

Hard work pays dividends

By Peter Foley

If a movie is made one day about trainer Michael Morrison's career, its script may sound more like make-believe than reality.

A Far North Queensland kid with no racing background, a dashed AFL dream, a bank job that led to mucking out stables, a new racing life, and now a growing Ipswich stable.

Morrison laughs off the movie reference, but he is doing everything he can to make his racing dreams real.

"I don't like to blow my own trumpet, but I do work very hard and make sure I'm there every day doing hours upon hours and hopefully that'll pay off at some stage," Morrison said.

"A couple of these horses are coming through nicely now, like Venom Rush and Petite Palace.

"It's starting to come together. We've bought a few nice yearlings this year that we didn't pay much for, but they're all quite nicely bred.

"We don't have a big budget, but you've got to find those opportunities that most people pass up.

"I guess that's the goal - to prove yourself with the stuff that people have passed on and then, if you get the opportunities with better stock, you're ready to take them."

Morrison grew up in Malanda, an 80-minute drive south-west of Cairns. Both his parents were teachers at the high school; neither had anything to do with horse racing.

"I lobbed down in south-east Queensland trying to make it as a footballer, but wasn't good enough, obviously," he said.

"I probably didn't have the concentration levels to go to uni, so I just got a job with the Commonwealth Bank.

"I started getting the interest in horse racing through a mate that I worked with who grew up with parents punting."

His first branch was at Sandgate, near Deagon racecourse. Through trainers and jockeys who came in, he heard about a job mucking out boxes for trainer Pat Duff.

He did it before work at the bank. Then he heard trainer Darren Bell was looking for someone, so he started working for him.

Later, he was accepted into the Godolphin Flying Start program, a two-year scholarship that recruits 12 people from around the world each year.

"It was a good opportunity to really immerse myself in the industry. After that, I did a bit of work on the stud side of things, which was even better grounding in terms of horsemanship."

He worked at Glenlogan Park Stud near Beaudesert, then joined Michael Costa's team after Costa moved to Queensland.

"When Michael announced that he was going to Dubai, I wanted to start training myself, but couldn't find any stables around that were big enough."

Morrison moved into retired trainer Bryan Guy's Gold Coast stables, which had been sold to developers but were available for a short time.

He shifted to Beaudesert in 2023, then three months ago moved into stables across the road from Ipswich racetrack.



Wednesday's win was Ipswich apprentice Olivia Kendal's first metropolitan success. Olivia is fourth on the provincial apprentice's premiership for 2025-26, behind Bella Youngberry, Leah Martyn and Jett Newman.

"It's a good little setup and I've really enjoyed being able to race horses at their home track too."

At Ipswich last Wednesday, Morrison won with Petite Palace, giving Ipswich apprentice Olivia Kendal her first metropolitan success.

An honest type, Petite Palace ran third in the Listed Military Rose Plate (1200m) on the Gold Coast in March, less than a length behind winner Considered at 100 to one.

A four-year-old mare by Under The Louvre from Drovers Rest, she is bred and owned by Dovedeen, the company of former Ipswich trainer and bookmaker Evan Hartley.

"It's mostly run by his son Darren, who I also met in my time at the Commonwealth Bank," Morrison said.

"Once he saw me starting to train, he gave me a bell and said: 'We'd like to see how you go with some of our horses.'

"We started off well and we've continued to produce consistent winners.

"I probably wouldn't be training today without their support. They've been very good to me.

"We're getting to the stage where we're going to have a nice little broodmare band for them."

The broodmares are racehorses he's trained including Ain't She Lovely and Down Under Stunnah. They plan to add Petite Palace.

Morrison nominated her for the Ramornie Handicap (1200m), hoping she would sneak into the field.



Petite Palace (right), with Olivia Kendal aboard, gets the better of Grand Crusader (Chelsea Baker) to win the Fertpro Handicap (1200m). (Trackside Photography)



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