

Australian Thoroughbred Sire Review

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For June 2009 issue of Bluebloods

Eagle Park sires could revitalise Central western NSW breeding

Folklore has it that when a leading trainer was asked at the Sydney Easter yearlings 50 years ago if he was going to bid on the progeny of a first crop sire standing at the then modestly successful Newhaven Park Stud between Cowra and Boorowa, central western NSW, he sneered 'you can't grow horses down there'.

He ended up with egg on his face as the sire was the Court Martial product Wilkes (FR) and his first female runner, Wenona Girl, took out the AJC Gimcrack Stakes on debut, also succeeded in the AJC and VRC Sires' Produce Stakes and finished second in the Golden Slipper at two and went succeed all told in 27 races, including 12 Group1 events.

Wenona Girl was bred on Newhaven Park and was the forerunner of a host of superior performers by three times champion Australian sire Wilkes raised on the stud. The others from Newhaven Park included Golden Slipper winners John's Hope and Vivarchi and other Slipper second placegetters in Farnworth and Young Broлга.

Newhaven Park is not the only breeding grounds in the central and south western region to show in the last half century that leading talent can come from west of the Blue Mountains. The Tait's in the Gundagai district have bred and raced some wonderful performers, including Golden Slipper winner Baguette and 12-times Group1 winner Tie The Knot, and seven times Group1 winner Family of Man was a central western bred champion.

Another Tait was the owner and trainer nearly a hundred years earlier of a great colonial racehorse bred in the region, The Barb. Revered as the Black Demon, he was bred at Bathurst, the first town west of the mountains, in 1863 and is considered the first great Australian galloper.

Tait, like a recent Australian Prime Minister, was accoladed 'Honest John'. He also owned and trained four Melbourne Cup winners, The Barb, Glencoe, The Pearl (100-1) and The Quack.

When The Barb was bred, the central western region which is now home for two historic provincial cities, Bathurst and Orange, was the cradle of Australian breeding outside Sydney environs. It was far more significant at the time than the now capital of breeding, the Hunter Valley.

Given the investment and good fortune, Bathurst-Orange has the country and climate to emerge again as a big force. A breeder who could pioneer that renaissance is former Cowra grazier turned Orange businessman Peter Ward. With his wife Jan, Peter has established the Eagle Park stud on a lovely creek bisected, spring nurtured, well sheltered undulating, volcanic soiled property 14 Kms south of the city.

They pulled off a coup in 2006 when they arranged for Colossus (IRE) a good 2-year-old brother to one of Coolmore's most successful dual hemisphere sires, the Ireland bred Danehill product Danehill Dancer, to shuttle out as the stud's foundation sire. A hoof injury prevented Colossus returning after that one visit, one which results in first crop 2-year-olds in 2009-10, and this is a pity as he has shown up as a very promising sire in Europe. He was a leading juvenile sire for 2008 in Italy with one of his winners, Ciloster, setting new 1000m track record time of 0:57.4s at Rome's Capanelle course.

Peter Ward; however, appears to have shown very good judgement in the selection of two sires to fill the void left by Colossus. Both full time residents at Eagle Park, they are the Hussonet (USA) Chilean Group1 winner and proven sire Byblos (CHI) and the Danehill Dancer Ireland bred very smart juvenile Barbajuan.

Byblos, fee for 2009 \$8,800, started his career at Eagle Park last year, looking after over 100 mares, including daughters of Danehill Dancer, Anabaa, Quest for Fame, General Nediym, Langfuhr, Canny Lad, Marauding, Grand Lodge, Mister C, Military Plume, Alleged, Testa Rossa, Royal Academy, Bite the Bullet, King of Kings, El Moxie, Covetous, Spectrum, Semipalatinsk, Jeune, Naturalism, Sir Tristram, Marscay, Umatilla, Salieri, Chimes Square and Strategic.