



By John Coffey

## From Royal Ascot to a Gold Crown at Bathurst

**Gulgong in central NSW is not a renowned Harness Racing town and Royal Ascot in the UK is a long way from Bathurst Paceway but both these places play an important part into the likely favourite for the 2018 edition of the Bathurst Gold Crown.**

The two-year-old colt named College Chapel has started three times to date for two impressive wins including a 1:52.6 demolition of his opposition in the Group 3 NSW Sapling Stakes at Menangle on February 24.

The story of his Gulgong based owners Gary and Margaret Meredith is an intriguing one and an inspiration for anyone else contemplating an entry into ownership of a Standardbred.

Margaret Meredith is a lifelong resident of Gulgong, a 30 minute drive north of Mudgee; Gary Meredith grew up in the Campbelltown region [near Menangle] when it was very much a rural area. Prior to going to secondary school each day Gary and a mate headed to Warwick Farm to muck out boxes for a Thoroughbred trainer.

School wasn't big on Gary's list of priorities in life, but horses were so for the next few years he enjoyed toiling with both Standardbreds [at Frank Willis's stables] and Thoroughbreds at Kirkham Stud, a prominent Stud at Wagga and finally accompanied the 1972 Golden Slipper winner John's Hope to Guntawang Stud at Gulgong.

Well once settled in Gulgong, love blossomed between Gary and Margaret and in 1979 they bought a supermarket in the town and so horses disappeared from Gary's life... but not forever.

On March 24, 2013, Gary and Margaret decided to drive up to Bathurst for the annual Graeme Board Bathurst Yearling Sale. After studying the catalogue, Gary decided they would bid for Lot 63, a colt by the little known sire Gold Dust Beach but from a No Nukes mare, who was from an Albatross mare.

While waiting for this colt to enter the auction ring, Margaret spotted what she thought was a 'drop dead gorgeous' looking filly and asked Gary to come and cast his eye over her.

"We're here to buy a colt," Gary replied, but he did agree with his wife's judgment and so Lot 22, a Modern Art-Sheb Ace filly, became the property of the Meredith's on the fall of the hammer.

"I thought she looked like Marilyn Monroe reincarnated as a horse and so eventually named her Allnight Kiss," Gary said recently. "I'm not sure if my wife was that impressed with the name but once the filly started winning races Margaret agreed it was a good name."

So that day commenced a charmed run for the Gulgong couple. Gary also purchased Lot 63 for just \$2,000 and named him Allnight Raid. Allnight Kiss and Allnight Raid have won almost \$150,000 between them and Allnight Raid is now retired to the Meredith farm on the outskirts of Gulgong.

Then in early 2014 Gary and Margaret noticed a beautifully bred mare advertised for Sale on the HRA website Trading Ring. Her name was Meljoy and she was by the highly successful stallion Village Jasper from an Australian Broodmare of the Year Intrude. Following a quick trip to Peppertree Farm at Cowra to inspect her, Meljoy was added to the Meredith equine portfolio.

A further visit in 2015 to the Annual Bathurst Yearling Sale resulted in Gary and Margaret purchasing Lot 77, an Always A Virgin filly for \$14,000.

Now named Royal Story, she provided Gary and Margaret and highly respected trainer Bernie Hewitt with their first Group 1 winner when she was victorious in the NSW Breeders Challenge Final for three-year-old fillies at Menangle in June last year.

So back to Meljoy, who was in foal to Roll With Joe when purchased by the Meredith's. She did foal in November 2014 but that foal later died in a stable accident in early 2015 - an accident that shattered the couple.

Margaret Meredith, breeder and part-owner of College Chapel, with trainer-driver Bernie Hewitt





College Chapel (Bernie Hewitt up) in a victory parade after the Bathurst Gold Crown

After Meljoy foaled in late November, Gary decided he wanted to breed her again even though it was getting late into the breeding season and thought that a Direct Scooter sireline stallion would suit this daughter of Intrude perfectly.

Mach Three was the stallion of choice and even though he was advertised as fully booked, Alabar Bloodstock were able to supply semen and so Meljoy was bred on December 19, 2014.

Then on November 30 the following year a smallish but lovely colt foal arrived.

“He looked like a good horse right from the beginning and eventually broke in like a really good horse,” Gary said recently.

When questioned about his name of College Chapel, Gary replied: “As mentioned previously I was involved in the Thoroughbred Industry quite heavily when I was younger and still followed the racing in both hemispheres.

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So now a two-year-old colt trained by Bernie Hewitt, but named after a high class horse who raced at Royal Ascot, is ready to set the Bathurst track alight and give his owners a Gold Crown.

By the way Bernie, this two-year-old colt is ‘bred in the purple’, so your task now is to ‘do a Vincent O’Brien’ and turn the Aussie College Chapel into a stallion prospect.

**HOOFNOTE:** College Chapel won both his heat and the \$100,000 final of the Bathurst Gold Crown to advance his record to four wins and a second from five starts