

PEDIGREE ANALYSIS by Renée Geelen

STRONG JUMPS *program could help win back the Cup*

IF AUSTRALIAN breeders want to win the Melbourne Cup they should really be supporting our jumps racing scene. There have been five Melbourne Cup winners since an Australian bred last won the race that stops a nation and that situation doesn't look like changing any time soon.

A turnaround could come if we foster our staying talent and having a vibrant jumps calendar is part of that. Before those five imported winners we won the two previous Melbourne Cups in succession with Shocking (Street Cry (IRE)-Maria di Castiglia (GB) by Danehill (USA)) and Viewed (Scenic (IRE)-Lovers Knot by Khozaam (USA)).

Rather than succumb to the annual spring ritual of tearing our hair out in angst that we will "never" see another Australian bred horse win our 3200m Cup, let's perform a little analysis instead. Is there a way that our Principal Racing Authorities can assist our trainers, owners and breeders in getting closer to a local Melbourne Cup success?

The racing industry is rich in data, yet tends to hugely under-utilise that data for strategic gain. It would take hardly any time to get a list of all runners in the past five years, and group them by country of birth, country where they had their first start, and the distance of that first start (and all subsequent starts). This information would give bodies such as Racing Victoria an advantage in how to program races into the future to support local talent in their campaign towards the Cup.

This information also helps buyers who want to find a tried horse who has the potential to make it in the Cup, and helps trainers understand which of their current crop of youngsters has Cups potential. For the sake of this article, let's concentrate only on the past five winners and how they compare to the last two Australian-bred winners. (see Table 1.)

If we look at the country where each of the past five winners made their debut there are some rather obvious parallels. There are two each from France and England and one from Germany. And what do these countries have in common? A predisposition towards staying races and a strong jumps racing scene. (see Table 2.)

Protectionist (GER) (Monsun-Patineuse by Peintre Celebre (USA)) comes from the small racing nation



of Germany where they have a strong stamina focus, but the real jumps trend is seen in the next four winners. Both Fiorente (IRE) (Monsun-Desert Bloom by Pilsudski) and Green Moon (IRE) (Montjeu (IRE)-Green Noon by Green Tune) were bred in Ireland, and had their first start in England (coincidentally, both at the same track Newbury). Ireland and England have a massive jumps racing scene, in particular in Ireland where more than half of all their races are over obstacles. Jumps (National Hunt) racing is so strong there that riders are referred to as either jockeys or flat jockeys. France is next on this table with one third of all racing being over sticks, and both Dunaden (FR) (Nicobar-La Marlia by Kaldounevees) and Americain (USA) (Dynaformer-America by Arazi (USA)) were trained in France.

Many jumps horses start their careers on the flat, and the flat system in these countries is designed to educate young staying horses. Trainers know how to train a stayer, and the authorities program races to support them. To put some context around this idea, there are 140 nominations for this year's Melbourne Cup across

65 trainers. Of those 65 trainers, at least 35% also currently have jumps horses in their stables, and many others have trained jumpers during their career.

If we look at all the past seven Melbourne Cup winners, and their debut performance, only two were winners, but five debuted as two year-olds. Even a stayer needs to be out early, even just for an educational run.

Look at the distances these horses debuted over, and the difference between Shocking's debut run at 1000m and the other extreme of Fiorente at 2200m. Just this tiny scrap of data tells a story, and it's a story that our local authorities should be paying attention to. The past five winners of our biggest internationally recognised race had their debut over distances that suited developing stayers. Yet how many races does Australia program for horses like this?

For two year-olds, there are only 12 races at a mile or longer (that's just 2% of all two year-old races). And further to that, how many horses do trainers have in work who could have one start as a two year-old for education, yet are sent to the paddock because there are very few suitable races.

Our authorities could cater to staying types by programming races for young horses over longer distances. Not just for their first start, but across a suitable program so they get enough opportunities. This is, however, a two way street, and trainers need to enter their young horses in these races, otherwise the authorities will not continue to program them. And breeders, who make up a huge proportion of racehorse owners, need to support this as well.

It is especially heartening to see some studs in Victoria investing in staying stallions and for a special "Blue Riband" section for staying bred youngsters to be incorporated in the Inglis Premier Yearling Sale in Melbourne. Breeders and yearling buyers need to support these initiatives if they really want to see a resurgence of stamina in our bloodstock.

Of course there is another upside when we have a strong program to encourage stayers and jumpers. It ensures those horses who don't measure up to Melbourne Cup class have the chance at a valuable and worthwhile career in more modest events and that will keep their owners happy and perhaps buying or breeding more stayers in the hunt for a Cup winner. ■

Year	Winner (birth nation)	Country of first start	Details of first start
2014	Protectionist (GER)	Germany	1st: 2YO race over 1600m
2013	Fiorente (IRE)	England	5th: 3YO Maiden over 2200m
2012	Green Moon (IRE)	England	8th: 2YO maiden over 1600m
2011	Dunaden (FR)	France	6th: 2YO race over 2000m
2010	Americain (USA)	France	1st: 2YO city race over 1400m
2009	Shocking (AUS)	Australia	5th: 2YO maiden over 1000m
2008	Viewed (AUS)	Australia	2nd: 3YO maiden over 1250m

Table 1

Country	Jumps Races	Flat Races	% Jumps Races
Ireland	1426	1104	56%
England	3750	6396	37%
France	2259	4867	32%
Germany	22	1253	2%
Australia	92	19,534	0%

Table 2: Jumps races and flat races by nation in 2013. Data from the International Federation of Horseracing Authorities.