

Irish chasing Aussie pot of gold

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MEADOWBRANCH DJ'S happy connections

IRELAND'S Flanagan family are hoping a pot of gold is waiting for them at the end of the rainbow...

Set to embark on a 15,000-kilometre trip, the Flanagans are heading to Australia in a bid to become the first Northern Hemisphere winners of the time-honoured Inter Dominion.

To be staged in Perth, the Inter Dominion is scheduled to begin with heats on November 27, with the \$1.3million Final on December 13.

The Flanagans will be represented by well-bred pacer Meadowbranch D J, which earned a berth in the Championship by capturing the inaugural UK/Ireland Inter Dominion.

Trained by William Flanagan, Meadowbranch D J was awarded the title on countback, having tied with Brywinsmagicpotion on points.

Ironically, the inaugural Inter Dominion in Perth also saw Evicus declared the winner on posts in 1936!

William part-owns the seven-year-old with his brother, Mark, and family friend Noel Cawden, having purchased the American-bred pacer as an unborn foal.

Making the journey to the United States to purchase a two-year-old named Mystery Chase, the Flanagans were the under bidders at \$75,000, but managed to by the youngster's dam, Search For Cam, in foal to Real Artist.

Transported to Ireland, Search For Cam produced a colt foal now known as Meadowbranch D J.

"We actually wanted to buy Mystery Chase, which was a two-year-old close to turning three at the time," Mark explained. "We were the under bidders at \$75,000 and he went on to win almost \$1million.



MEADOWBRANCH DJ – Photo Ironia-Art

"We bought his mum who was in foal in America and had her transported back to Ireland where she had Meadowbranch D J."

Showing plenty of potential as a juvenile, Meadowbranch D J "lost his way" at four, with connections deciding to geld the stallion after two frustrating seasons.

Since then Meadowbranch D J has recaptured his best to become Ireland's top pacer.

"He won the UK Derby at three and looked to be heading for the top," Mark said. "But he lost his way at four and had his mind elsewhere.

"He kept showing plenty, but was not putting in like he should, so we gelded him about 10 months ago and he hasn't looked back.

"His whole attitude has changed and he is a different animal now."

Aware most Australians are questioning Meadowbranch D J's inclusion in the prestigious series, Mark has issued a strong warning to rivals.

"We are not coming to make up the numbers that's for sure," Mark declared. "He is going to surprise quite a few.



"It's a long way to come and we wouldn't be doing it if we didn't think he would be competitive.

"We may not race for as much money or have the prestige in Ireland, but we're not amateurs. We have some very talented, natural, professional horsemen."

*Strapper SHANNON FLANAGAN with
Irish Inter Dominion contender
Meadowbranch D J – Photo Ironia-Art*

The Flanagans are no strangers to racing horses 'Down Under', having sent Sable Matters to contest the 1997 Adelaide Inter Dominion.

Although successful first-up at Harold Park, Sable Matters failed to flatter from five subsequent starts before injury ended his campaign, forcing him to miss the Inter Dominion.

Sable Matters is closely-related to former top mare Sabilize, which captured the 1993 Ladyship Mile before finishing second behind Chokin in the Miracle Mile a week later.

Sabilize, the dam of former top youngster Sushi Sushi, also won the 1996 Ladyship Mile before finishing third behind Iraklis in the Miracle Mile.

"Sable Matters hurt himself during track work and missed the Inter Dominion," Mark said. "We are hoping for much better luck this time.

"This is a step up in class, but his times here suggest he can win there.

"I was at Menangle last year for the Inter Dominion and I'd say Meadowbranch D J would be a 1:49 horse there.

"He has run record times on our half-mile tracks and they are flat with tight bends, not like the cambered bends in Perth."

Meadowbranch D J is scheduled to arrive in Sydney in late September, with the Flanagans planning to give him several starts before the Inter Dominion.

It is undecided whether he will race in Sydney or make his Aussie debut in Perth.



MEADOWBRANCH DJ in his Perth Inter Dominion rug – Photo Ironia-Art

"He will go across to the UK and will be quarantined for two weeks before he goes to Sydney and has another two weeks in quarantine," Mark said. "We are looking at options with him once we get to Australia as we would like to give him a few early runs.

"We'd like to get to Perth early to have a couple of starts at Gloucester Park and to acclimatise to the weather. We want him to get into a routine as quickly as possible."

Along with a large family contingent, Meadowbranch D J will also be accompanied by his regular driver John Richardson, with the Flanagans also looking to bring the gelding's regular feed.

"Bringing his food will be awkward because of the restrictions, but we are working on it," Mark explained. "We want to do everything to make the trip as smooth as possible for him.

"John has been Ireland's leading driver for the last 20 years and he will be coming with the horse."

Following his Inter Dominion campaign Meadowbranch D J is likely to remain in Australia throughout the summer, with a trip to Victoria also on the agenda.

"We haven't really looked past the Inter Dominion, but we have got a Victoria Cup invite," Mark said. "We will decide on those plans after the Inter Dominion."

- **PAUL COURTS**

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