

Connor's dream COMES TO FRUITION

Connor Hotham is living his dream – and it's all thanks to one horse.

For the 19-year-old Bathurst native, horse racing played virtually no role in his life until 2010 when he went to Rosehill Gardens and witnessed More Joyous win the George Main Stakes.

"My story is probably a little bit different. The first time I went to the races I didn't really know that much about it," Hotham said.

"I got to see More Joyous and I fell in love with her. She was the reason I wanted to get into horse racing."

A champion volleyball player at school, Hotham knocked back more than one sporting scholarship and decided to pursue his dream of working with horses.

Soon after he secured a job at Bell River Thoroughbreds, helping them prepare horses for the sales.

Hotham then joined trainer Peter Stanley, who enabled him to experience Sydney racing once again.

"He had a horse in the TAB Highway race and I went down with him to strap the horse and met Ian Smith. Ian asked me to come and work in Sydney," he said.

Hotham has been with Gai Waterhouse and Adrian Bott for more than six months now and Waterhouse said she's never seen a teenager so keen for racing – particularly one who has no family background in the industry.

Hotham's up every day at 2:30am and at the track by 3am to walk horses, saddle and wash them until

YOUNG CONNOR HOTHAM WATCHED MORE JOYOUS PERFORM AND HE WAS SOLD – THE 19YO SIMPLY HAD TO FIND A CAREER IN HORSE RACING

WORDS: MATT JONES
PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

6am before moving out on the track to help jockeys at the jump outs before finishing up at 8:30am.

After a few hours off it's back to work again from 12pm to 2:30pm to walk and dress horses and fix their boxes with feed to ensure they're comfortable for the rest of the day.

Hotham said working with world-class horses has been better than he ever imagined.

"It's been amazing and it's a very friendly environment," he said.

"Gai's different to work for but she gets the best out of you and Adrian [Bott] is the same.

"It was a bit daunting at first but once you meet her it's fine. Then you get to know how things work and it gets a little bit easier.

"Gai's taught me that there's always something new to learn and I keep on asking questions."

His greatest thrill to date has been strapping Fabrizio as he starts to rack up the wins early in his career.

"He's been very good to me," Hotham said. "It was crazy. The way he's won has been incredible and it's the best feeling ever, strapping a winner.

"I care so much about him and it was awesome to see him win."

Fabrizio has now won seven of his 11 starts including a win at Flemington on Melbourne Cup day.

Hotham said while he's generally always the youngest person at

trackwork in the morning, it isn't as hard as most teenagers think to get into racing as long as they have a passion for Thoroughbreds.

"My family was never in racing but I wanted to be in it so I tried to get in any way I could and if you want it there's always people who are willing to give you an opportunity," he said.

"The best part is working with the horses – they're the reason we wake up in the morning."

Hotham, who says Black Caviar is his favourite all-time horse, wants to eventually be a racing manager or senior foreman in Australia or overseas.

"But I'm not sure if I'd like to be a trainer yet, but will figure that out as I get older," he said.

"Hopefully I'm involved in racing forever." **RNSW**



Strapper Connor Hotham – was super keen to get into horse racing

Connor Hotham leads his favourite galloper Fabrizio with Koby Jennings in the saddle

