

GRANDSTAND VIEW

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A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FOR THE CLIENTS OF
LAUREL OAK BLOODSTOCK

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ACTIVE ON ALL FRONTS

There are so many reasons why we are very active at Laurel Oak at various times of the year, but the April/May period is always one of the busiest.

The reasons actually highlight the many services that Laurel Oak now provides to the racing and breeding industries over and above the normal ongoing administration and communication for our racing and breeding syndicates.

The stories below will emphasise so many aspects of Laurel Oak, and particularly readers who are new to Laurel Oak may then have a better idea of the various services that we can provide for you.

ANCIENT SONG FILLY SELLS FOR \$500,000

In last month's Grandstand View we intimated that the main focus for the coming month would be on the sale of **ANCIENT SONG's** first foal. Ancient Song was Laurel Oak's first, and so far only (hopefully rectified in the not-too-distant future!), Group One winner, and her first foal since retiring to stud was the Lonhro filly being offered at the Easter Yearling Sale.

She presented well at the sale, although lightening off a little at first when off her tucker upon arrival at the sale yards. There was a lot of interest in her and, ultimately, we put a reserve of \$500,000 on her, which was exactly the amount that she sold for.

Her sale showed that 'barrier draws' can be just as important at sales as they are at the races. She was Lot 43 in the sale and on the first day there was a very

high pass-in rate of above 30% while buyers and vendors were sparring and jockeying for positions trying to assess the market. By the third day, the clearance rate was closer to 90% and the average for that day was \$100,000 per lot higher than the first day, and most observers agreed that, had our filly been sold on that last day when the market was in full swing and buyers knew how much they needed to spend to buy the better horses, we could well have sold for \$100,000 to \$200,000 more.

That story is not told here as a complaint but more to illustrate how positioning in a yearling sale can affect price, because we were very happy with the price that she sold for. Ancient Song has a very healthy General Nediym colt on the ground and is in foal to Commands, so hopefully the good sales will continue into the future.

LANCE DANCES TO VICTORY

One to two months between winners was totally normal in the early days of Laurel Oak but more recently we have been spoiled with regular success from our runners. Consequently, it was somewhat of a frustration when we did go almost two months without a winner recently, with many horses running well and being placed, being unlucky in races, getting the wrong tracks or being pulled out before races when they were good chances.

All that became a thing of the past last Friday when **TIRELESS**, who has been a source of frustration over time with many minor prizemoney cheques but only one win, put his best foot forward with an emphatic victory at Mornington.

TONY NOONAN's plan to freshen him up after a recent good run, where he was ridden against the grain, and then bring him back for a similar race proved to be spot-on because he was ridden quietly early and was back last with about 800m to go before jockey Ben Melham took the short cut along the fence and, by the time they straightened, was behind the leaders. After switching across their heels Tireless led them a merry dance and came away for an emphatic two-length victory. Tireless, aka Lance, was a candidate to be sold in the not-too-distant future but we do love this version of Lance

so he is certainly under reprieve for another start or two to see if the win is a sample for the future or whether one grade higher just makes it harder for him. Being by Pentire, which is a breed that improves with time, there is a possibility that the new, better version of Lance may be hanging around for some time yet because he is winning. The next start or two will give us a clue but we are thankful for that result, especially as he won at good odds after Tony gave him a genuine each-way chance.

OTHER PROMISING RUNS

Several members of the Laurel Oak team are three-year-olds with later-maturing pedigrees who have only just started going to the races.

Promising runs this month came from **DENUNCIATE** and **UNTAINTED LOVE**.

Denunciate was having his fourth start over 1600m at Sale when running on very well into second placing. He looks to be a promising middle-distance horse that is still learning his trade and he is now having a short let-up. Three of his four starts to-date have been very encouraging and at the other, which was his third career start when we thought he was a great chance to win, we discovered that he didn't like soft tracks! If the tracks become permanently wet in Victoria, he is likely to be part of Tony Noonan's team heading to Queensland for winter racing.

Untainted Love did not have a particularly auspicious start to her career. Debuting back in January she finished tailed off despite going into the race with some optimism that she would run respectably in an unsuitably short race. It turned out that she tied up in the race (a form of equine cramp) and that necessitated a let-up and another series of barrier trials before getting her ready to go racing again.

After trialling well, we went to Cranbourne in mid-April with expectations of an encouraging run from her inside barrier draw. The moment the gates opened she knuckled over, went down on her nose and threw her rider. Fortunately, she stayed out of harm's way after that and was collected by the Clerk of the Course after a solid gallop chasing the field, and had done no damage to herself. That was a first for Laurel Oak - to lose a rider not just in a race but at the start! We did receive a phonecall from the stable after that to send out another set of colours as the ambulance men had to cut the colours off jockey Mark Pegus, who fortunately suffered no serious damage in the fall.

Consequently, when Untainted Love went to Pakenham for her third career start in a 1400m Fillies and Mares maiden, we had no real idea what to expect. After drawing very wide she was trapped four-and five-wide throughout but kept pushing forward and did extremely well to run second.

Consolidating at the 1400m, she went to Sale last Monday for another 1400m maiden and, alas, drew very wide again. On this occasion, rather than racing wide, she was taken back to the tail and once more ran home extremely well for second placing. On both occasions she was beaten by horses who drew perfectly, so she was unlucky not to have broken her maiden. There will be race options for her on the weekend after next as she will probably have one more run before going for a break, and we hope that she can break her maiden that day because she, too, looks another promising stayer who is achieving what she has done to date at distances way short of what is expected to be her best.

Untainted Love throwing her rider at the start would normally rank as the most bizarre thing that would happen over a given time frame however, in this month, it was second only to NINAJI's false start debut

performance at Cessnock. With many excited owners gathering at the races, after we bade the jockey good luck and they all went and mounted, the field moved out but, alas, there was no Ninaji, who was around the corner from where we were standing. Eventually the gates were opened and she was led onto the track, as she had refused to budge in the mounting yard, and then the jockey remounted. Once again she refused to budge and no amount of coaxing from the jockey or the Clerk of the Course would make her move and, in the end, the stewards had no option but to scratch her. It was quite bizarre and, hopefully, it is not a permanent fixture in her character, but the stewards have obliged her to trial again, which will take place this Friday 11 May. All being well, she will have another crack at the races next Thursday 17 May at Hawkesbury, but it was a very strange moment that has never happened at Laurel Oak before.

Another unfortunate rare event was a diagnosis that the Commands/Shand colt (HELMSMAN) that we bought last year has a degenerative bone disease and simply will not stand up to any pressure of training. He has been retired unraced and this is another first where a 2yo has had to be retired so early with a problem that will stop him from racing. He also tarnishes our proud record of buying horses that do race, and he is now only the third horse out of sixty four over the last seven seasons that have not at least made it to the races. Hopefully he will be the last for a while!

NEW BROODMARE PURCHASE

At the broodmare sales we focused on buying another quality broodmare for a syndicate of owners to be managed by Laurel Oak. Fleetingly there was a possibility that we would buy a more expensive mare but that brief was short-lived when one of the potential shareholders bought a quality mare on his own. The main focus was to buy a commercial sale-quality mare around the \$100,000 mark and, after being very selective from the large catalogue, we only analysed around twelve mares to determine who the best mating

options were. In the end, we were underbidder on one and were almost underbidder on a second until we decided to go one more bid which proved successful. The new acquisition to the team is a mare called **FIDDLY**, who is a half-sister to the Group winners Piper Star and Melora and was bought for \$135,000. The mare is in foal to Darley first-season sire, Dubawi, and has been booked to go to promising young stallion Fastnet Rock, and we can look forward to her offspring hopefully going to the major yearling sales.

STALLION BOOKINGS

Another part of the Laurel Oak operation that keeps us busy at this time of year is stallion bookings. Something that evolved naturally several years ago from managing a number of mares ourselves and then having a large Brain client base who are all involved in breeding, we started a stallion booking service. We now book between 150 and 200 mares to stud each year and there would be very few occasions where we cannot save clients something off the advertised service fee. The ideal situation that we can occasionally co-ordinate is when a client receives a standard discount for a one-off booking but, if it is done through Laurel Oak, we may co-ordinate three or four or five mares into one booking with the stud and then all parties receive a bigger discount for the block booking. The majority of the bookings take place in the April to May period once the major studs announce their service fees and their new stallions.

BRAIN PEDIGREE ANALYSIS

As Australasian agents for BRAIN PEDIGREE ANALYSIS, we are busier than we have ever been on an annual basis, and that is all from return client business. Apart from the odd directory listing, we virtually have

not advertised for three years and 99% of our work is from repeat client analysis requests for broodmares, yearlings, or any other variation of those themes for buying horses or mating broodmares.

While Brain analysis is all year round, the most intense period is again the two months of April and May.

NEW YEARLINGS

This is also the main time of year that we place the majority of the equity available in our various yearlings. January to June is the peak yearling sale-buying time in Australia, so that is when we acquire the majority of our horses. While many of our horses are allocated even before they are bought, we also have a large percentage of clients, particularly colt buyers, who like to see what we buy before committing to a particular horse, so this is also the main time of year when we allocate the shares in our various horses.

OTHER BUYING ACTIVITY

The successful association that we have developed over the years with STUART RAMSEY of Turangga Farms that started with BERLIN, her son, TEMPELHOF, and then followed with ANCIENT SONG, RADIANT STAR, and the broodmare SHE'S MY BABY, has continued because, through the connection with Stuart, we were able to offer clients a share in two new acquisitions.

Stuart has purchased the race mare, **YOLO**, who is already a Listed winner, and she is now back in training with PETER MOODY, looking for a tilt at spring carnival racing. Ancient Song was bought on the same basis and proved to be a magnificent experience so we are hoping to enjoy some carnival success with Yolo as well before she retires to stud.

Stuart has also purchased a colt by **Fusaichi Pegasus out of Palia**, which is a full-brother to the very good

2yo Dr Green, who recently retired to stud in Queensland. As this colt has future potential as a stallion, providing he is a successful racehorse, Stuart made available some equity in this colt as well for Laurel Oak clients, so these two horses are two high-quality additions to the Laurel Oak racing team.

Attempts at Easter for further high-quality acquisitions in the form of yearling fillies with GARY PORTELLI and JOE PRIDE did not eventuate, despite being underbidder on a number of occasions. The market was very hot on fillies and we were not able to buy horses that we had great faith in for the prices that we thought reasonable. Unfortunate, but hopefully next time we will find the right filly, as we do try and pay sensible prices for our yearlings at sales despite the growing difficulty in the inflated markets.

MELBOURNE CUP

This is also the time of year that we co-ordinate our annual Melbourne Cup booking in the Panorama Restaurant.

The demand for prime locations at Flemington increases every year and it has been very noticeable in the last two or three years that not only do the VRC brochures come out earlier but all available spots during Melbourne Cup Carnival are booked out, usually by June. Not so long ago we were still able to get extra tickets in the Panorama Restaurant as late as October.

There is no doubt that the Melbourne Cup is the biggest annual event of any form, sporting or otherwise, in Australia and the appeal of this mighty carnival just increases each year. As the crowds increase outside, the demand increases for comfortable viewing and dining facilities inside. Despite annual price increases, the rooms just book out more and more quickly as people seek sanctuary from the madding crowd outside, where they can enjoy the racing and be well-watered and fed in relative comfort.

Fortunately we discovered the Panorama Room before the majority of the rest of the world did, so we do have an inside 'barrier draw' for our annual booking and, through this, the VRC knows us well and we have developed a good reputation with them.

The VRC did us no favours by sending the brochure out a few days before Easter when we were coming up to an extremely intense period of sale attendance and, at that stage, we simply pre-booked a group booking and now, through May, we find out who would like to join us there! The co-ordination of the Melbourne Cup booking now literally takes many days, even to the extent that, when the tickets arrive, every seat and ticket is copied and recorded in case tickets are lost either before or en-route to the attendees via Express Post.

NEW SOUTH WALES RACEHORSE OWNERS' DAY

Growing into one of our biggest Sydney-based functions is the annual NSW Racehorse Owners' Association Raceday at Randwick on the last day of their Easter Carnival. This year we had 45 Laurel Oak clients and friends in the Vista Room, which is appropriately named

as it overlooks the Randwick racecourse. Four Group Ones on the day, a wonderful seafood banquet, and free-flowing drinks, all made for a fantastic day capped off with a 30/1 winner in the last in the form of Brave Lancer, which many of us were on.

LAUREL OAK GOLF DAY

Another feature on the Laurel Oak social calendar in the April/May period is the first of our three Laurel Oak Golf Days. Sponsored by PORTELLI RACING, the April Golf Day was the 52nd Occasional Laurel Oak Golf Day and, given that we have three most years and four on the odd occasion, you can work out the sums as to how many years we have been doing it. 51 of them have been held at Castle Hill, with the one attempt to move from there being poorly attended, so we didn't try that again. The formula for the golf days is a classic case of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' and already those who were there would be looking forward to the next ones in August and November.

OTHER SOCIAL EVENTS

In May we also start planning for the Cox Plate function; there will be a stable visit at Tony Noonan's on 20 May; the annual overnight golf trip to Canberra will be on again, likely in July, but needs to be organised in May; advance notice will be going out for race day bookings at Rosehill in their private boxes, while in May we also provide advance notice of other major annual events later in the year, such as the NSW Racehorse

Owners' Association Awards Night, held in the Randwick Pavilion on 2 August and Tony Noonan's annual Greendale Ball, held at Crown Casino on Saturday 8 September.

So, between all those many services that Laurel Oak provides, hopefully there will be something in it that you will enjoy or benefit from.

Until next month, happy racing!

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