



Jake Pracey-Holmes and Stonerise head to the barriers prior to the Country Championships Qualifier at Dubbo

Champion rises from BACK O'BOURKE

When Stonerise steps out at Royal Randwick next month in the Country Championships Final, he will have had a three-day road journey behind him.

The winner of the Western Region qualifier has to travel more than 1000km from Hungerford, north-west of Bourke on the Queensland border, to compete in the \$400,000 race.

"The first 200km to Bourke is the hardest because it's gravel and it takes me four hours," owner-trainer James Hatch said. "The rest of the way is fine but I will have a few stop overs.

"I've had plenty of offers of places to stay; my phone hasn't stopped ringing. I never knew I had this many friends!"

**STONEYRISE
CAUSED A MAJOR
UPSET AT THE
DUBBO COUNTRY
CHAMPIONSHIPS BUT
NOBODY MINDED,
NOT EVEN HIS RIVALS**

WORDS: JULIEANNE HORSMAN
PICTURES: JANIAN MCMILLAN

Stonerise, a \$10 chance, won admirers all over the country with his come-from-behind win at Dubbo.

With Jake Pracey-Holmes on board, the five-year-old gelding flew home from last to beat short-priced favourite La La Loopsy by a

length. The win made it a double for the hoop, after he saluted on Fairy Fragments in Race 1.

"I am still pinching myself," Hatch said a few days after the race. "We almost turned around the morning of the race because the horse hadn't eaten overnight, but he came right by the time we got to the track.

"We had a great night celebrating at the Macquarie Inn with some other trainers and bunch of locals. I'd say the TAB at Bourke would have had a pretty bad day."

Hatch dared to dream about the Country Championships after putting his \$7500 bargain buy to the test at a Coonamble TAB meeting last October.

"He'd won four picnic races and only missed a place twice in his



ABOVE: Connections and officials with Stonerise after his win in the WRRRA Country Championships Qualifier (trainer James Hatch is 5th from left)

RIGHT: Stonerise at home 'about to go out to trackwork' next to the battered old Ford Festiva

12-start career so I wanted to see how he would go against higher class horses," Hatch said.

"When he won again that was enough for me. Opportunities like this don't come up every day so it was full steam ahead to the Country Championships."

Hatch has been a licensed trainer for 13 years and with only two horses in his stable, he mostly works them at home on Wombah Station.

The four-hour round trip to Bourke Racecourse is not a viable option for regular galloping so Hatch has had to get creative.

"When the horses need galloping I connect them to an old Ford Festiva and slowly accelerate," he said. "They're happy enough to run along next to the car."

Hatch also uses Stonerise for mustering: "He's a foolproof horse though so you can just grab him and do anything with him," he said. "We throw a saddle on him and he does a bit of cattle work to keep him fit and stimulated."

As soon as Stonerise returned



from Dubbo he was sent into the paddock to rest for a couple of weeks.

"He has pulled up fine and will let me know when he is ready to come back," Hatch said. "I'd like him to have another race before the Final but I don't think there's anything suitable. He's only a little fella and doesn't need too much work though."

Jake Pracey-Holmes was offered first right of refusal on the ride at Royal Randwick and of course he snapped it up.

The win in the Dubbo Country Championships heat was the most

significant of his career and came just eight months after a shocking race fall in which he broke the c2 vertebra in his neck.

"Most people would be hesitant to get back in the saddle after that but not Jake," Hatch said. "He has only ridden for me twice now but gee, he's got talent."

Hatch has a proud family history in thoroughbred horse racing. His father was an owner/trainer and enjoyed success in the 1960s with a horse named Hypertan who won 12 of his 23 starts around the Central West Slopes and Plains. **RNSW**