

# Rachael's landing goals – on and off the track

**TALENTED JOCKEY RACHAEL MURRAY GUIDED BOTH MEDAL OF GLORY AND MR PUMBLEHOOK TO VICTORY AT THE RACES – NOW SHE'S STEERING THEM TOWARDS AN EXCITING NEW GOAL OFF THE TRACK** WORDS: JULIEANNE HORSMAN

**G**rowing up on a 3000-acre property at Inverell in Northern NSW, Rachael Murray would often go missing.

Her parents need not have worried though. She would always be found soon after, curled up in the kennels with the working dogs or playing with the poddy lambs out in the sunshine.

Now 31, not a great deal has changed. When Rachael isn't travelling around the state riding winners, she's usually at home at Somersby on the Central Coast with her dog Jet and two off the track Thoroughbreds, Mr Pumblehook and Medal Of Glory.

"I was staying at Jane's (Clement, trainer) house and we decided to go for a trail ride over the river," Rachael said.

"I was riding Medal Of Glory in a race the next day and despite being in full work he was an angel. We wound our way through gullies and splashed in the water. It was so much fun.

"My love for him went to the next level that day and I knew I wanted to adopt him once he had retired."

By the time Medal Of Glory ran his last race in 2017, he had seven wins and 19 places to his name. Rachael was aboard for one of those wins (2016 Warialda Cup) and five of the places.

She began retraining him as a showjumper and was impressed by his willingness and consistent effort.

"He's such a kind horse and always tries his heart out," Rachael said. "He leaps about two feet above every jump and clears them easily. Sometimes his jump is so big he can throw me right out of the saddle!"



*Retired racehorses Medal Of Glory and Mr Pumblehook have become part of Rachael Murray's family. Picture by Daryl Duckworth*

Rachael added former Greg Bennett then Cody Morgan-trained gelding Mr Pumblehook to her stable in September last year, having earlier won two races on him.

"From the moment I laid eyes on him I loved him with all my heart," Rachael said.

"He has so much zest for life and loved being a racehorse. I kept in contact with owner Neil Werrett and asked if I could keep him when he retired.

"Cody would tease me and say his mum wanted Chookie but thankfully he came home with me in the end. He is little for a Thoroughbred, just 15.1hh, but he's a natural jumper.

"I've done a lot of groundwork with both horses so they are

respectful and desensitised.

"You want to feel safe and in control when riding them. They aren't a responsibility or chore though. They are my family and I love them dearly."

Despite already being an accomplished rider, Rachael gets dressage and showjumping tuition from Gosford trainer, John Cooper.

John has dedicated to his life to equestrian sports and even coached Olympians but became a racehorse trainer in 2017 after suffering a serious injury in a jumping accident.

"John and his wife Pip are such good, genuine horse people," Rachael said. "They are full of knowledge and have made themselves a beautiful home at

Central Mangrove.

"It's a credit to how hard they have worked. I would recommend anyone with an off the track Thoroughbred invest in lessons."

Rachael has taken Medal Of Glory out to several competitions and on some occasions had to dash off early to ride at the races. She's hoping to take Mr Pumblechook on his first outing soon.

"It's a balancing act, that's for sure," Rachael said. "I would love to have them both at a level where I can take them out to showjumping days and be competitive. Getting involved in the Off The Track series would be a dream."

Rachael isn't the only professional rider to be taking retired racehorses and giving them a second career off the track.

Alena Skerritt has Group 3 winner Mighty Lucky, Jess Taylor adopted Tsunami Alert after scoring a win and two places with him, Kathy O'Hara retrained Zaratone after winning a Group 3 and several Listed races on him, young former jockey Chloe Wilkes is retraining Our Sarastro and inaugural The Kosciuszko runner Fuel, and Courtney Van Der Werf is making 1.15m look easy on Mediterranean.

"Most people are in the industry because they are passionate about horses," Rachael said. "You wouldn't get up in the dark and freezing cold every day if you didn't love it."

"Often you see strappers, stablehands, trackwork riders, jockeys and trainers looking worn out but the horses are thriving."

While Rachael has always loved horses and spent most of her youth at Inverell Pony Club, she wasn't always going to be a jockey. The



*Medal Of Glory has shown plenty of scope over jumps*

stars aligned in 2008 when she was studying Agricultural Science at the University of New England.

Rachael roomed with a teaching student named Tracy O'Hara, a talented jockey who chalked up almost 300 wins herself and the sister of leading Sydney jockey Kathy O'Hara. Rachael mentioned she needed a job and the O'Haras suggested she become an apprentice jockey.

Agreeing it would be an enjoyable way to earn a living, Rachael approached Armidale trainer Frank Tanner and was soon indentured to him.

Once she graduated from Uni she moved to Scone where she was apprenticed to Greg Bennett.

Later she moved to Sydney where she finished her apprenticeship with then Warwick Farm trainer Michael Costa. Rachael credits him with teaching her to believe in herself

and encouraged her to keep aiming high.

In 2017 Rachael wrote herself into the history books as the first female jockey to ride 100 winners in a season, smashing the previous record of 87 set by Linda Meech a decade before.

Just last month Rachael celebrated her 500th winner as a jockey. While she has no plans to slow down anytime soon, when she does she would love to become a Thoroughbred re-trainer and prepare retired racehorses for their next pursuit off the track.

"I look forward to the day when I can have a slower paced life with limited travelling," she said.

"It would be a dream to have a little property away from all the hustle and bustle where I could give retired racehorses the best opportunity for a successful and rewarding life after racing." **RNSW**