



SINGAPORE DINNER PARTY THAT KEEPS GIVING

ACE JOCKEY ALYSHA COLLETT AND RACECALLER LUKE MARLOW RECENTLY BECAME ENGAGED AND ALTHOUGH THEY DON'T LIKE THE PHRASE 'GLAMOUR COUPLE' ... WELL THEY ARE!

WORDS: MARK BRASSEL IMAGES: JESSE WEBBER-WHITE (BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS)

Alysha Collett has overcome plenty of adversity in her 31 years but none more so than in Singapore nearly seven years back when involved in a serious race fall resulting in an eight-month stint on the sideline after suffering damage to her L1 lumbar vertebra.

Alysha was restricted to a wheelchair for two months where doctors inserted metal rods and screws in her back and she also had broken a heel in six places.

"My horse was weakening and two horses either side of me squeezed me out and I was flung into the air," Alysha recalled. "It didn't help that it was on the synthetic track.

"My spine was unstable and required surgery and it was touch and go for a while. I thought the worst as I couldn't move for a week.

"That was very scary, but it was spine shock and eventually it came good. Once the rods came out, they were happy with my movement, and I received a clearance and went back home [New Zealand] to do my rehab three times a week.

"I eventually rode in New Zealand for a month before I worked out what I wanted to do and decided I was keen to get back to Singapore. That was a blessing when I think about it as it's when I met Luke."

We'll get to Luke Marlow's story shortly.

Alysha again hit a speed bump last June when hit in the eye with a clod at Rosehill Gardens on a rain-affected track.

"It was a little worrying at the time as I couldn't see – the Doctor told me not to panic, and I said: "But I am panicking!"

"Anyway, turns out he was right, and I was surprised how quickly the eye got better."

And not long beforehand the tough-as-teak jockey was sidelined with pneumonia, but the ever-optimistic Collett said: "That was only for a month, anyway they're just small things in the big picture!"

Alysha is part of one of New Zealand's most famous racing families that includes brother Jason (third in the Sydney Metro Premiership), father Richard (trains at Warwick Farm; both he and wife Judy are ex-jockeys), and sister Tash who is married to jockey Andrew Calder who's now riding here having landed over 1000 winners mostly in NZ and Macau.

During her time out of the saddle when rehabilitating Collett did some media TV work with Trackside in NZ: "I really enjoyed doing that as it gave me an insight into what's down the path after racing, as that's all I know," Collett said.

"It was for six months and during the Carnival and at the time I knew all the horses. It's great I've ticked off that box and there remains another challenge for me once I finish up riding."

To date Collett has won 843 races (435-Australia; 379-NZ and 29-Singapore) that includes a Group 1 victory and 22 Stakes wins: "To rack up 1000 winners is something that would be amazing."

Alysha said her biggest thrill was winning a Group 1 on Consensus at Ellerslie: "I knew all the owners – more than anything I love riding winners for my family.

"I try not to set goals as I tend to try too hard to achieve them – that can be my downfall, but also my biggest asset!

"I like keeping it simple, I don't over complicate it and just pay attention to the trainer's instructions. I note what's happening around me and I don't clutter my mind too much."

Collett rode a double at the Gosford Saturday stand-alone meeting but also received a suspension on the day.

"I work pretty hard and don't have many breaks, so I'll head home for a week to catch up with friends."

The Luke Marlow story began in Thangool around two hours south of Rockhampton.

"I grew up on our property where Dad had cattle and

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We attended a dinner party together with friends and naturally all Alysha and I spoke about was racing," Marlow said.

hobby-trained some racehorses," Marlow, who turns 32 this month, recalled. "I was there until Year 5 then went to school at Rockhampton until Year 12.

"I rode trackwork before school for Dad and loved it. I think having that experience on the other side of the fence was valuable in giving me a better understanding as a racecaller and in the media.

"I moved to Sydney and the timing was spot on as I won a Sky Racing Scholarship for 12 months.

"Sky must have been happy as I've been there since.

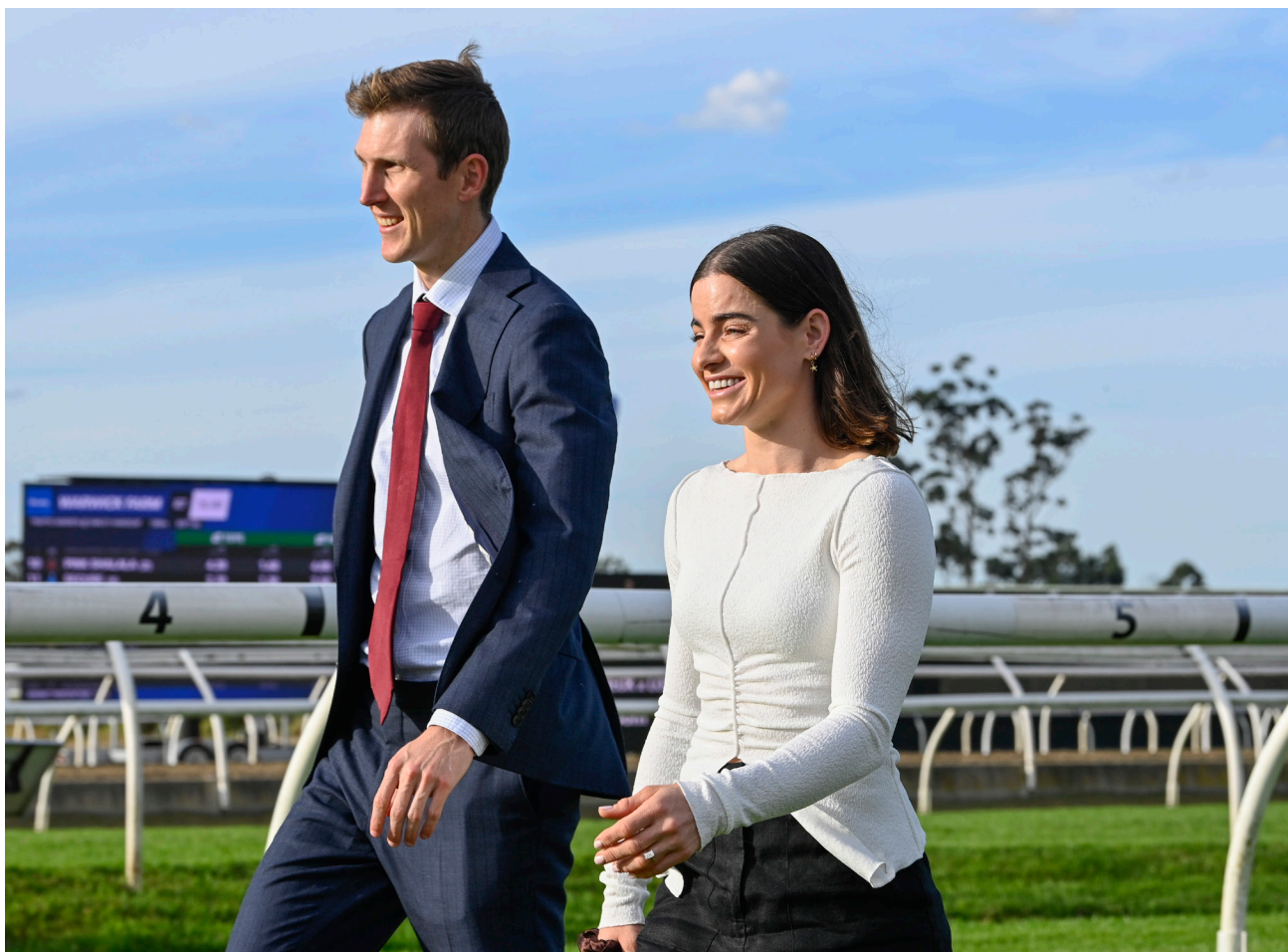
"It's been a tremendous journey, and I love working for Sky.

"Initially I travelled with other callers Matt Hill to the Metro tracks, and with Josh Fleming to the Provincials.

"I called the greyhounds and harness racing for about six months, but racehorses were always my passion.

"Moruya was the first track where I started calling a full race card before the Sapphire Coast. There are probably not too many courses up and down the New South Wales coast that I haven't attended since."

Luke and fellow Sky Racing host Dave Stanley are often seen up and about together having formed a strong friendship.



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We do find time to walk along the shores of Maroubra with our French Bulldog, Frank.

“Dave and I met in a studio in the early days. I was doing a voice over and Dave was presenting on Sky 2. We’d quite often talk in the corridors of Sky, and we now enjoy being close friends.

“It works well on-air as we can push the envelope sometimes and that creates a better show for the listeners.

“Dave does far more travelling than I do attending Country Cups, but I try and tag along when I can and help out.”

Last year Marlow showed another string to his bow when he stepped into the boxing ring for charity and came out a winner; as did his charity Sydney Children’s Hospital.

“It was a great challenge, but it’s harder than many would think. I spent 12 weeks training, and realised boxing is more technical than I first thought. It’s like a chess game rather than just getting into the ring to simply whack each other.”

Marlow has called half a dozen Provincial Championships Finals and rates them as outstanding experiences: “I love it as I know the horses and it’s such a great atmosphere at Randwick.

“I try to be impartial when calling especially with Alysha riding but one of my favourite calls was when Joe Azzopardi won the Singapore Derby on Sun Marshall for Lee Freedman. Joe is a great friend, and it was pretty special calling the finish.”

Both Marlow and Collett are characters and full of life,

with their connection having blossomed in Singapore six years ago.

“There are lots of expats there and we attended a dinner party together with friends and naturally all Alysha and I spoke about was racing,” Marlow said.

“We had lunch the next day and now here we are recently engaged. I popped the question in New Zealand when we were there for a wedding. It just felt right in the days that followed.

“We both keep very fit but Alysha’s always flat out, so we don’t get that much time to go to the gym together and I have my own trainer.

“We do find time to walk along the shores of Maroubra with our French Bulldog, Frank.”

Alysha added Luke does fall short in his taste of jewellery.

“He had bought me an engagement ring when he proposed – I have the sort of face that can’t get away with telling a lie, so I said: ‘that’s so thoughtful ... but the ring is hideous!!’ **RNSW**