



O'Rourke has acquired class filly Frolic, seen here winning at Royal Randwick with Tommy Berry aboard

FRESHMAN and his band of babies

A WINTER WORKING FOR GAI WATERHOUSE WAS ALL TRAINER EDWARD O'ROURKE NEEDED TO FALL IN LOVE WITH SYDNEY RACING AND, IN PARTICULAR, TWO-YEAR-OLD RACING

WORDS: RAY HICKSON PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

With a jumping and National Hunt background at home in Ireland, it may seem an odd fit for up and coming trainer Edward O'Rourke to want to train precocious youngsters.

O'Rourke is one of the newest names in the Sydney training ranks and, being something of a Waterhouse product, it's no surprise that he wants to see smart two-year-olds rolling out of his Randwick stable for years to come.

"When I decided I wanted to get into the flat game I came here for a

winter, the Irish summer, and worked for Gai," the 32-year-old said.

"She's renowned around the world for what she does with her two-year-olds. I could see the racing was fantastic and I decided I wanted to be a part of it."

That was back in 2011. After another six months working for the likes of Anthony Cummings, John Thompson and David Hayes, O'Rourke was offered sponsorship to stay in Sydney and a job preparing the youngsters for the Waterhouse stable.

In that time, he helped in the

development of Slipper winners Pierro, Overreach and Vancouver and O'Rourke is adamant the 2014 Slipper could have been theirs too.

"We'd look after the babies in the early stages and educate them," he said. "Then we hand them over to the stables when we had them up to racing.

"I learned a lot from Gai there, about how to bring them along. She is one of the best at it in the country - six Golden Slippers.

"I've been there for three but it probably should have been four had Fighting Sun not broken down."



Edward O'Rourke is all smiles after his first winner, Takahashi at Muswellbrook

By the time Vancouver won the Slipper, O'Rourke was starting to get 'itchy feet' about going out on his own.

An opportunity arose with Michael Freedman to be his assistant trainer and O'Rourke "jumped at that".

He then hit another crossroad when Freedman announced he was moving to Hong Kong at the end of the 2016 Sydney Autumn Racing Carnival.

O'Rourke will tell you he feels extremely fortunate to have been given boxes at Randwick to start his own venture despite having little tried stock to fill them.

"It just all happened very quickly. It was a rollercoaster. It just took off," he said.

"I never thought I wasn't ready for it but the biggest thing was ringing owners and getting people on side.

"I've done my time, I wasn't too worried about that. I'm blessed to be starting at Randwick.

"I thought one day I might get back here but it's a big benefit to start here because a lot of owners are based here and like to have their horses stabled in Sydney."

While his team consists largely of young horses there's two very

familiar names that O'Rourke hopes can showcase his skills in the coming months.

They are Golden Slipper runner-up Frolic and one-time Magic Millions favourite, From Within.

Frolic was trained by Freedman so O'Rourke is very familiar with her, while he picked up From Within from the Chris Waller stable – both coming off injuries that kept them out of the spring.

"I was very lucky that Tom Kelly let me inherit a filly like Frolic. Not many people who start off training are given the calibre of horse I've been given," he said.

"At the moment, I'm not too worried about Frolic because we're looking to the autumn. The main thing is getting her back on track, building her up and taking her along nice and slowly.

"I'm lucky to be able to do that with her and have not have the pressure of having the knees operated on and having to race her."

O'Rourke expects to have From Within up and racing before the end of the year.

"She came from champion trainer Chris Waller so there are no small shoes to fill there," he said.

"She was unfortunate when she came to me she kicked out and broke a splint bone.

"Since she's come back there have been no problems and hopefully she will be ready to race towards the end of December.

"She has a lot of potential and if we can get that out of her hopefully we can get her to the next level."

Until those fillies are ready to return, O'Rourke hopes his team of two-year-olds can begin to make their mark.

He said he wouldn't want to be training anywhere else at the moment, with prizemoney at the levels it is in Sydney, and is prepared to back his ability and the knowledge he's acquired.

"I want to try to hit the mark early with the two-year-olds. There's more pressure on myself that way because I haven't had many tried horses to run around," he said.

"It'd be lovely to have more boxes in five years and training with the top trainers in Sydney. Competing in the big races and produce quality two-year-olds every year.

"We have some nice babies coming through, we just have to work hard and be patient." **RNSW**