

Dungog's son is riding tall

By Peter Foley

Seemingly too tall to be a jockey, with weight nowhere to hide, apprentice jockey Benjamin Osmond is so laidback that in a split-second decision he'd still have an hour to spare.

If all goes well with his career in the saddle, Benjamin could yet become the most famous name to emerge from Dungog since laconic Test cricketer Doug Walters.

Dungog, in the New South Wales Hunter Valley, also lists scenic walks, cafes, restaurants, art galleries and antique shops as its attractions.

Are you from Dungog?

"Dungog, yes," Benjamin grinned.

What's it famous for?

"Um, probably Doug Walters.

"It's about an hour out of Newcastle."

Can you tell me about your upbringing?

"I did a lot of polocrosse and camp drafting and stuff. Pony club and stuff like that.

"The parents used to do that when they were growing up, and then we kind of did that.

They're not in racing at all.

"And then once I finished school, I didn't really know what to do. I thought I'd try this out.

"I started at Kris Lees' pre-training farm at Cessnock."

How did that come about?

"I just rung Racing New South Wales, and they put me onto Kris.

"He said: Okay yeah, you can come out there and like, learn how to ride racehorses and stuff."

Do you get sick of being asked how tall you are?

"Oh, I wouldn't say sick of it, but I hear it a lot."

You must be pretty close to the record.

"Yeah, I'm not sure. Corey is pretty tall as well. Corey Sutherland.

I think you might have him covered.

(For what it's worth, Corey lists his height as 180cm; Benjamin one centimetre more.

You ride pretty light. How much do you weigh?

"I walk around at 56 kilos and the lowest I can ride is 54."

Does it take much to ride at that weight?

"A little bit. Fifty-five is comfortable, but 54 means not much eating or drinking for a few days before."

Benjamin, who is apprenticed to the highly respected Kris Lees in Newcastle, came to Queensland for a change of scenery.

The 26-year-old, who comes out of his apprenticeship at the end of May, recently shifted north to be based at Kris' Gold Coast satellite stable.

"That was before the carnival started down south. I came up here and it's going really well. I'm real happy," he said.

"It took probably a month to get the ball rolling - just getting familiar with other trainers and stuff - but now, it's really picked up."

Sydney is extremely competitive - some say the most competitive racing atmosphere in the world. How does Queensland compare?

"It's very competitive down there. It's definitely more travelling, whereas here, most



Benjamin Osmond (blue colours) lifts Fasvara to victory in the Ipswich Party Hire Handicap(1200m) after overhauling his rivals from back in the field. (Trackside Photography)

tracks are just an hour apart.

"And yeah, just not as competitive."

How are you feeling about the Winter Carnival?

"I'll probably just be based at the provincials while that's going on. And then once that's over, whatever; stay here or go back."

In the cutthroat world of Sydney racing, Benjamin has chalked up 142 wins so far, including a Listed success aboard Harlem Queen at Hawkesbury for trainer Nathan Doyle.

At Ipswich racetrack last Wednesday, Ben-

jamin rode a winner for Kris Lees, Fasvara in the Ipswich Party Hire Handicap (1200m).

From barrier two, he settled Fasvara in the second half of the field as Esprit Du Jour set the pace.

Well into the straight, Benjamin bided his time and coolly allowed Fasvara to run on and comfortably overhaul his rivals.

"We drew good, so we probably planned on being a bit closer, but they rolled along, and you just kind of want to save him, because he only has that little, short sprint," Benjamin said.

"He travelled good and we just had to wait till the straight, and some gaps open, and he was good.

"There was always enough space. I was following the favourite, Jace (McMurray on Rewrite), and he took me right into the straight."

Fasvara is a three-year-old gelding by Farnan, who is raced by his breeder Kia Ora Stud.

Benjamin had not ridden him in a race before but had trialed him.

"He's good," he said. "Very progressive."

Ipswichturfclub

IPSWICH

RACING POWERED BY

IPSWICH TRIBUNE TODAY

ipswichturfclub.com.au