

# Neil's having a 'Ball'

**NEIL COUPER REFLECTS ON HIS AMAZING RIDE AS AN OWNER WHO WENT ON TO RACE THE WORLD'S HIGHEST-RANKED SPRINTER AND CLAIM GROUP 1 GLORY**

WORDS: SHARON HUNT (EXECUTIVE OFFICER – NSWROA) PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

**B**eing the owner of a winning horse is something that all owners aspire to, but to be a part-owner of a horse which has jointly topped the Longines world's best racehorse rankings as champion sprinter is something most can only dream of.

The lucky owner in question is Neil Couper, co-owner of Terravista which, together with Lankan Rupee, was recently handed this auspicious honour by the International Federation of Horse Racing Authorities. In fact, Australian-trained horses provided the three highest rated horses (the third being Chautauqua) in the sprinting division.

I asked Neil what it felt like to be a part-owner of a world champion sprinter: "To part-own a horse like Terravista is the dream of all owners. From the first day we saw the horse we knew he had the

standout qualities. Joe (Pride, trainer) believed in him and kept on raising the bar which culminated in his Darley Classic win.

"Then to be announced in London at the Longines Awards, sharing the Best Sprinter in the World category, is just another thrill this horse has given us. I think we have gone past cloud nine and now we are heading to cloud 10."

What a year 2014 was for Terravista (Captain Rio (GB)-Parfore (NZ)) starting with two Group 3 wins in the ATC Southern Cross Stakes at Randwick and the ATC Liverpool City Cup at Warwick Farm.

After an unplaced run in the Group 1 ATC George Ryder Stakes, he was sent for a spell. He resumed in August and had immediate success in the Group 3 ATC Show County Quality and then saluted in the Group 2 ATC The Shorts.

Terravista then ventured to Melbourne for the Spring Racing Carnival where he was an emphatic winner of the Group 1 VRC Darley Classic at Flemington, relegating co-world champion sprinter Lankan Rupee into third place and running to a career high rating of 123.

The view would be great from cloud 10 wouldn't it?

Currently, Neil has interests in nine horses which range in age from seven-year-olds to yearlings and is firmly of the view that you need to have a new horse coming through all the time.

The present crop includes Tiger Tees (NZ), Ball of Muscle and, of course, Terravista.

As readers may be aware, all three horses are from the wonderful producing mare Parfore (by Gold Brose) with Tiger Tees and Ball of Muscle being full brothers by Dubawi (Ire) and Terravista –



*Ball of Muscle (Glyn Schofield) romps home at Royal Randwick*

a half-brother by Captain Rio (GB).

Last year wasn't a bad one for Tiger Tees either following four black-type wins in the Group 1 ATC The Galaxy, the Group 2 ATC Warwick Stakes, the Group 3 VRC Aurie's Star Handicap and the Listed BRC Falvelon Quality.

The baby brother of the trio, Ball of Muscle, recently recorded his first black-type success in the Listed GRC Takeover Target Stakes.

In what might be by traditional standards a surprise to some, Couper has never owned a horse outright himself, instead always choosing to take shares with a group of partners.

"Taking shares rather than an outright purchase allows me to spread my interests which then in turn allows me to have more horses," he said.

"Over the years I have had 28 horses ranging from 10 per cent to 33 per cent ownership."

So how was Couper introduced into the world of racing?

As has been the case with so many participants, his interest in horse racing started as a young boy.

Both his grandfather and father followed racing and owned horses themselves, albeit not very successfully.

As Couper became older and his lifestyle more affluent, he ventured into the ownership ranks with his business partner Peter Callaghan.

They went to the Inglis Sales at Newmarket in 1992 and purchased their first horse, subsequently named Benchmark, which was trained by Clarry Conners.

They had success with him which enabled them to purchase a few more horses, again with success.

Couper said the racing game had been kind to him over the years.

"I have been fortunate to meet many good people in the racing industry who



Neil Couper (yellow tie) with fellow connections of Ball of Muscle

have influenced my pleasure as an owner," he said.

"In my early days of ownership I would have to say definitely Clarry Conners helped. As a hobby breeder I would have to say Andrew Bowcock and John Cornish of Torryburn Stud have influenced me and Michael Ryan, a good friend, who offered me the opportunity to race the progeny of the great broodmare Parfore.

"In recent times I would have to say Joe Pride, a very talented trainer. His skill at being able to place horses to their best advantage and keep them happy in the process is signified by his results."

And the million dollar question – what has been his most memorable moment on a racecourse?

He said that there have been many unforgettable moments as an owner. His first winner rates highly, of course, but the euphoria of winning his first Group 1 with Tiger Tees and following that up with Terravista winning the Darley Classic against a top-quality field was second to none.

Asked what advice he would give someone contemplating entering the ownership ranks, Couper said: "Live the dream. It doesn't matter how big or small your share in a racehorse is. It's the camaraderie with other owners and meeting like-minded people which is the key.

"The feeling of winning your first race to having a runner in a major race is only heightened by those involved with you. Do it with a group of friends to spread the cost, don't go in over your head and research the type of horse you wish to buy and then match that horse to the trainer."

If you are interested in participating in the racing industry, become a member of the NSW Racehorse Owners Association (NSWROA).

NSWROA is very pleased to advise that 2015 membership, which runs for a calendar year, is now open. Simply visit the website [www.nswroa.com.au](http://www.nswroa.com.au) or telephone the NSWROA office on 9299 4299 for further information. **RNSW**

**YOUNG PROFESSIONALS IN RACING**

**A network for young racing enthusiasts**

**Join now at [ypr.com.au](http://ypr.com.au)**

