

Are Australians Willing to Travel?

By Katrina Partridge

Whether you're a strident opponent or supporter of the principle the fact remains: globalization is here to stay. And in racing that is no more clearly demonstrated than in the international ballot for the Melbourne Cup whose fields grow annually ever stronger as overseas champions nominate and then arrive to compete for both glory and financial reward in Australia's most famous race.

Equally, a number of Australian horses have ventured overseas in search of fame and prize money. Famous names to have taken on America include Phar Lap and Lets Elope. Recent examples in terms of Asian sojourners include: Fields of Omagh who took on the World in the 2003 Japan Cup and the Hong Kong Vase less than a month later; Bomber Bill and Dantana who challenged the Hong Kong International Sprint in December of last year. In Dubai the likes of Belle de Jour, Notoire, Dantelah, Flight Pattern and Bomber Bill have lined up for past runnings of the Golden Shaheen; Seasquill for the Dubai Sheema Classic; Scoozi for the Godolphin Mile; and Danewin and Juggler for the World Cup.

Whilst the numbers aren't considerable the list demonstrates that, as a rule, it would be unfair to state Australians don't venture abroad. Indeed, Choisir's exploits at Royal Ascot last year show that on occasion we don't just venture - we also well and truly plunder.

But the dearth of Australian entries in this year's Dubai World Cup meeting raises an interesting question about Australian trainers' general willingness to take on international fields.

The local cry, of course, will always be "Well, Exceed and Excel was SUPPOSED to go". It was only Godolphin's purchase of the \$21M colt that diverted those plans.

But as if this should have settled the argument the Director of the Emirates Racing Association, Fin Powrie, inadvertently pushed it back to the headlines during a March 24 interview with the *Racing Post*.

It was there in print for all to see: ““We thought we had Australia's top sprinter Exceed and Excel, but he was bought by Sheikh Mohammed, & the response from the rest of the dozen or so we targeted was lukewarm. There are quarantine difficulties, which the authorities in Australia are very slow to tackle. But it's mainly a cultural thing, and nothing to do with the horses or financial issues. I don't think the Australians understand dirt racing.”

The comments were somewhat surprising; given the general ‘good neighbor policy in racing’ some may even remark - mildly confrontational. I therefore caught up with Martin Talty, Manager of the International Department at the Dubai Racing Club to ask for his views:

"It's always hard going to get Australian horses here for a World Cup,” he says “Why? Because they have to be the very best horses in Australia and the timing of the World Cup is during one of the premier carnivals in Australia. It was shame this year but no, I don’t think it's a thing about Australian trainers not being willing to travel as they do and Australian horses have shown that they can compete very successfully overseas.

“I think there will be a time where we will have Australian runners here; that will be very soon and I think they will run very well.

“I don’t think it's a misunderstanding about dirt racing either as we have 2 fantastic turf races – a Group 1 mile and a half race and another Group race just under 9 furlongs.

“From the point of view of an Australian trainer/owner - they virtually have to give up a lucrative Autumn campaign to target the World Cup so I can understand their hesitance in

coming here. Having said that, the rewards if they do decide to do it are there for all to see. And if horses are going to go on to England now and follow the Choisir or Exceed and Excel route why not come here, have a run and then go on to England?

"It's disappointing there are no Australian horses this year but I would never criticize an Australian trainer for not bringing a horse here – far from it. You've got to have the right type of horse to travel. We were hoping to get Lonhro and I was very appreciative of the time and the length of time Hawkes and the Inghams took in really considering it – but even though they decided against it – but that's not to say we won't have another one like him over here in the future.

"At the end of the day – there is always something going on in racing in any given country at any given time. You've got Easter in Australia; you've got the World Cup in Dubai. Then you've got the Breeders Cup in the States and the Cox Plate in Melbourne on the same day. You've also got the Spring Carnival on when the Arc is on ... There's always something."

“Horses aren't machines, they're flesh and blood, and if you want to get the best horses from every single country running against each other on any given day it simply can't be done.”

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