

The old and the new

By Peter Foley

Billy Healey is part of a new breed of Australian racehorse trainers blending old-school horsemanship and new-school data.

Like Ciaran Maher, who leads the field of sports science in Australian racing, Billy uses technology, married with his own equine instincts.

That mix of horsemanship with modern training methods has helped Billy's rise from a Sunshine Coast kid breaking in horses to a trainer with a thriving stable.

"If you're not using it, you're probably falling behind to be honest," Billy said.

"Heart rate, stride lengths, knowing when horses are fatiguing, knowing when they're not, knowing where we can find their ideal trip and how far we can push, it all helps. That's for sure.

"I've been around horses my whole life, so the horse side of it's quite natural, but using that as well, it's a good combination."

Billy developed a passion for training at an early age, breaking in his first horse when he was 12.

"I just really enjoy the animal, the horse itself," he said.

"I like the thought that you've got to figure them all out and they've all got different habits, like different things, do different things or respond different to certain methods.

"And then the challenge of trying to get the best out of them all the time."

Before focusing on thoroughbred racing, he competed in showjumping and rode competitively until he was 17.

Then, too young to train in his own right, his father, Dale Healey, took out a licence and in 2016, once Billy turned 18, the pair formed a partnership.

"I started, as most do, with a pony in the backyard and had these aspirations to be a jockey to start with and then obviously found a love for food, so that was no hope," he laughed.

"Dad got his trainers' licence for me so I could knock around with a few.

"And once I was old enough, we went into a partnership before he passed away."

The pair enjoyed many memorable successes with horses including I Am Venus, Our Story and Instrumentalist.

After Dale died from cancer in 2018, Billy took full control of the operation, including the family's 20-hectare property in the Sunshine Coast hinterland.

His stable has built momentum with horses such as Cosmic Fire, winner of the Listed Queensland Day Stakes. Billy has recorded more than 180 wins so far.

His wife Kelly Slater-Healey, who he met on the showjumping circuit, manages the farm operations, while stable staff support the day-to-day training.

Billy still rides trackwork which gives him a feel for his horses and he believes in keeping his horses happy by treating them as individuals.

This year, Billy took over the stables of retired trainer Mark Currie, although that partnership



Dale Healey (left) with his son Billy Healey. After Dale died from cancer in 2018, Billy took full control of the training operation. (Billy Healey)

has since been dissolved.

In 2021, Billy was thrust into the racing spotlight when he was announced as the new trainer of cult favourite Alligator Blood.

In early 2021, Alligator Blood was recovering from surgery and his owners planned to transfer him to Gai Waterhouse and Adrian Bott in Sydney but agreed to give Billy a chance first.

Billy trained Alligator Blood for three starts after helping the gelding's recovery from injury.

After he went to Waterhouse-Bott, Alligator Blood won six Group 1 races.

"It was definitely a mixed experience but a good learning curve. Probably should always trust your gut feeling," he said.

"It's a bit hard when you're a bit green and in

the situation I was in with how it was all handled, that you did things different to how I would now.

"Definitely, I'm a far better trainer for having him. It taught me a lot, that's for sure."

Billy had another success at Ipswich on July 24 when Clench gutsed out a win in the Cruice Creations Maiden Handicap (1950m) with Cejay Graham in the saddle.

Clench, a four-year-old gelding by Proisir, is the first winner for Nathan Walker's 113 Racing syndicate.

"It was a very good ride; a 12 out of 10 ride. It won the race," said Billy, who is the syndicate's trainer.

"He's rock hard fit and deep into a prep, so you'd expect him to be able to tough it out a bit."



Jockey Cejay Graham piloted Clench to victory in the Cruice Creations Maiden Handicap (1950m) for Billy Healey. (Trackside Photography)

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