

BACK TO THE WELL



Star sprinter Apache Cat may never have been but for the persistence of one of his part-owners.

KRISTEN MANNING reports on his breeder's perseverance through thick and thin.

He makes it look so simple. He stalks his rivals, never letting them out of sight. And then bang – in a stride or two he passes them and races away. So much natural talent, such a great will to win. Apache Cat – winner of 13 of his 27 starts and over \$2.3 million in stakes.

Three Gr1 victories to his name. And all his owners have to do is cheer and celebrate. Easy, right?

But horses are never that uncomplicated. For every fairytale there is heartbreak, for every big winner there is a story that might have been. For every horse who achieves his best, there is one whose fate determined that he would not.

Just ask Paul Radford, one of Australia's proudest owner/breeders – the man who convinced his racing partners that they should breed with their little mare Tennessee Blaze "just one more time."

Inheriting a love of racing from his grandparents, Radford has fond memories of listening to the races on radio, having pretend bets with his family. At school he ran a book – the seeds of a gambling interest well and truly sown.

"I have been a punter all my life," he said, adding

that it was inevitable that he would one day extend the gamble into horse ownership. A 20th share in the Arch Sculptor filly Work Of Art was his first foray. A Flemington winner at only her second start, she displayed good talent and eventually Radford bought her outright.

She was to win another couple of races at Corowa where she was trained by Richard Freyer but she was unable to fulfil her potential after hurting her back in a stable accident: the first story that might have been!

Holding on to the family, Radford still has Work Of Art's two times winning, city placed daughter Fine Distraction who is in foal to Gonski. That mare was another bad luck story – looking an Adelaide Cup chance but missing out on a run as emergency.

At around the same time as racing Work Of Art, Radford leased from friend David Tobin a share in the smart filly Our Draw. It was she who gave him a taste of metropolitan racing – winning five times at Moonee Valley.

A couple of years after Our Draw's retirement to stud, Radford decided that he would like to buy his own horse. The business run by he and his partner Robin Lawrie was going very well – they were amongst the first in the world to discover the many uses of e-mail and profited from it.

So it was off to the sales two years running. In 1991 a son of What A Guest caught the eye and christened Waterbridge, he really hit the track running – winning his first couple as a two-year-old at Albury by wide margins.

Unfortunately he was unable to measure up to city grade but he did win six races and he got Radford all the more hooked. "He had his problems and when he was older I nursed him and learned a lot about horses – it was an education worth having."

A year previously Radford had sat with Richard and Jack Freyer at the sales. He liked the look of a chestnut Whiskey Road filly. She wasn't big but she was very strong. "What about her?" he asked Richard who relayed the same question on to Jack. With the hammer was about to come down, Jack nodded, Richard bid and Paul Radford thought he'd got himself a \$7000 bargain.

Just how good a buy she was could not be foreseen.

Friend Ken Lofthouse took a quarter share in the new filly as did his friend Gary Riddell. They named her Tennessee Blaze and a 3-lengths victory at her second outing had them excited. Winning another three races, and described as "a good country performer," she gave her owners an excuse for a lovely day out in the country – Ken Lofthouse and his wife becoming so fond of the Corowa area that they eventually retired there.

Whilst not possessed of "zippy speed,"



Greg Eurell trains all of Tennessee Blaze's offspring

Tennessee Blaze was a tough trier. "She had real courage," Radford notes, "she would never give in." These were qualities he thought that augured well for her broodmare potential.

Retired with hoof problems in 1995, she was sent to the speedy Sports Works.

"Like her, he was strong and solid," Radford recalled – "so we thought we'd get either a bullet or a brick!" Unfortunately an example of the latter was a result of that first

"Don't worry, your foal is fine – but he looks like his head has been dipped in a bucket of paint!"

mating, an ordinary type called Sport For Short. He did however win a maiden at Warrnambool and Paul was content with that – "we knew he didn't have much ability but we wanted to see if he had the heart to win a race and he did."

Sport For Short was the first horse Radford and Lawrie sent to Cranbourne trainer Greg Eurell and they were impressed with his horsemanship – "he gave Sport For Short every chance so we were happy."

It was a case of second time lucky for the Sports Works-Tennessee Blaze mating: better type this time, a chestnut filly who would race under the name of Tiger Belle. A natural speedster she won her first start at Mornington by four lengths, stepping straight up to city grade with an all-the-way Sandown victory.

A game second under a big weight at that same track next start and Radford was full of

anticipation. "We really thought we had something – we thought, 'this is going to be fun!'"

But it was yet another story not meant to be, Tiger Belle contracting a virus shortly after "which really knocked her around." In three subsequent preparations consisting of six starts she was out of the placings and just when it looked like she might yet find her best – finding winning form at Moonee Valley as a summer four-year-old – she broke down, fracturing a sesamoid.

Next along for Tennessee Blaze was another "bullet" in the shape of Raptor. A good looking horse with "a bit of presence about him," the son of Prince Of Birds shaped well early, winning two in a row at Sandown and Caulfield.

"Greg thought he may have been the best horse he'd had," Radford recalls – remembering dreaming of the Australian Guineas. But close to the race the big chestnut, full of beans, reared in his yard – landing awkwardly and putting a nail through his hoof. Another unfulfilled dream – "he was never right again."

Tennessee Blaze's second Prince Of Birds colt was the "brick." Only little, he showed no racing desire at all. "He was never even interested in leaving his paddock!" Paul joked.

Three times provincial winner Chocolate Ali by Ali-Royal was her next foal – and then along came Tennessee Darlin'. A filly who gave her owners cause for excitement, she was an unlucky second at debut and fourth to Laura's Charm at Sandown second up.

Another "bullet?" Everyone thought so but within two weeks of that encouraging run Tennessee Darlin' was dead. "Greg was devastated," Radford commented, "and so were we."

But a reward for their patience as breeders was just around the corner. Whilst Tennessee Darlin' was at foot Tennessee Blaze was in foal to the well bred shuttler Lion Cavern, a full brother to Gone West. On October 13, 2002 she foaled a colt – one who immediately commanded attention.

Radford well remembers the call from Chatswood Stud. "Don't worry, your foal is fine – but he looks like his head has been dipped in a bucket of paint!"

A few hours later and Radford caught his first glimpse of Apache Cat. "I really liked him – he was different, interesting!" Not everyone was so taken however, "ugly" another word used to describe him. But Radford was always smitten – "he was a sweet little fellow who just loved visitors."

Growing in stature and strength, Apache Cat was in work as a two-year-old and Greg Eurell was impressed from the start.

"He said that he had the speed of Tiger Belle and the toughness of Raptor."

Winning a jump-out with ease, Apache Cat was given a little time – debut-

PTO



Apache Cat has now won 3 Gr1s

