

# BRENTON'S POISED AND READY TO 'STRIKE'

FOR THE PAST FIVE SEASONS JOCKEY BRENTON AVDULLA HAS BEEN ON THE IMPROVE AND NOW SITS AS ONE OF THE ELITE GROUP OF RIDERS IN THE NOTORIOUSLY COMPETITIVE SYDNEY SCENE

WORDS: MATT JONES PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS



*Brenton Avdulla smiles for the camera as he cruises home aboard Libran at Rosehill Gardens*

**T**he statistics say it all – the rise and rise of Brenton Avdulla has catapulted him to the top of NSW jockeys ranks over the past two seasons.

Avdulla, originally from Port Melbourne, Victoria, wasn't even intending on being a NSW jockey for long, after he was invited up for a short stint in Sydney as a 19-year-old by Gai Waterhouse.

He was "always going back to Melbourne".

However, by the time he was 20 Avdulla had won an Epsom Handicap, Flight Stakes and Randwick Guineas.

"I found the lifestyle hard being on my own, but Grahame Begg started supporting me more and I found some horses like Secret Admirer which is probably the reason why I stayed," Avdulla said.

"Gerald Ryan was a big influence on me when I was claiming 1.5 kilos and I won a Villiers Stakes for him on Dances on Waves (2010) and that opened up a few doors for me.

"When those horses came I thought Sydney was my home and I haven't thought about going back since."

Despite early success, Avdulla was still frustrated that more opportunities weren't coming his way.

But that was an indication of the strength and depth of jockeys in Sydney and he knew it would take more than a handful of big race wins to consistently be offered top rides weekly.

"I was mixing it with the best and riding winners but the opportunities weren't coming and I couldn't work out why," Avdulla said.

"It was a bit of immaturity and I wasn't doing the hard yards and I had to figure out why I wasn't getting as many opportunities so I worked hard, rode plenty of trackwork and rode a lot at the provincials which got me going.

"It's a bit of a 'Catch 22', you've got to ride winners but to get those rides you've got to ride well and when you get those quality horses your job starts to become easier.

"It's been a bit of a journey and in the past five years I've been getting opportunities and working, as well as being in the right places."



*Brenton Avdulla – has quickly climbed the ladder to now be among the top handful of jockeys in Sydney*

The 25-year-old's strike-rate and standings in various premierships in NSW has climbed dramatically since the 2011/12 season.

In that season he finished 31st in the state riders' premiership with a strike-rate of 9%, 11th in the metropolitan standings at 7.6% and 22nd at the provincials at 10.6%.

***There was a steady climb each season until 2015/16 when he finished first in the state at a strike-rate of 16%, fourth in the metropolitan premiership at 11.3% and first at the provincial level with a whopping 23.9% strike-rate.***

"You don't take it for granted because you can lose form and as soon as that happens the opportunities go. Owners and trainers want to put on winners not riders that get beaten," Avdulla said.

"A few years ago the Sydney premiership wasn't in reach, I was just trying to ride at an elite level but in the next five years I'd like to be able to

challenge for that premiership."

So who's the best rider in Sydney? When asked, Avdulla responded in less than a second.

"Bowman is number one," he said.

"Hugh's just so cool, calm and collected. The horses always seem to relax well for him and he can get out from impossible spots."

At the moment Hugh Bowman is the regular rider of champion mare Winx and he's on his way to being part of a long list of legendary jockey and horse combinations such as Luke Nolen/Black Caviar, Malcolm Johnston/Kingston Town and George Moore/Tulloch.

Avdulla, like all hoops, is wondering if the next horse he rides becomes a champion.

"You hope for it," he said. "Racing is an amazing thing. You never know what's around the corner.

"A good horse can come out of nowhere and the next thing you're with it travelling the world.

"Racing is one of the only sports like that where you all of a sudden can be on top of the world if you find a champion." **RNSW**