



The front page of The Queensland Times for Monday, July 22, 1968. The Ipswich Cup was held in July back then. The pages used in this story were found on microfiche in the Ipswich Central Library's History Room with help from Picture Ipswich. (Images enhanced by AI.)



After leading all the way in the 1968 Ipswich Cup, Sombani (with Michael Schubert aboard) holds on to beat Gai Smoke, with Golden Man third.

## Michael won the 1968 cup

By Peter Foley

He self-effacingly describes himself as a mediocre jockey. But if trophies were given for wit, generosity and good company, Michael Schubert would have a roomful.

Michael is one of those people who makes you want to go to the races; a good bloke always ready to help who likes to talk about racing and LOVES a chat.

You spend an hour with him, and it seems like no time. You know a good story is coming when he gets a glint in his eye and that infectious giggle starts.

The day we spoke first, Michael was sitting with the other racing folk on one of the long steel benches outside the jockeys' and stewards' rooms at Ipswich racetrack.

Everyone knows him but you wonder if everyone knows his whole story. It is a story full of humour and adventure but it's also interspersed with personal tragedy.

He has endless yarns about everything, not just racing. The blessing is, at 81, he can recall them all. He puts that down to never being a drinker or a smoker.

"I've had a funny life, I tell you," he says with a grin.

"A lot of people said to me: 'You should write a book on your life.'

"I've had a good life, and the places I went to ride..."

He rode for Fine Cotton's owner and after retiring from riding, drove trucks carting champions such as Kingston Town and Might and Power. Later, he chauffeured top jockeys and even gave Winx's owner a lift.

Before all that, he went to school at Redcliffe with three poor young boys who went on to become the Bee Gees.

Among other people, legendary jockey Mick Dittman trusts Michael to stay in his house when he goes overseas.

Peter Mitchell of horse equipment supplier Race Zone took up an offer from Michael to operate his business at the races while he was away fishing in Weipa with jockey Michael Cahill.

"He's the only bloke I know who I would let run my business," Peter said.

Sitting outside the jockeys' room at Ipswich, Michael's memory drifts back to July 20, 1968, when he won the Ipswich Cup on Sombani for Toowoomba trainer Norm McCallum.

Norm, who died in 1995, was a noted conditioner of stayers in particular, and he had a great strike rate from a small team.

His best wins included the Prime Minister's Cup (Bernalla, Veil Kingdom), QTC Guineas and Ross Stakes, (Paola Pisani) and the BTC Winter Handicap (Bernalla).

One of his best horses was Turvey, whose wins included the BTC Williams Quality, Bernborough Stakes, Toowoomba Cup and the Defence Force Cup.

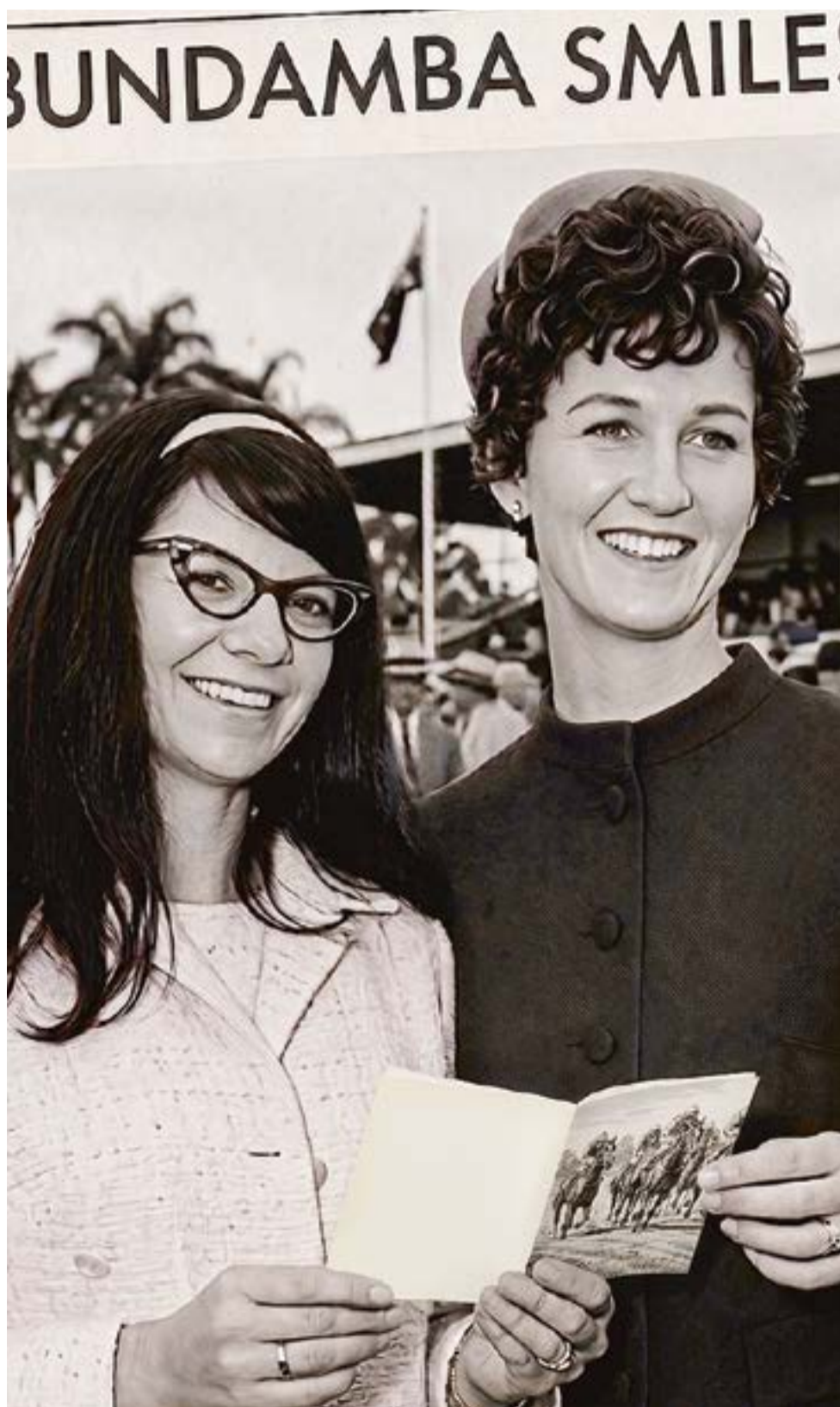
For Michael, who went to Toowoomba to link up with Norm, Sombani's Ipswich Cup win was his crowning achievement.

"I won a novice on him at Eagle Farm. It was a mile-and-a-half (2000m), and he won by 10 lengths," Michael said.

"Around the back, he was about 14 lengths in front of them.

"He was one of those real strong frontrunning buggers, Sombani.

"In the Ipswich Cup, he led from the winning post all the way around again."



Two women in front of the new grandstand at Ipswich racetrack. They were part of the huge crowd at Ipswich for Cup Day, 1968.

Fifty-eight years on, what sticks out most is the crowd. "Huge," he said. "Every year, it's always been a lot of people seem to get here. They all come here for that meeting, don't they?"

Sombani, who was well fancied, beat Gai Smoke, with Golden Man third. Despite the big

win in the Cup, Michael recalls celebrations were modest.

"We stopped on the way home; the lady who owned the horse, Mrs Boycha, was with us. She had a big property at Roma," he said.

Tiny in the saddle - Sombani carried seven

stone, six pounds (a bit more than 47kg) in the Cup - Michael could ride light most of the time.

"I used to get headlines in the paper: 'Stamp-sized apprentice,' they used to call me, because I was so small," he said.

"The only time I wasted was in the Doomben Cup and the horse had seven stone nothing.

"I'm sitting there having Christmas lunch with Norm and them, and they've got a big turkey, you know, all the trimmings.

"And here I am having a lettuce leaf and a boiled egg. Because they used to race on Boxing Day.

"Bloody horse got beat; ran second."

Most jockeys smoked to keep their weight down; Michael only had a couple.

He still laughs about fellow jockey and noted wag Tony Erhart encouraging him to smoke menthols called Cool: "They're good for you if you get a cold."

Michael's life has, in many ways, been an unfortunate one, but he never lets it get him down.

He was born in Launceston in Tasmania. His mother split from his father when he was four, so she gathered the family and moved to Redcliffe with her sister.

"She packed the port and got on a boat over to Melbourne and then caught the train and finished up at the Harvey's place in Redcliffe," he said.

"I started at the Catholic school with Barry Gibb, you know, the Bee Gees.

"Yeah, old Barry. Him and his two brothers, (Robin and Maurice) they had no shoes; they came from a very poor family.

"We used to play together on the school grounds of a weekend. Rounders; like baseball. We used to call it rounders in our day."

His mother later met a builder and the family moved west, first to Mitchell, where Michael rode a pony bareback to school, and then to Mary Kathleen, where uranium was mined.

He remembers a mischievous childhood: a nun who coached rugby league, a grasshopper surreptitiously placed on her veil.

"I caught a big grasshopper and brought it in the classroom, and when she walked past, I put it on the back of her veil," he giggled.

"Bloody girl dobbed me in and I got the cane."

At Mary Kathleen there was no school. "I said: 'This is good. That'll do me,'" he laughed.

The family lived in a big army tent until he poured petrol on green wood to start a fire for his mum to cook dinner and it burned the tent down along with his stepfather's good clothes.

"Oh, didn't he blow up!" Michael said. "We had to go and sleep in the church because we had nowhere else to go."

The family moved to Mt Isa where they stayed for two years. Michael got a job as a paper boy, getting up early every morning to sell papers at the mine gates.

He never got along with his stepfather. Years later, he tracked down his father in Tasmania, only to find he'd had a stroke after having another family, who didn't know about Michael.

Michael traces his connection with horses to one of his stepfather's brothers, who liked a bet and used to put Michael on a table and pretend he was a jockey.

"In 1961, I started off as an apprentice with a trainer called Reg Rowley at Eagle Farm," he said.

"He had stables at School Street, Hendra and he trained for Sir Byrne Hart. He was the chairman of the QTC."

Ipswich Tribune Today has more of Michael's stories with Peter Foley next week.