

INDUSTRY PROFILE

**Trevor
Miller**

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PHOTOS BY NOEL PASCOE



Quiet Achiever

WHEN TREVOR MILLER TRANSPORTED HIS FAMILY AND EIGHT HORSES FROM THE FAR WESTERN TOWN OF CUNNAMULLA 23 YEARS AGO HE COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED MORE THAN 900 WINNERS WOULD COME OUT OF THE NEW STABLE HE SET UP AT CALOUNDRA.

The quietly-spoken bush trainer knew the move, with his wife and three children, was a huge gamble. If he didn't succeed within a relatively short time, Miller was resigned to taking a job outside racing.

The son of a drover and one of 10 children, Trevor was the last of the Miller clan to leave Cunnamulla where he'd trained 210 winners as a virtual part-timer.

His brother Barry had moved to Eagle Farm 15 years earlier to make a success of training in the metropolitan area, but Trevor stayed in Cunnamulla to combine driving a taxi and later running a fish and chip shop with wife Rosalea with the business of training racehorses.

He had a share in a horse trained in Brisbane by Barry that was beaten a long neck by Manikato in the 1979 Doomben 10,000. The 100/1 roughie that almost caused a major boilover was Casca, ridden by Owen Wall.

"That gave us a bit of a thrill," said the understated Miller.

Corbould Park had been operating for only 18 months when Miller, then aged 44, arrived to set up shop. Within six months, he'd won the 1986/87 Sunshine Coast trainers premiership...the first of an amazing 12 premierships he was to win during his first 14 seasons on the Sunshine Coast.

Miller, now 66, is a modest man from the 'old

school' who lets his results do the talking. But in 23 years, he has only once finished outside the top three trainers on the Sunshine Coast premiership.

A measure of Miller's ability is the fact he has won 920 races since transferring to Corbould Park with a stable devoid of expensive or fashionably bred horses.

"I wouldn't have had five Group 1 starters in my life," he said. "You could buy a lot of horses I've had at Target. In the last month I've run second to a couple of Redoute's Choice horses...one cost a million dollars and the other \$700,000.

"The best horse I've got at the moment is Sommerssea Drive and he cost \$18,000."

Trevor started riding work as a 12-year-old at Cunnamulla where older brothers Bill and Barry were trainers.

Billy, the eldest of six boys in the Miller family, married a New Zealand nurse who was working at the local hospital and moved to Auckland where he trained successfully for many years.

Others riding work at Cunnamulla when Miller was a kid included a young Aboriginal rider named "Darby" McCarthy, his brother "Scobie" and Peter Gumbleton who went on to ride a Brisbane Cup winner in a successful career that included lengthy stints in

Melbourne and Hong Kong.

"I never intended to become a horse trainer. I used to ride work and do other jobs around the shearing sheds and on the railway," recalled Trevor.

He was also a very handy footballer, playing senior grade rugby league from the age of 16 until he retired as a member of Cunnamulla's victorious Warrall Cup side at 34.

"Football was strong in the bush and there were four clubs in Cunnamulla in those days. The Warrall Cup was a competition between the rep teams from Charleville, Quilpie, Augathella and Cunnamulla."

Country football was so strong that Queensland and Australian five-eighth Bobby Banks played in Cunnamulla for three seasons during Miller's time. And a youngster named Chris Close started his senior career in Cunnamulla the season after Miller hung up his boots.

"I played mostly on the wing. I wasn't real fast, but was always a non-drinker and kept myself reasonably fit."

Noted amateur rider Noel Thompson, who earned a permanent mention in Miller's Guide after riding the program of seven winners at Cunnamulla in 1961, owned a taxi in the town which Miller purchased when Thompson moved to Brisbane to take up a job as a steward. >>



» “I drove the taxi for 11 years, but was still riding work for Barry who had built up his team. Then I sold the taxi licence and my wife and I bought the takeaway food shop.”

With brother Barry off to Brisbane, Trevor started to train in his own right and notched his first winner, Quinty Boy, at Wyandra.

“We did all the western tracks and used to go over the border to Louth, Nyngan, Brewarrina and Bourke. The meeting at Louth was like a mini-Birdsville...I also won a race at Birdsville one year.”

Miller also once brought a horse to Ipswich, travelling 72 hours from Cunnamulla on a goods train, to win a mid-week 10 furlong (2000m) race.

Although he trained 210 winners from Cunnamulla, Miller was a realist and knew things were becoming very tough in the bush.

“It got very hard and with three young kids there wasn’t much future. Racing was a hobby. You couldn’t make a fulltime living out of the industry and it was a battle with all the travel. You had to have your own truck and buy a lot of your own horses...it was a hobby, and I was trying to manage a team of 25 horses at Cunnamulla.

“We’d been to Caloundra on a holiday before the new racecourse opened and thought it might be the place to go. We planned the move for a couple of years and sold the takeaway food business...it was a big move for us.

“I brought eight horses with me. It was a big punt because I owned them all and one horse was an 11-year-old. I knew that if the move didn’t work out that I’d have to get a job outside racing.”

Ironically, Miller’s first winner from his new stable was the 11-year-old Bonsreturn at Gympie. The grey veteran retired not long after, but continued in racing as a clerk of the course’s mount at the Sunshine Coast.

A significant day for Miller was January 26, 1987, when he led-in his first winner at Corbould Park. Gallant Ruler, the horse that won on that Australian Day, is described by Miller as his “bread and butter”.

“He wasn’t the best horse I’ve trained, but he was the best horse to me,” he said.

Gallant Ruler won an incredible 24 races on the Corbould Park track and was the galloper that put Miller on the map.

"I think he still holds the record for most wins on a regular TAB track in Queensland. He won two races at Doomben and ran a few placings at Eagle Farm, but he was a Caloundra specialist. He could beat better horses at Caloundra than he was himself. He beat Burglar of Bamff five of the six times they met there."

From a modest start with eight horses in his stable, Miller's team grew to as many as 60 during the 1990s and early 2000s.

In 1998, he became the first to train four winners in an afternoon at the Sunshine Coast. The feat was later equalled by the late Bruce McLachlan.

"I'd won 12 premierships by 2000, but after Bruce (McLachlan) transferred here from Thornhill Park that year it was hard for me to compete," said Miller.

Stable stars have included Heavenly Knight, winner of the Group 3 Lightning Handicap and the Group 2 Ansett Cup in 1991 and Guided Queen which won the Silk Stocking the following year and later finished fifth in the Doomben 10,000.

Whale of a Knight, a \$6000 purchase who won 15 races and more than \$250,000 stake money was another top money-spinner.

And in 2007, Miller produced a training triumph to take the Caloundra Cup with problem horse King Latarmiss at the odds of \$51.

"Everyone thought it was a fluke that day, but I thought he could win," recalled Miller. "He was a real challenge to train. You couldn't work him twice around a track...he'd just run off if you tried a second circuit.

"The week before the Caloundra Cup, his preparation included a 1000m gallop and then a barrier trial a couple of hours later. That was the only way to get the work required for a 2400m race. It wasn't as easy as people make out...there's a lot of challenges training horses and you have to get them mentally right."

Jockey Ken Pope, who also cut his teeth in western Queensland, has ridden most winners for Miller who also had very successful associations with Craig Hyeronimus and the late Keith Mahoney.

"And I regard Michael Cahill very highly as a rider," he said.

He has also been the master of three Sunshine Coast premiership-winning apprentices, the late Lisa Francis, Matt Morris



and Michael Hughes.

Promising Jason Kropp, who started as a schoolboy doing work experience one day a week, is currently apprenticed to Miller.

"Jason started working on Sundays when he was at school and I never thought he'd be a jockey. But he rides quite well."

The trainer hit a difficult personal hurdle six and a half years ago with the loss of his wife Rosalea...six months after his son had survived the trauma of the Sari Club bombing in Bali.

"It was a very tough couple of years. I could almost have given it away then," he said.

"I'm lucky my three kids live at Caloundra and I have six grandkids now."

Despite training more than 1100 winners, Miller believes the training game is as tough now than at any time during his experience.

"It's extremely hard with expenses. Wages are a big thing for any trainer with a reasonable sized team. I've got 23 horses right now, the lowest numbers I've had for many years.

"There's no doubt total prizemoney is better these days, but it's top-heavy. So much money goes to the big carnivals and only the top people are getting it. QTIS money is good, but if you go back over the figures you see that a handful of horses each year take about 90 per cent of the money.

"Too many people miss out. I'd like to see the money spread across the board. Midweek prizemoney in town is shocking and I don't think any race at Caloundra should be worth less than \$10,000 to the winner.



"Owners are missing out. They are the people we should be keeping in the game."

Miller has no qualms with the Cushion Track at Caloundra.

"It's an alternative to the grass. You can work on the Cushion everyday, wet or dry."

The fact Miller has kept a record of each of his 1129 winners speaks volumes for his meticulous approach to training.

In 23 years at the Sunshine Coast his only break has been for one week when he attended a nephew's wedding in Perth.

"This business is seven days a week, 365 days a year," he said.

"Anyway, if you live at Caloundra it's like being on holidays all year round." <<