



Official presentation to Winx as Tab.com.au NSW Champion Horse of the Year at 2016 Racing's Night of Champions

Winx is the word

WINX!! HAS THERE EVER BEEN A MORE POPULAR WORD IN THE VOCABULARY OF RACING PARTICIPANTS AND INDEED THE GENERAL PUBLIC IN RECENT TIMES? WORDS: SHARON HUNT (EXECUTIVE OFFICER – NSWROA)

It has been said on numerous occasions in the past that we should never compare champions from other eras but how can we not?

The original “people’s champion” Phar Lap had the same cult following in the 1930s as did the “Big O” Octagonal during the 1990s.

Makybe Diva also brought people ‘back to the track’ to witness her remarkable feats in the Melbourne Cup during the early 2000s and then there was the phenomenon that was Black Caviar.

Winx!! Just the mention of her name and adjectives flow so quickly from our lips. Could it be that she is one of the best horses we have ever seen?

Her victory in this year’s W.S. Cox Plate would surely prove that this is the

case. Her win by eight lengths was the biggest winning margin ever recorded in this time-honoured race.

Winx extended her winning streak to 13 straight wins in the Cox Plate, nine of which have been at Group 1 level.

She had also just won the 2016 Australian Racehorse of the Year award after having been named the Tab.com.au NSW Champion Horse of the Year in August at Racing’s Night of Champions.

I cannot, even in the best of my dreams, imagine what it must be like to own such a wonderful racehorse.

So to answer this question, and a few others, I spoke recently with part-owner Debbie Kepitis, a true blueblood of the racing industry herself.

As the daughter of Bob Ingham, there was never a question as to whether

racing would pull on her heart strings – it was a foregone conclusion!

Growing up the Ingham family (her father Bob and Uncle Jack nicknamed the ‘Chicken Kings’) were heavily involved in both racing and trotting.

In 1970 the Ingham brothers were the biggest trotting owners in Australia and by 1974 had some 650 race wins to their credit.

From an early age Debbie watched as their passion grew in racing amassing an equine empire which included Woodlands Stud, Crown Lodge at Warwick Farm (their Sydney racing base), Carbine Lodge at Flemington (their Melbourne racing base), plus stables in Adelaide and Brisbane as well as thousands of racehorses, making it the largest Thoroughbred racing and

breeding operation in Australia at the time.

Their all cerise colours were the most recognised racing colours in the land.

When the entire operation was sold to Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum in 2008, Bob Ingham created Ingham Racing for his four children Lyn, John, Robby and Debbie as he wanted the camaraderie to continue in the family which it has to this day.

Debbie saw first-hand from her father and uncle what it was like to own a champion horse, indeed a very public champion horse, the incredible Octagonal who sadly passed away recently at the age of 24.

The 'Big O' as he was affectionately referred to was a star from the very start of his career – facing the starter 28 times for 14 wins (10 at Group 1 level), 7 second placings and a third placing for \$5,892,231 in stakes when retired in 1997. He was the highest earning Australian racehorse in history at the time.

Like Winx, Octagonal was an Australian Horse of the Year and a Cox Plate winner. Champion Racehorse and Stallion Lonhro, a son from Octagonal's very first crop, was also an Australian Horse of the Year.

Debbie's enthusiasm for the great horse has not diminished saying: "Octagonal was incredible; he knew how to win and where the winning post was.

"In more times than not you never actually knew he had won until his number came up – it was breathtaking! How lucky am I to have been involved with him?"

By 2006 Debbie officially entered the racing industry herself buying the first of some 175 horses she has owned since that time. She currently has 45 racehorses 'on the books' at present.

Racing under the banner of Woppitt Bloodstock, named after the first horse she bought, Debbie and husband Paul wanted to include their three daughters early in a syndicate for the children to run – similar to what her father had done with her siblings and herself with Ingham Racing.

Woppitt, who is now the matriarch broodmare of their operation, was trained by Lee Freedman and was a real speed ball. She won five times for the Kepitis family including a Listed race in South Australia.



Winx (Hugh Bowman) dashes away from Hauraki (James McDonald) to win the Group 1 George Main Stakes at Royal Randwick. Picture by Steve Hart

Without doubt Winx (who is co-owned with Peter and Patty Tighe, and Richard Treweek) is the star of the current stable which also includes the likes of Preferment (NZ), winner of the 2016 Australian Stayer of the Year award.

The recently retired Amicus was Woppitt Bloodstock's first Group 1 winner having saluted in the 1000 Guineas at Caulfield in 2014.

Debbie said it was hard to put into words what it feels like to watch Winx race.

"I need to be there on track – it's superstition – until she has crossed the line the race isn't over for me. Pressure and responsibility also goes with the territory now."

Debbie was quick to point out that her father had influenced her greatly in the industry as had all the team from Woodlands.

"They all imparted their knowledge guiding me to form my own opinions and systems for my foray into racing. I cannot thank them enough for their help."

Chris Waller is also a very important part of the equation and Debbie credits him with having accomplished so much with Winx.

She truly believes that Winx could have been a good horse with any trainer, but with Chris Waller she has become a champion. "Chris has extraordinary abilities and does what is best for the horse rather than doing what others would normally do, nothing is left to chance nor are any risks taken."

When asked what her most memorable moment on a racecourse was she said it was hard to say that one moment has been the most memorable.

"There are many especially those from the first of each step, horse at the races, win a race, win black type, win Group race, win first Group One to winning a major.

"Probably last year's Cox Plate with Winx as it was the 20th anniversary of Octagonal's success in the race, it took my breath away but with a mare like Winx the memorable moments just keep happening."

And her advice to someone contemplating entering into the ownership ranks: "Ownership is wonderful. Enter with dreams but make sure you enjoy every step along the way from horse selection, naming, trial, race start, etcetera. Luck plays a big part in the industry so make the most of it when it comes your way."

To those of you who are not owners as yet, why not give it a go! You never know, you might be leading in a champion like Winx yourself.

To those owners who are not as yet members of the Association, why not join this winning team and become a member of NSW Racehorse Owners Association (NSWROA). Applications will be opening soon for the 2017 membership year.

For further information, simply visit our website www.nswroa.com.au or telephone the NSWROA office on 02 9299 4299. **RNSW**