

An affordable hobby

Aussies take punt on racehorse ownership

DESPITE its reputation as the Sport of Kings, thoroughbred horse racing can be an affordable hobby for the average Australian, writes **BRUCE CLARKE**

WITH 200m to go, first start racehorse Showeranasherry was several lengths behind the leaders, and looked unlikely to run a place.

Part-owner Scott Healy, a lifelong racing fan, looked on from the grandstand, disappointed that the horse had not lived up to his or the stable's expectations.

Jockey Dale Smith, who until then had been sitting quietly on the horse, suddenly sprang to life and gave the horse a few encouraging cracks of the whip. Showeranasherry responded with a dynamic turn of speed, catching the leaders in a few strides and opening up a winning break which he held until the finish line.

Healy was ecstatic; a win for his first horse in its first start, and at odds of 20-1. Since then, he's watched the replay of the race on countless occasions, and re-experiences that thrill of winning every single time.

A maiden race at a midweek meeting at Moe may be a long way from Flemington in November, but to Healy, it was the perfect initiation to racehorse ownership.

A great way to get started is as a member of a partnership or syndicate. The beauty of these structures is that they let smaller players share in the excitement of racehorse ownership, while at the same time ensuring their financial commitment is kept to a manageable level.

Australian turf legend and 2003 Caulfield Cup winner Mummify is a classic syndicate success story. Bought in 2001 for \$41,000, the horse went on to win more than \$5 million in prizemoney for his syndicate of owners, some of whom had never owned a horse before.

Partnerships and syndicates offer similar advantages to smaller players, however there are subtle differences to note when making a purchase decision.

A partnership allows for up to 10 people to jointly race a horse, each as a registered owner. Each partner's name appears in the racebook, and each is entitled to receive race day ownership privileges, including free admission as well as access to the members' enclosure and mounting yard.

A syndicate allows for up to 20 people to jointly race a horse, however, only the syndicate manager's name appears in the racebook, along with the syndicate name. Raceday ownership privileges under this model are sometimes restricted.

With both partnerships and syndicates, costs and prizemoney are generally shared equally between owners. A formal ownership agreement covers these matters, as well as other issues affecting ownership of the horse.

Some people prefer to take part in the sport as sole owners. This gives them total control over all decisions regarding the horse, including who will train it and what its racing program will be.

Although the purchase price of many racehorses puts sole ownership out of the reach of most ordinary Australians, there are still celebrated good news stories of horses being picked up for bargain basement prices and going on to win millions for their delighted owners.

For example, in 2003, Canberra taxi driver and part-time trainer Joe Janiak paid \$1375 for a horse with bad knees but more than a little ability.

That horse, Takeover Target, has



the boys

ALISTAIR Butcher is one of the 16 owners of Creekside, a horse which recorded a spectacular and much-celebrated win (above) in the last race of the 2006 Melbourne Cup Day program.

All but one of the owners are associated with the local Strathmore Football and Cricket Club, so it is no surprise that the horse carries the yellow-and-blue colours of the club, complete with fighting lion emblem.

For Butcher, racehorse ownership is all about having fun and sharing in friendships with mates.

His advice to prospective owners is to embrace the idea of syndication.

"Don't be put off if you can only afford a 5 per cent or 10 per cent share," he said. "You still get to enjoy all of the thrills of raceday and the sense of shared enjoyment with the other owners."

gone on to win more than \$4 million in prizemoney, including a victory in front of the Queen at the 2006 King's Stand Stakes at Ascot and a narrow second in the 2007 Golden Jubilee Stakes at the same course. Not a bad little return.

The cost of owning a share in a racehorse varies, depending on the purchase price of the horse in question.

Costs can be broken down into two streams: the initial outlay required to buy the horse, and ongoing costs for training and upkeep of the horse.

The purchase of an entry level 10 per cent investment in a racehorse starts from about \$4000. Ongoing monthly fees, which cover training, transport, agistment and veterinary bills, start at \$200 per 10 per cent share.

The reputation and popularity of the trainer chosen will have a direct bearing on the level of training fees charged, as will whether the horse is trained in the metropolitan area or in the country.

The sport of thoroughbred racing is administered by a principal body in each state and territory. These bodies are critically aware of the importance of owners to the industry, and as such have strategies in place to attract and support potential new owners.

Most conduct regular seminars explaining the intricacies of racehorse ownership, and have sections on their websites dealing specifically with ownership issues.

The principal bodies can provide contact details for gistered syndicate promoters, most of whom have their own websites displaying the horses they currently have for sale, and indicative costs of ownership.

Most states and territories have formal thoroughbred owners' associations, which provide resources and advice to new and experienced owners alike, as well as representing the interests of owners in industry matters.

There are more than 31,000 thoroughbreds registered to race in Australia, contesting about 20,000 races (pre-Equine Influenza) each year.

Races are graded to ensure that horses generally compete against others of similar ability. About a third of all registered horses win a race each year, so there is a reasonable chance you will get to see your horse "salute" at some stage in its career.

Prizemoney levels vary. In the larger states, prizemoney for country racing starts at \$8000, with standard Saturday metropolitan races paying upwards of \$50,000. Premier races attract higher levels of prizemoney, the highest being the Melbourne Cup, with \$5.1 million on offer.

Generally the winner receives 65 per cent of the prizemoney pool, with the balance going to minor placegetters. From the prizemoney received, the trainer receives 10 per cent and the jockey 5 per cent. The rest is shared between the happy owners.

Although there is attractive prizemoney on offer, it is not a good idea to enter the world of horse ownership expecting to make a profit. Many horses fail to win a race and some don't even make it to the racetrack.

The best advice from those who've been there is to get involved purely for the love of racing and let any financial success be a welcome, but unexpected, bonus.



PUB: NT NEWS DATE: 4-NOV-2007 PAGE: 18 COLOR: K

the first-timer

LISA Wakelin recently bought a 5 per cent share in her first horse, Tarpins.

Wakelin has been a regular racegoer for several years, and a few of her friends own shares in



horses. She thought it was time to take get involved herself.

"I'm looking forward to the excitement of going to the races and having a bet on my own horse," she said.

So far her highlight as an owner has been a visit to trainer Cliff Brown's stables at Flemington to see the horse up close.

Wakelin's goals for the horse are modest. "It would be fantastic if he could get a couple of wins, even if they were only country meetings."

TARPINS has since had his first run, finishing a gallant sixth in a maiden race at Wangaratta.

who to contact in the NT

Darwin Turf Club
Phone (08) 8941 1566
www.darwinturfclub.org.au
Racehorse Owners

Association of the Northern Territory
Phone (08) 8948 0578
The Winner's Circle

Excellent resource on racehorse ownership in general — www.trsa.com.au/owners/pdf/winnerscircle.pdf

the girls

IN 2006, Permaiscuous went within a hundredth of a second of winning the Group 1 Thousand Guineas at Caulfield.

Owned by a syndicate of 44 high-profile women (and token male Shane Crawford), Permaiscuous led for most of the race before being caught right on the line by Miss Finland.

Many of the owners were first-timers, banding together to enjoy the thrills and excitement of raceday, while at the same time supporting the National Breast Cancer Foundation. The horse raced in the distinctive colours of black with pink ribbon and cap, and the owners donated a portion of their winnings to the charity.

"I took the plunge to go into Permaiscuous and it turned out to be one of the best decisions



I've ever made in my life," recalled TVN presenter and part-owner Jo McKinnon.

"A couple of metres from the line we thought we had it ... the emotion and adrenaline was overwhelming."

The elation quickly turned to disbelief when a few sheepish bystanders politely delivered the news that none of the owners wanted to hear.

Still, the disappointment of finishing a close second didn't stop the ladies partying well into the night.

PERMAISCUOUS has since been retired and the ladies now have an interest in Red Stiletto.

the enthusiast

PHIL Read's interest in racehorse ownership dates back to the early 1970s, when he joined uni colleagues and took a 1/16th interest in Scottish Reformer.

Since then Read has had interests in about 20 horses, the most successful being multiple Group 1 placegetter (and Group 2 winner), Emission. Read's biggest thrill was seeing Emission sprint from the back of the field to win the BT Sprint in Brisbane.

"I'll always remember the call of the race, 'And what is this from the back of the field? It's Emission, he has blown them away.'"

Read's advice to newcomers is simple. "Start in a small way and only invest an amount of money you can afford to lose. Get involved because you want to enjoy your racing, and not for the money. It is very, very difficult to be a winner."