS)



I Am Invincible – Special Lover (NZ) filly



Harry Angel (IRE) – Kibibi colt

3-5 March 2024

Inglis Melbourne Premier Yearling Sale

(Victoria)

2023 Results

Premier Session

Lots Offered	545
Lots Sold	439
Clearance Rate	81%
Aggregate AU\$	59,164,000
Average AU\$	134,770
Top Price AU\$	1,100,000

Breeding & Vendor

I Am Invincible – Special Lover (NZ) filly
(Noorilim Park, VIC)



Stratosphere
– Ehor filly

11-12 March 2024

Magic Millions March Yearling Sale

(Queensland)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	348
Lots Sold	292
Clearance Rate	84%
Aggregate AU\$	10,378,000
Average AU\$	35,541
Top Price AU\$	170,000

Breeding & Vendor

Dubious – Care to Elaborate colt
(Waylon J Stud, QLD)

18-19 March 2024

Magic Millions Adelaide Yearling Sale

(South Australia)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	415
Lots Sold	352
Clearance Rate	85%
Aggregate AU\$	17,457,000
Average AU\$	49,594
Top Price AU\$	230,000

Breeding & Vendor

Harry Angel (IRE) – Kibibi colt
(Willow Grove Stud, SA)

Photos: Magic Millions and Amplify Marketing



The Autumn Sun – Via Africa (SAF) filly

7-8 April 2024 Inglis Australian Easter Yearling Sale

(New South Wales)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	422
Lots Sold	360
Clearance Rate	85%
Aggregate AU\$	139,290,000
Average AU\$	386,917
Top Price AU\$	1,800,000

Breeding & Vendor

The Autumn Sun – Via Africa (SAF) filly
(Silverdale Farm, NSW)

21 April 2024 Inglis Gold Yearling Sale

(Victoria)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	172
Lots Sold	133
Clearance Rate	77%
Aggregate AU\$	1,952,550
Average AU\$	14,681
Top Price AU\$	200,000

Breeding & Vendor

Blue Point (IRE) – On The Loose colt
(Supreme Thoroughbreds, VIC)

6-7 May 2024 Inglis Australian Weanling Sale

(New South Wales)

2023 Results

Select Session

Lots Offered	336
Lots Sold	253
Clearance Rate	75%
Aggregate AU\$	12,991,000
Average AU\$	51,348
Top Price AU\$	625,000

Breeding & Vendor

Capitalist – Speedboat colt
(Ashleigh Thoroughbreds, NSW)

9 May 2024 Inglis Chairman's Sale

(New South Wales)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	101
Lots Sold	81
Clearance Rate	80%
Aggregate AU\$	44,905,000
Average AU\$	554,383
Top Price AU\$	3,600,000

Breeding & Vendor

Nimalee (So You Think (NZ) – Dezign)
(Glensk Thoroughbreds, NSW)

10 May 2024 Inglis Australian Broodmare Sale

(New South Wales)

2023 Results

Lots Offered	143
Lots Sold	108
Clearance Rate	76%
Aggregate AU\$	8,047,000
Average AU\$	74,509
Top Price AU\$	440,000

Breeding & Vendor

Candyland (NZ)
(Tavistock (NZ) – Bagalollies)
(Holbrook Thoroughbreds, NSW)

23-24 May 2024 Magic Millions National Weanling Sale

(Queensland)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	373
Lots Sold	272
Clearance Rate	73%
Aggregate AU\$	22,261,000
Average AU\$	81,842
Top Price AU\$	925,000

Breeding & Vendor

Frankel (GB) – Upside (IRE) colt
(Cornerstone Stud, SA)

Photo: Inglis

2024 SALES CALENDAR



Forbidden Love

28-30 May 2024

Magic Millions National Broodmare Sale

(Queensland)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	641
Lots Sold	501
Clearance Rate	78%
Aggregate AU\$	107,843,000
Average AU\$	215,255
Top Price AU\$	4,100,000

Breeding & Vendor

Forbidden Love

(All Too Hard – Juliet's Princess (USA))

(Newgate Consignment, NSW)

4-5 June 2024

Magic Millions National Yearling Sale

(Queensland)

2023 Results

Book 1

Lots Offered	306
Lots Sold	218
Clearance Rate	73%
Aggregate AU\$	10,066,000
Average AU\$	46,174
Top Price AU\$	750,000

Breeding & Vendor

The Autumn Sun – Bagalollies filly

(Arrowfield Stud, NSW)

13-14 June 2024

Inglis Great Southern Sale

(Victoria)

2023 Results

Select Weanlings

Lots Offered	313
Lots Sold	223
Clearance Rate	71%
Aggregate AU\$	9,966,273
Average AU\$	44,692
Top Price AU\$	825,000

Breeding & Vendor

Frankel (GB) – Vedema (FR) filly

(Burnewang North Pastoral, VIC)

Broodmares

Lots Offered	44
Lots Sold	29
Clearance Rate	66%
Aggregate AU\$	2,146,250
Average AU\$	74,009
Top Price AU\$	510,000

Breeding & Vendor

Veranskova (Written Tycoon

– Kirvinsky (NZ))

(Alderson Racing, VIC)



15 October 2024

Inglis Ready 2 Race Sale

(New South Wales)

2024 Results

Lots Offered	179
Lots Sold	104
Clearance Rate	58%
Aggregate AU\$	11,043,500
Average AU\$	106,188
Top Price AU\$	400,000

Breeding & Vendor

Capitalist – Ghalia's Dream colt

(Blake Ryan Racing, NSW)

TBC

Magic Millions 2YOs In Training Sale

(Queensland)

2024 Results

Lots Offered	110
Lots Sold	87
Clearance Rate	79%
Aggregate AU\$	5,271,500
Average AU\$	60,592
Top Price AU\$	400,000

Breeding & Vendor

American Pharoah (USA)

– Speed Princess colt

(Nolen Racing, VIC)

American Pharoah (USA)

– Speed Princess colt

Photos: Magic Millions

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