



NSW News

Gary Clark

Egg night was Golden for Derryn

AN opportune meeting seven years ago has provided a talented AFL footballer with a new direction and a chance to find success at the top level.

The *Stately Bird Golden Easter Egg* might have been another Group victory for superstar Queenslander Bogie Leigh, but it was third placegetter Aussie Country that provided quiet celebrations for Victorian trainer Derryn Harrison and owner Peter Alimovski.

It all started back on the night of the Topgun at Sandown when Harrison went to the track and was introduced to a local trainer who offered him a job at his kennels.

This then led to him working with Kevin Miller for a year before teaming up with leading trainer Chris Johannsen who has been the teacher behind Harrison's success to date.

"Chris has been tremendous, his knowledge has helped me through the last couple of years, I may not have achieved the results in that time without his coaching", Harrison said.

Johannsen has an annual BBQ for his owners and staff each year and it was last year's gathering that led to Harrison being introduced to Michael Hooper who manages the Doctors Kennels for Mark England now one of Johannsen's clients.

Harrison was looking to buy a good class dog for Alimovski and Hooper offered him Aussie Country for \$15,000 but the price was out of range.

Two days later, Hooper rang Harrison back and told him after discussions with England was prepared to sell him the dog for \$10,000 and the deal was done.

"I told Peter he was losing too much on the punt, he (Peter) loves a bet, and said why not save the money and buy and race your own dog," Harrison said.

Derryn and Peter met through their association with AFL. Peter was an umpire and his brother played with Derryn.

Harrison had been playing AFL since he was six and progressed to the Richmond under-19's. When benched he was far from satisfied and walked out, a decision he regrets. "I was a little hot-headed back



Derryn and Melissa on Golden Easter Egg night at Wentworth Park.

then, stupidity took over," he said.

He played in the minor rep sides with some of the now established premier players of the AFL and at one stage broke his wrist. He may have eventually played for the Tigers but said if he had a choice he would have played with Essendon.

Now at 31, Harrison also has had an on, off relationship with girlfriend Melissa.

They met a decade ago but drifted apart. They met again four years later and the relationship was back on.

“It has taken a fair while to encourage Melissa to get close to the dogs but she is now enjoying them,” Derryn said.

He has three dogs, Crimson Rain who is retired and now a pet, Carlo Fox who has won five races in Queensland and is the new addition to the kennel and Aussie Country.

Harrison and Alimovski won their first two races with Aussie Country at Shepparton then was beaten a nose at The Meadows before returning to win there in January.

Aussie Country won a heat of the Launceston Cup before failing in the final.

He then ran 30.02 at Sandown before heading to Sydney for the Easter Egg.

The advantage was the dog won four Wenty races before being sold.

He upset hot favourite Bogie Leigh in his semi-final and then finished well for third in the final.

A third placed cheque of \$12,500 has now taken his earnings to more than \$25,000 for his new owners in four months. Running third in their first Group 1 was like winning for Peter and Derryn.

“He has had a tough campaign and plenty of travelling this year, so at the moment he is having a complete week off and the run of the house. I will give him a couple of graded races at Geelong when he returns,” Derryn said.

The Golden Easter Egg might have found another champion in winner Bogie Leigh, but in her shadows was another story, one of what this sport is all about ... chance!



Aussie Country beats eventual final winner Bogie Leigh in the Easter Egg semi-final.