



## Cushion Track heralded a success

The opening of the Sunshine Coast Cushion Track on Sunday, April 6, 2008 was a significant milestone for the Queensland racing industry.

Whilst I fully understand that this initiative has a long way to go before it can be hailed a success, the inaugural race meeting provided a high level of confidence to all industry participants that the Sunshine Coast Cushion Track and subsequent installations throughout Queensland will ensure stakeholders have access to the best training and racing facilities in the country.

Queensland Racing investigated all surfaces available and made the call to install the Cushion Track as it was the best option for the state. All the best technology and care in selection means very little if it is not embraced by the stakeholders. It was gratifying to report that a wide cross section of stakeholders who utilise the track for trackwork purposes and those involved in the inaugural race meeting were very upbeat about the future prospects of the Cushion Track.

Listed below are the views expressed by these stakeholders on April 6.

### Jockeys

#### Jason Holder

*"I've ridden in Macau and Hong Kong on their dirt surface and this is just as good as any of them. It's racing really well and the kick back's not too bad either. A lot of sand track horses tend to resent the kick back but they are getting through this really well."*

#### Jason Taylor

*"I was fortunate to ride about 14 trials on the track so I was very confident the track would race well. With the racing pattern at the moment, I don't think barriers will play a major role in it, although it would be good to draw a nice gate," Jason said after riding Diamond Sapphire to win from barrier 11.*

### Trainers

#### Robert Heathcote

*"I brought a few horses up here (to the trials) for a gallop and what I needed to see was a horse on it who hadn't seen the track to see how they coped with it and I ran second and probably could have won it if the horse was pushed out. That gave me the confidence to bring a truck load of horses here today (April 6) expecting them to go well. The horse Malta who just won the inaugural Cup has never been on this surface but the fact that my other horses*

*had been on it gave me the confidence to bring him up and he has run right up to his form. It was a very good strong win."*

#### Bruce McLachlan

*"It's a tremendous track; it's the best track I've ever trained on and I've trained everywhere. I think it will be an incredible help to the Sunshine Coast racing...You can train horses and get them fit and not change any plans when it rains because it is such a good track and drains well wet weather doesn't make any difference to it; it's just as good if not better."*

#### Stewart MacKinnon

*"We can program our horse's preparation now where the weather doesn't interfere with it, we can gallop any morning we want. It has made a huge difference. All the feedback I get from my jockeys after riding on the track is you can't hear them; it doesn't even feel like they are hitting the ground. There is no jarring; it is a very even consistent surface."*

### Wagering Outcomes

#### Brad Tamer (UNITAB)

*"Customer response to the introduction of the Sunshine Coast Cushion Track on April 6 was positive. The 10-race program on the new synthetic surface delivered Queensland sales in excess of \$1M. This is a most pleasing result when compared to the Sunshine Coast's last 10 race program on March 23 which delivered sales of \$900k. Whilst this is the first of many meetings to come, April 6's favourable TAB results (i.e. longest price winner was \$7.30) will go a long way to convincing punters that they can bet on the Cushion Track with plenty of confidence."*

Usually, any change in this industry derives criticism from different sections, I can honestly say that I am yet to hear any negative feedback regarding the Cushion Track, something which is highly unusual.

The Queensland Government along with Treasurer, The Honourable Andrew Fraser, has played an integral role in developing three synthetic tracks in Queensland with the first at Caloundra. Below is the Treasurer's media release announcing the official opening of the Sunshine Coast Cushion Track.

### Synthetic track heralds new era for racing: Fraser

The first of three state-of-the-art synthetic race tracks has been unveiled today (April 6), paving the way for a new era in equine sport in Queensland.

Treasurer and Minister responsible for Racing Andrew Fraser said the new Queensland-first facility at Caloundra meant both jockeys and horses alike would be afforded a new level of safety because the so-called "cushion" track would cut down on injury.

Launching the \$6 million track today (April 6), Mr Fraser said it was the first in a package of three synthetic tracks which would also reduce the reliance on precious water resources during the drought.

"This track - and the others to follow - represents a major investment in the future of this vital sport by the State Government which will foot about \$4 million of the track's total cost," Mr Fraser said.

"I'm confident synthetic tracks will be a great asset to the industry. They are the way forward on so many levels.

"They provide an even ground that helps absorb impact, reducing the risk of injury to both riders and animals.

"They require substantially less water to maintain - drought coupled with limited water use has led to a hardening of race track surfaces and such conditions increase the incidence of soft tissue damage to horses, particularly fillies and colts.

"The installation of synthetic tracks will also give the industry the ability to race in all weather conditions."

Mr Fraser said two future tracks would be constructed at Toowoomba and either on the Gold Coast or in Brisbane.

"The choice of location between Brisbane and the Gold Coast will ultimately be decided by the industry itself.

"Either way, it is a major shot in the arm for the sport.

"The racing industry has strong links with other industries in Queensland such as tourism and hospitality.

"The upgrading of facilities will attract greater national and international interest, enhancing Queensland's reputation as a progressive racing body." 