

## EUREKA STUD

There aren't too many Darling Downs studs that can claim a connection to not just one of the world's most famous mathematicians, but also to Australia's only 'official' rebellion. I admit that it's perhaps a shaky geographic connection between modern day Cambooya and the ancient Italian city of Syracuse (where legend has it that in 215BC, upon discovering the law of buoyancy, Archimedes cried "EUREKA! EUREKA" ["I've found it!"]) - or, for that matter, the 1854 Victorian gold field where the word 'Eureka' has filtered into the subconscious courtesy of the dog eared high school text book and the occasional ambitious movie director. But despite the nuances of time lines, maps and legends, the three connections to 'Eureka' have one thing in common - all have produced exceptional results from steadfast commitment and all have demonstrated a natural ability to harness change.

Eureka stud was founded in 1935 by Andrew McAlpine. Similar to a number of studs in Queensland, the property has been handed down from one generation to the next - current owners/managers being Andrew's son (Colin) and grand-son (Scott). Over the past 69 years the original "square mile of timbered Darling Downs country with no infrastructure and no fencing except along the boundary line" has expanded to 1350 acres. But don't expect to stumble across Kentucky style stallion barns and water fountains when you drive through the front gate. Practicality, well maintained buildings, a focus on safety, and a desire to reduce the stress on every horse on the property has resulted in success, not necessarily a 5-star hotel rating.

"It's not the colour of the fences - it's what inside them that count," Scott says.

Consistent with its achievements, the stud has remained at the forefront of innovation. Along with Colin Hayes, Colin McAlpine spearheaded the Australian buyers' bench in the UK in 1966, being one of four Australian buyers to attend the December sales at Newmarket. Later in his career he shouldered the criticism of others and pursued the (then) novel (now standard) strategy of promoting and selling yearlings at interstate sales. In 1995 Eureka was the first stud to stand a shuttle stallion in Queensland (the leading first season sire in the UK at the time, Puissance). More recently the stud has incorporated the practice of interstate shuttling - Skalato spending alternate seasons in

Queensland and Victoria ensuring maximum benefit to breeders (all progeny being Super VOBIS and QTIS eligible).

Colin acknowledges that he once named a horse “Luck Makes Success” but is the first to admit that “whilst the concept is true, a lot of hard work goes into breeding and preparing horses to be good race horses.” Over the years Eureka has developed a series of horse rearing methods that have been validated not just by the healthy, strong boned and psychologically contented horses it continues to produce, but by their results on the ultimate of assessment grounds - the racetrack. From only four horses foaled and reared at Eureka to race during the 2000 Spring Carnival the quartet of Skalato, Show a Heart, Scenic Warrior, and Oh Blue Angel amassed a series of Group wins and prize money just shy of the million dollar mark. Further evidence to show that these results were no fluke: Eureka horses also hold four course records (three at Flemington and one at Eagle Farm). In addition, Eureka earned the title of leading stud for the Queensland winter carnival in 2003 and boasts an impressive tally of four Magic Millions winners, Group winners in every State, the Group One winners Picaday, Just Now, Scenic Peak and Show a Heart and Skalato (who had it taken from him on a technicality) as well as multiple Group winners and Group One seconds including Eureka Jewel, Memphis Blues, and Skalato.

The family’s ability to breed and raise such an enviable list of Group performers becomes more noteworthy when you consider that most have been produced from a moderately priced broodmare band. Eureka mares have won Queensland Broodmare of the Year no less than four times (most recently in 2003 with Our Today). The stud owes much of this success to an historical (yet increasingly rare) approach of supporting foundation mares and their daughters over decades – not months or years as commercial nuances dictate what may or may not be “fashionable” – thus producing future generations of champions (a strategy also supported by world renowned owner/breeder the Aga Khan). Colin says however that you can’t learn it overnight.

“You can’t read it out of a book,” he says. “If you run your business by theory you’ll go broke. You need practical experience gained from living and experiencing your horses and you have to be sensible enough to take note of the people who do have the experience.”

The results speak for themselves with Eureka mares producing Just for Luck (dam of Stanzaic and Scenic Warrior), Just Now (AJC Oaks winner whose winning time was 0.2 seconds faster than Bonecrusher's Derby winning time the previous Saturday), Palatious (G2 winner and dam of the G1 winner Danelagh), Alma Mater (dam of Savannah Success), Sea Cabin (winner of the first million dollar race for fillies in Qld), Eureka Jewel (4 times stakes winner and 2<sup>nd</sup> AJC Oaks G1), Dancing Cossack (stakes winner) as well as (amongst many others on a long and distinguished honour roll) Lolita Star who was an unlucky third in the AJC Oaks in 2000 (winner of the G2 VRC Wakeful Stakes). Her dam, grand-dam, great-grand dam, and great-great grand-dam were all bred by Eureka.

Colin's approach to purchasing bloodstock has not always been as straightforward as attending a broodmare sale and opening his catalogue at the requisite page or indeed his policy of staying true to certain families. He has (literally) stumbled across some of his broodmare 'diamonds'. On his way to the races in New Zealand a number of decades ago Colin deviated slightly from course to chase a pheasant across a paddock. An evergreen punter, he had placed a small wager with a friend that he could out run it. The startled pheasant revealed a superior turn of foot but as Colin wandered back to the gate he noticed a mare observing him with an intelligent (albeit somewhat curious) eye. The owner of the mare seized the opportunity to stride into the paddock to discuss the finer points of good manners (or something along those lines) with the Australian trespasser - only to depart a short time later with some extra change in his pocket ... and one less mare. The horse was none other than a half sister to the mighty Star Kingdom. She went on to become the grand-dam of the hardy stayer Semstar, who has the distinction of beating the Melbourne Cup winner Kensei on each occasion they met.

The stud has been home to many good stallions over the years including The Iliad, St Constant, Gaekwar's Pride, Messmate, Emerillo, Midnight Cowboy and Lumley Road (the latter producing broodmare of the year Tautina [dam of Just Now] whose dam line is etched in the pedigree page of recent performers Startell, Tellson and Stanzaic). Current incumbents include the internationally credentialed Piccolo, Great Dane, and the stud's signature stallion – Semipalatinsk.

In 1981, the three year old colt with the name that no-one could pronounce was based in Milan, Italy. The story of his purchase is worthy of a chapter in its own right (involving as it does a drive to Tamworth, a fateful telegram left at a pub, a detour via Lindsay Park, a bank in Melbourne whose local manager was utterly bewildered by Colin appearing at his desk demanding a six figure loan to buy “some overseas horse – and the loan needs approval in five hours not two weeks or someone else will grab him!” and, ultimately, Colin’s unique ability to tell a good yarn). Suffice it to say, the story has done the rounds of quite a few Bank dinners and the young manager who approved the loan may well get a deserved mention in the history book as the man who ensured Queensland would stand the horse who would be crowned champion Queensland sire on four occasions, produce 21 Stakes winners and 23 stakes placed horses including a Stakes winner in every state of Australia and winners from 800m to 3200m on the flat and etch his name in stone as the broodmare sire of winners of \$20m and 21 stakes winners including Group One winners Private Steer, Savannah Success, Danelagh, Picaday, Star Shiraz, Scenic Warrior and Make Mine Magic.

The Stud has also enjoyed its share of success in the yearling ring (their shuttle stallion, Piccolo, siring the highest priced Queensland bred yearling sold at auction when, at the 2004 Magic Millions sales, the colt out of Our Today (a full brother to Picaday) sold for \$260,000) but Colin gives me a stern look when I touch on the delicate topic of competition and the role of commercialism, reminding me that “if the industry goes well then you’ll go well but the horse winning on the track is where the dollars are, not in a service fee or in the yearling ring.”

“The horse has to be reared right then put in the right hands by giving it to the right trainer,” he says. “Otherwise you have no horse. The ultimate aim has to be what the race track should produce for you.”

Colin has contributed significantly to the Australian thoroughbred industry - well beyond Eureka, the “hundreds of horses” he’s raced, the race meetings he’s attended and the punting money he’s put up. He was President of the Queensland Bloodhorse Breeders Association for 17 years (having been on the Committee for more than a quarter of a century) and was Australian BBA (now TBA) president for 14 years. With Professor Reg Pascoe he instigated the Australian Horse Council and chaired its first meeting in

Canberra, and was vice-chairman of the Australian Equine Research Foundation and vice-chairman of the Queensland branch of the same organization. He was awarded an A.M. (Member in the Order of Australia) in the Queen's Honours List for services to the industry in 1992.

If you're thinking at this point that fortune has always smiled on this Queensland family then you'd be mistaken. Like anyone involved with thoroughbreds they've had their fair share of heartache both in the breeding barn and on the track (for example the loss of Queensland Cup winner Evasion, who was killed by lightning just 48 hours after winning the race). They've also been exposed to an uglier side of the industry which, ironically, Colin had hinted at in a 1997 interview with Ged Cosgrove of the Toowoomba Chronicle where he stated that "greed and disunity are the industry's greatest enemies." Less than 12 months later the stud's promising young sire Brave Warrior was dead, victim of a freak paddock accident. Four years later, two of the former co-owners of the stallion would serve an unprecedented damages claim for \$23 million on the McAlpines. The action was eventually settled out of court but the questions it raised over the potential liability of stud owners sent shock waves through the Australian breeding community and the Equine Industry throughout the world.

Eureka Stud's 69 year history gives it the distinction of being a true achiever in the field of producing exceptional thoroughbreds. Like the miners of years gone by, the McAlpine family's success has been achieved by back-breaking work, the occasional stroke of luck, and a stoic ability to deal with an occasional darker cloud that taints all our fortune on occasion.

The history of the Queensland – and indeed Australian - thoroughbred industry would be remarkably different without them.

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