

Chance of a lifetime in The TAB Everest

IT STARTED AS A 'RANDOM IDEA' AND IT JUST GAINED MOMENTUM, NOW IT'S THE STUFF OF DREAMS FOR CARMEL SIZE IN HER QUEST FOR THE TAB EVEREST

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Carmel Size with jockey Kerrin McEvoy following one of Classique Legend's victories

Carmel Size has so far watched The TAB Everest from afar but when a slot in the \$14 million race became available, she thought about Classique Legend and wondered 'what if'.

At that stage the talented grey had only three starts against his name but after he raced away with the Group 2 Arrowfield 3yo Sprint (1200m) during The Championships at his fourth start, that random idea had some weight.

Size, the daughter of legendary trainer Neville Begg, of course has no crystal ball to predict what might unfold in the spring but convinced the gelding's owner, Hong Kong businessman Boniface Ho, to put The TAB Everest on the table and secure

the vacated GPI Racing slot.

"I had a couple of people talk to me about the race and I thought it's not so crazy after all," Size said.

"The opportunity came up and I thought, rather than be disappointed if it doesn't work out it's in our hands and we can find another horse.

"It may be a dream. Racing is a great leveller but why not control our own destiny. I said to Mr Ho 'I believe so much in it I'll be a partner with you'.

"We've been in racing a long time and know what the pitfalls are. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, then can you believe another slot came on the market."

The TAB Everest takes on a different look in 2019 with three new slot

holders.

Size and Ho replace Greg Ingham's GPI Racing, Australian Turf Club sold its slot to the Melbourne Racing Club, also for this year, while the slot owned by Damion Flower was put up for tender and claimed by Godolphin.

"It gathered momentum so quickly. I was thinking of impossibilities then next thing I'm having a go at negotiating," Size said.

"I'd never done an expression of interest before but Inglis, who managed the sale, and GPI were really good to deal with and it was pretty straightforward."

The partnership between Carmel Size and Bon Ho goes back many years to when she was based in Hong Kong with former husband John Size,



A smiling Kerrin McEvoy guides Classique Legend home in the Arrowfield 3yo Sprint at Royal Randwick

leading trainer in the Asian racing capital.

She'd been back in Australia for a couple of years when Mr Ho called out of the blue and asked if she'd be his racing and bloodstock manager.

The first horse Size bought for him was Southern Legend, now one of Hong Kong's best horses.

But Mr Ho did take some convincing when the idea to buy into The Everest was floated.

He was adamant that Classique Legend would be the best four-year-old in Hong Kong this season but once he was on board with the idea, and the back-up plan, Size's dream was alive.

"Everybody is looking at The Everest," she said.

"Mr Ho is an individual owner and that excites him amongst his group of friends. He's put his hand up and said 'yes, I want to be a part of that'.

"I think it is a great compliment to have a Hong Kong owner invest in the Everest.

"He's stuck with me. We have discussions about the way he would like things done, sometimes he wins and sometimes I win, and he trusts me."

The back up plan involves what happens if Classique Legend doesn't

make it to The Everest.

He's due to kick off his spring campaign in September and with just the four races under his belt there's no telling what level he can get to.

That is part of the dream, the gamble, of owning a horse that shows rare talent.

"Nobody would ever say if you have a horse go to the races and win like he did at his first two starts they don't have a dream they'll be a top class horse," Size said.

"We are quite open to what the pitfalls are and we know we can do a good enough deal to cover being a part of the Everest.

"We're going to have a great day and be a part of something that's probably the best thing that has ever happened in racing."

While Classique Legend lacks experience, there's plenty of years in the racing industry behind the grey sprinter.

His trainer is 81-year-old Les Bridge, a man of few words but some of those words after the Arrowfield Sprint win suggested he thinks Classique Legend could be something special.

Then there's Neville Begg, 88, a member of the Racing Hall of Fame, whose advice Size usually takes heed of.

"I talked to my dad about it and he thought it was a good idea. That probably sealed the deal, if Neville thinks it's a good idea then it's a good idea," she said.

"I still don't know if Les believes I've done the right thing and whether I've put too much pressure on him. You never know your luck in a big city.

"My mother told me that when I was nine years old and I've never forgotten it and I've always believed in it."

Until the 2019 TAB Everest is run and won, Carmel Size will be a little on edge.

She has faith in the horse they've thrown in the deep end and would dearly love to see him take his place at Royal Randwick on October 19.

What if he won it? That's something that will require a 'pinch me' moment probably the next day but a conversation with Redzel's co-trainer Peter Snowden after the inaugural running has her anticipating what she says is a wild ride for her and Mr Ho. "I said to Peter Snowden the Sunday after the Everest 'how unreal is that, I'd love to do that. It must be the best feeling in the world,'" she said.

"He said, 'mate, why can't you'."

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