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Highland Kitty, with Jett Newman in the saddle, races clear of her rivals to win the TAB Maiden Plate (2190m). (Trackside Photography)



Trainer Jacob Leach shares a tender moment with Highland Kitty. (Jacob Leach)

Kitty win a start for Jacob

By Peter Foley

Most young trainers couldn't wait to celebrate their first winner. Jacob Leach was already planning for his next one.

He achieved his breakthrough victory at Ipswich last Friday when five-year-old mare Highland Kitty won the TAB Maiden Plate (2190m) by nearly three lengths.

Ridden confidently by apprentice Jett Newman, the favourite delivered at Jacob's 10th start as a trainer.

Rather than popping champagne or sinking beers, the 26-year-old was determined to get back to work, focused on the next success for his fledgling stable.

"It's a first win, but I've always expected myself to be able to train plenty of winners," Jacob said.

"So no celebration. We'll get back to work this afternoon and keep working hard to make sure I can train more."

By Highland Reel out of Magic Kitty, Highland Kitty was also Jacob's first runner when she debuted for his stable at Doomben on July 22. Most of his other starters have earned placings and the Sunshine Coast horseman believes he was unlucky not to break through sooner.

Highland Kitty's breakthrough came at her 15th start, seven of those under Jacob after joining his stable from retired trainer Mark Currie.

"She was pretty dominant today, but she does need everything to go right and a few things had gone wrong in previous starts," Jacob said.

"She's been going super the whole preparation and she's definitely got the ability to go on with it. She'll take a lot of confidence out of today."

Jacob's first win was particularly sweet because he felt Highland Kitty deserved success.

"It feels very good. It's good to get the monkey off the back," he said.

"I was really happy that this horse was my first winner. To see her break her maiden and give me my first winner as a trainer is a really good feeling.

"She's been a bit unlucky this prep. She should have broken her maiden a bit earlier.

"However, she's been consistent and been around the mark, so it's good to see her break through."

Jacob grew up in Toowoomba, living in Roma during his primary school years before moving back to Toowoomba and eventually to the Sunshine Coast a year ago.

Having worked across the industry, he served as foreman for Mark Currie, managing his Sunshine Coast satellite stable.

When Currie retired and a training partnership with Billy Healey didn't work out, Jacob faced a crossroads. He decided to strike out on his own.

That decision was supported by owner-breeder Jeff Nevell, whose Big V Racing syndicate raced horses with Currie.

"I thought: If you're going to have a crack, you may as well have a crack now," he said.

"So I decided to go out on my own and Jeff contacted me and said: 'I'll give you all my horses. He really kickstarted my career and he's given me a handful of nice horses to get going with."

Jeff's trust, Jacob said, was invaluable for a young trainer starting out.

"It's quite a bit for a bloke who's running his own syndication business and he wants to give the new kid on the block a crack with all his horses and especially with the quality of horses.

"He's got Little Fella, Kinross Lane, a Graff colt, an Admire Mars filly, an Anamoe filly. He's also got a horse in Sydney with Bjorn Baker, You're Not The King, who's won two in a row."

Jacob has a 12-box barn across the road from Sunshine Coast racetrack. As a rookie trainer, Racing Queensland regulations cap his initial stable size to 10 horses, a target he is aiming at with positivity.

"I haven't filled all the boxes, but they've got sawdust in them, ready to go; for people to give me horses," he said. You've got to think positive and the boxes are ready to go. I do it all by myself at the moment, but when I have 10 horses, my brother can come work for me.

"The goal is to maintain a high strike rate. You want your horses running consistent; you need results and that attracts attention.

"Off the back of working hard and good results, other people will want to give you an opportunity to train their horses as well."



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