

RACING CAN BE— A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

RACEHORSE OWNERSHIP HAS OFTEN BEEN REGARDED AS A PASTIME FOR THE WEALTHY BUT THAT IS CERTAINLY NOT THE CASE – IT IS A THRILL READILY AVAILABLE TO ALL WORDS: SHARON HUNT (EXECUTIVE OFFICER – NSWROA)

It is now possible for anyone to own as little as 1% of a racehorse to experience the wonder of racehorse ownership!

Now that I have your attention, let me tell you about an ownership success story. Hopefully it will encourage more people to be owners in this wonderful industry.

They say that luck plays an important role in racing. Another common saying is: "Being in the right place at the right time". Both can be true. However, as most in the industry will tell you, once you have been 'bitten by the racing bug' there is no turning back.

Seven years ago NSWROA Members John and Anne McDonnell were living in New Zealand and regularly enjoyed boating on the Hauraki Gulf.

They decided to return to Australia and Anne encouraged John to do something with the proceeds from the sale of their boat.

Having always had a passion for racing, thanks to regular attendance at the races from a young age with his father who was a "pencilner" for a bookie, John decided to venture into racehorse ownership.

After seeing an advertisement for Star Thoroughbreds Syndication and a subsequent conversation with Denise Martin, he decided to take some shares in horses.

Within a relatively short period of time both Denise and Gai Waterhouse, who trains the Star Thoroughbreds recruits, brought the whole racing experience to life for John and Anne.

It started off with two horses, including a Rock of Gibraltar filly, but quickly led to four within four months before equine influenza (EI) struck and the racing world stopped.

Consequently, the initial foray did not work out as planned but no-one could have envisaged that such a tragedy could have ever happened.

It was during the EI period that Gai Waterhouse and Denise Martin took John and Anne to lunch with the purpose of inviting them into an exciting prospect that was being prepared for racing at Muskoka Farm.

Gai was emphatic with her praise and enthusiasm for the chestnut colt and said she thought he would be something special – and he was!

John and Anne wisely took Gai and Denise's counsel and purchased two shares in the horse. That horse was Sebring.

Sebring (More Than Ready (USA)-Purespeed) started

his career with trial wins in December 2007 and early January 2008.

He first faced the starter on 19 January 2008 and duly saluted in an 1100-metre race at Rosehill.

Next up was the Listed-Canonbury Stakes at Randwick on 16 February 2008 where he scored by an impressive 4½ lengths as an odds-on favourite.

The Listed-Breeders' Plate at Randwick on 1 March 2008 was win number three from as many starts where he again started in the red. The Golden Slipper beckoned.

After a trial win on 8 April 2008, Sebring's next start was in the Group 1-Golden Slipper at Rosehill on 19 April 2008 on a heavy track where he was again favourite, albeit this time at the lucrative odds of \$6.

Despite missing the start, Sebring charged through the field to defeat Von Costa de Hero with Portillo in third place.

The following week he lined up in the Group 1-Sires' Produce Stakes at Royal Randwick, again as favourite at the odds of \$2.60 and defeated an emerging star of the track, Samantha Miss, by a length on a heavy track.

This was win number five from as many starts and two legs up of the coveted 2YO Triple Crown with only the Group 1-Champagne Stakes remaining the following Saturday.

It was oh so close in the Champagne Stakes but the Triple Crown was not meant to be. The filly Samantha Miss won the race by the barest of margins from a brave Sebring on a dead track. This was the first time that a horse owned by John and Anne had not won!

And thus closed the first, and, unfortunately, last campaign of Sebring, with his record for the season being five wins and a second placing from six starts with \$2,537,060 in prizemoney.

In May 2008 Sebring was syndicated, at a record price, to stand at Widden Stud. John and Anne decided they would stay in the horse and retained their shares in Sebring. Again, a wise decision.

To date, Sebring has done very well in the sale ring with his progeny, is siring winners everywhere and his son Criterion ran a great sixth in the Slipper behind Overreach, having previously won the Gr 2-Todman Stakes and the LR-Black Opal Stakes.



Sebring (Blake Shinn) wins the Sires' Produce Stakes at Royal Randwick. Picture by Mark Smith

This was an excellent feat from Sebring's first crop of youngsters.

When asked what it felt like to be a part owner of such a good horse particularly first-up, John is the first to acknowledge that Anne and himself had a flying start at ownership.

He said: "Anne and I were put into a privileged position very quickly. We reached the incredible highs with our first horse to race.

"This has allowed us to cater to our passion and our hobby – racing – which is, in turn, funded by our business venture which is Sebring's breeding career. It's a 'win-win' for us."

Incredibly, John's passion has increased whilst Anne who had no previous interest is now a "confirmed racing tragic" as are all their family.

In recent times the McDonnells, along with their family, have entered into some new racing ventures with imported gallopers; again with Gai at the helm.

John said: "We contributed to a 'war chest' Gai initially took overseas to search for Melbourne Cup horses. We did very well out of the first crop which comprised Glencadam Gold (Ire), Julienas (Ire), Mr Monopolize (GB) and Galiando (GB). Galiando is currently the only non-winner from the group."

By chance, Gai found yet another international galloper last year in Fiorente (Ire), who Gai and husband Rob Waterhouse had seen at Royal Ascot. The McDonnells have an interest in him as well.

Fiorente ran a gallant second in the 2012 Gr 1-Melbourne Cup at his only start in Australia to date, going down by just a length to Green Moon (Ire).

When asked what advice he would give to someone thinking of entering the ownership ranks, John said: "Go ahead and do it but be mindful that you do not overly extend yourself. Just spend as much as you can afford.

"The best way to do this is via syndication; it is fantastic and works very well. We have had great fun and success with Gai and Denise as their formula really works at getting everyone involved – you become part of the team.

"It is so easy to get into racing and you only need a small percentage in a horse to experience the great thrill that is racehorse ownership."

It would be fair to say that for John and Anne, their experience is something that any owner could only dream of. John is adamant that one of the best things that racing has given them is the wonderful friends he and Anne have made.

They now have an extended group who regularly attend race meetings with them.

John recalls that in press coverage immediately after Sebring's Slipper win it was said that: "Lives have been changed today". They were indeed!

Racehorse ownership – there is nothing quite like it! Racehorse owners are very special people, are you one? If not, why not give it a go!

If you are interested in participating in this wonderful sport why not become a member of NSW Racehorse Owners Association.

NSWROA is very pleased to advise that in 2013 membership is priced at just \$27.50 including GST.

Membership runs for a calendar year. Simply visit our website www.nswroa.com.au or telephone the NSWROA office on (02) 9299 4299 for further information. **RNSW**