

# Alena's the 'Belle' of the ball

**ALENA SKERRITT WAS A LATE STARTER IN THE JOCKEY RANKS BUT AFTER STINTS AS A SPRAY PAINTER AND A DJ, SHE IS NOW CONTENT TO BE RIDING WINNERS**

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*Alena Skerritt returns to scale after scoring on Salerno at Scone*

**M**any parents are asked the question but few children are on the receiving end: “Can I please have a pony?” Alena Skerritt is one of those lucky kids, although it took more than a decade before her dream was realised.

Alena, 22, was born in Maitland and was raised in Newcastle before moving to the NSW Central Coast when she was 10-years-old and has since remained at Gosford.

“I always had a passion for horses even before I could walk,” Alena recalled. “When I was six months old my mum and nan used to walk me in the pram daily and we would go past a horse in a paddock at Lochinvar (near Cessnock).

“The horse would always greet me by putting his head into my pram and would nuzzle and lick me. I used to love it and mum told me I would always giggle.

“So for the next 11 years I was persistent in getting my own pony.”

Alena had riding lessons and one morning her dream came true: “It was my birthday and I went to the arena at a property that I had my usual lesson.

“When I got there I noticed a pony named Belle with a red ribbon tied around her neck. I couldn’t believe it; mum had surprised me with my first pony.

“I started attending pony club and gymkhanas at that property and did a couple of inter-school competitions, but I would mostly go on trail rides with friends. I even rode bareback a lot of the time.”

The first job Alena had was a school-based traineeship with Wyong trainer Michael Donoghue.

“When I was 16 I was unsure about the opportunities at the time so I completed my HSC and attended TAFE.

“After school I went straight onto an apprenticeship as a car spray painter at a smash repair place but after time the dust and chemicals got too much for me.

“I went into the night club scene and made money DJ’ing at Club Red where I met some great DJ’s and interesting personalities, but they were long nights.

“I was DJ’ing one night and heard of a track riding opportunity at Fred Cowell’s place.

“I had missed the buzz when I used to ride horses so I jumped at the chance. Fred said he could see potential and offered me an apprenticeship so I’ve been



*Alena Skerritt – starting to make inroads in country NSW*

with Fred now for the past three years.

“My family has backed my career every step of the way and they all enjoy watching me ride, although my parents will always be concerned of the dangers of the occupation.”

Alena rode her first winner as a 20-year-old at Tuncurry-Forster in March last year aboard Bettabet Red, a horse she now cherishes.

“Without doubt Bettabet Red is my favourite horse as I’ve won seven races on her. She is a beautiful horse to do anything with and has a unique character.

“I have also taken a liking to our ‘town’ horse Mighty Lucky. Although I only ride him trackwork he’s an absolute pleasure to ride.”

With 21 winners (eight at the provincials and 13 in the country) to her credit, trainers are now starting to notice Alena’s skills: “I have started to pick up more rides now that I have been travelling almost anywhere to get my

name out there.

“I won a race on Salerno at Scone for Paul Perry and it may have opened the door for me as Mr Perry has since put me on a few others. I won another race for him the other day on Impuesto at Muswellbrook.”

A natural lightweight, Alena has no problems with her weight and can ride at 50kg: “I’m pretty lucky when it comes to my weight as I don’t have to worry too much what I eat.

“And style-wise, I haven’t really modelled my riding style on any particular jockey but instead watch other riders and I just stick to what feels comfortable.

“I do admire Tye Angland as he has been a very big help whenever he has attended the apprentice school. He’s a super jockey.

“I just want to keep getting more rides and I’d really like to have a crack at the Rising Star Apprentice Series – now that’s something I’d love to win.” **RNSW**