



A beaming Michael Travers with Mathrin after winning the Cowra Cup. Image by Janian McMillan

# MICHAEL TRAVERS – A PHANTOM OF THE OPERA

**MICHAEL TRAVERS HAS A COLOURFUL BACKGROUND THAT INCLUDES A STINT SINGING AT THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE BUT HE'S NOW SETTLED INTO HIS DREAM JOB** WORDS: MARK BRASSEL



**Y**ou could say Wagga trainer Michael Travers knows plenty about the science of horse racing – in fact, he knows a great deal about all science as an ex-schoolteacher.

Travers, 52, a former jockey, is now plying his trade as a trainer in the Riverina and is beginning to be noticed with a steady stream of winners.

From his past 27 starters the Travers camp has recorded six winners at a 22% strike rate and the stable is on an upward spiral.

Travers has trained a total of 83 winners and with this season not even halfway through, he has already prepared 18 winners. The previous year it was 26 and in 2023/24 he had 18 wins on the board.

"I am very lucky I have great people around me and we all ride trackwork, so I don't have to worry too much about getting the horses galloped of a morning," Travers said.

"Graham Byatt is a horseman and won a Grand National [Sir Agrifo in 1989], and there's Charlie Murray a trainee apprentice.

"Our other apprentice is Amy O'Driscoll, but she broke her leg on another trainer's horse and is out of play for 12 months.

"They're tremendous workers and we all have the same mindset; we never look at the clock, when the work starts it starts, and we don't finish until the job's done.

"I've always been one to work hard and I like to have people around me that also work hard. It pays off at the end."

As a youngster, Travers was always mad-keen on racing and his parents allowed him to do some strapping and other odds and ends during weekends and public holidays at the Rosehill stables of Paul Sutherland and Ray Guy, as well as Noel Mayfield-Smith at Hawkesbury.

But they insisted young Michael finish Year 12 and beyond, so he then headed off to Uni to complete a Bachelor of Education where he taught science, maths, religion and music, the latter involving the piano and singing.

Travers is at adept at reading music and is an accomplished pianist, although he doesn't have much time these days to 'tickle the ivories'.

"My younger brother and I would always sing in the school choir, and we even did 'side hustles' at the Opera House when we were part of a choir performing in professional operas," Travers recalled.

Travers made his major leap into racing at 24 when he approached former jockey Maurice Logue [Racing NSW apprentice coach] at Rosehill and worked for eight years with Albury trainer Rob Wellington.

He then had a stint riding for Newcastle trainer Paul Perry including being aboard classy UK-winning sprinter Choisir in his trackwork.

Travers finished his riding career just short of the magical 1000-win milestone, booting home 985 winners including one metropolitan winner at Canterbury.

"Covet Thee was my one and only winner in town but it was significant as I'm sure it was Kris Lees' [trainer] first ever metropolitan winner."



Stable favourite Mathrin (Jessica Brookes) scores in style at Canberra. Image by Bradley Photographers



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One of Travers' favourite gallopers was Piracy on whom he won eight races including the Gundagai, Balranald and Ted Ryder Cups – alongside being owned by his mum, Rae!

Travers spent 25 years in the saddle including a couple of years both riding and training.

"It took a while, but I eventually received my dual licence to ride and train," Travers said.

"But I decided to retire doing both at 50 as it was becoming too much – I just felt it was the right time to only train with Jodie [wife] and a young family including son Maverick (11) and stepchildren Cameron and Alaska."

Travers entered his name into the history books when he guided home Estaverdi to a narrow win at Gundagai in April 2021, becoming the first in NSW to win a race as a jockey/trainer licensee.

Among the gallopers he now trains is eight-year-old mare Mathrin, a winner of nine races including the Ian Reid Sprint, Cowra and Corowa Cups and the Racecallers Cup at Canberra with 60kg.

"She's a beauty," Travers remarked. "I was the underbidder for Mathrin on an Inglis online digital sale when purchased by Peter Knight."

"I called Peter as I used to ride for him, but he said he'd already given the horse to Andrew Dale."

"She was still a maiden and Peter got back to me nine months later and said I could train her."

"Her stable name is Eve, and she has been a Godsend. Horses like her get all of us out of bed of a morning."

"She's only 430 kilos but that's all heart as she tries so hard every time she starts."

"It was a fairytale when Mathrin won the Cowra Cup last January as Jodie was born and bred at Cowra, so it was amazing feeling for the whole family."

"I'd like to think I can build the stable, it's a week-by-week thing and we're currently at about 25 horses."

"We can go to 50 but that might be a bit much, so I'm looking at a capacity of around 30 to 40 horses."

"It also depends on staff as there's just three of us now but as I said, they're great workers."

"There's a lot of cheap gallopers online like Gold Tracker who's won six races for us and \$180,000 and Dynamic One with five wins and \$140,000 on the bank."

"Around 95% of all the horses we get are tried as that's where we find the value, so we're just pottering along and enjoying what we're doing." **RNSW**



Michael Travers being interviewed in his riding days. Image by Bradley Photographers