



By
Bernie Pramberg

CRAANE'S LIFETIME OF DEDICATION

Eagle Farm trainer Tony Crane might never have become involved with horses if his mother had not taken he and his brother, Troy, to a school fete when they were kids.

The Crane brothers were besotted by the pony rides, but pocket-money was tight and the brothers didn't have any coins to pay for a ride.

"We stood there watching for a fair while until the man running the show said he'd give us a ride if we led the ponies around for him," recalled Tony.

"We hung around for hours, leading the ponies and getting a ride whenever business went a bit quiet.

"I think I was six at the time, but I remember it pretty well."

The man with the ponies was Kevin Wallen,

former trainer and renowned horseman.

"Mr Wallen had a riding school at Gumdale and from that day we spent a lot of time down there," said Tony. "We'd be there overnight, at weekends and school holidays. Mr Wallen was a great man to learn from."

The Crane boys became members of the Wynnum and Gumdale Pony Club and enjoyed plenty of success in equestrian events, including the Royal National at the Exhibition ground.

Kevin Wallen had no influence on the Crane brothers becoming apprentice jockeys in the 1980s.

"He never pushed at all," recalled Tony. "But I remember watching Just A Dash win the Melbourne Cup in 1981 and deciding I wanted to be a jockey more than anything."

Tony realised his dream...but not for long.

"I was with Jim Parr at Nebo Lodge, but got heavy overnight. I only had two race rides and was finished at 16.

"I'm now 105kg...not bad for a bloke who was once an apprentice jockey."

Crane was a work rider in Brisbane for 18 months after his apprenticeship ended, and then took a break from the industry and headed to the Northern Territory.

He returned to Brisbane after a couple of years, linking with veteran trainer Doug Bougoure as a work rider.

"Doug's son Danny was out on his own by then. Doug was close to retiring and I learnt a lot from him."

"Then I worked as a freelance for a while before Maurice Stafford asked me to go



Tony Crane eager to increase his success Noel Pascoe photo

“But I remember watching Just A Dash win the Melbourne Cup in 1981 and deciding I wanted to be a jockey more than anything.”

to Rockhampton to help him with a few difficult horses.

“That was in 1996, and a few weeks in Rocky turned into 10 years.”

Crane was mainly breaking-in horses and still riding a bit of work when he took out an owner-trainers licence in 1999.

“I guess I always seemed to be handling horses for other people rather than concentrating on anything of my own,” he said.

“I guess I never really wanted to be a trainer as badly as I wanted to be a jockey.”

In 2003, he was granted a trainer’s licence and led in his first winner All Tune at Callaghan Park on the first day he had runners.

Early “meal tickets” for the stable included

Coolangatta, Charnwood Prince and Spooky’s Beach which all won a number of races around the CQ area.

While training in Rockhampton, Crane also worked outside the industry, managing two service stations.

Perhaps his biggest thrill in racing so far came in January, 2005, when he brought the former Gerald Ryan-trained sprinter Gullcatcher to the Gold Coast on Magic Millions day.

“He was a broken down cripple and hadn’t been on a track for 11 months,” said Crane.

“I used to drive him 30 kilometres to the beach and walk miles with him on foot to get him right.

“He won over 1000m at the Gold Coast and Corey Brown rode him for me that day.”

In 2006, Crane decided he was prepared to give fulltime training “a fair dinkum go” and moved to Brisbane.

A steady stream of winners include Jumaara, Jujulio, Yatala, Larry’s Song and Preception Bay.

“I’ve a great team behind me and good owners. I’ve 18 horses in work and would like to get the numbers up to 25,” he said.

Crane employs four fulltime staff and has two work riders.

“I’m happy to win a race anywhere. I’d like to be the top trainer in Brisbane, but you need numbers.”

“I always remember old Kevin Wallen saying you have to be patient with horses and that’s what I am prepared to do. If it takes 12 months to get a horse right, that’s what I will do.” ●