

SNITZEL PROVIDES A FEAST FOR FLOWER

DAMION FLOWER'S BIGGEST BREAK IN RACING CAME WITH THE ARRIVAL OF SNITZEL, A TOP CLASS SPURTER AND NOW ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S LEADING STALLIONS

WORDS: BRAD GRAY

“Peaceful, isn't it?” Damion Flower asks as he leans on Platinum Park's middle fencing looking beyond his property which spills onto Hawkesbury Racecourse.

Flower, who operates Jadeskye Racing and holds a slot in the inaugural running of The Everest, is a name familiar to most people who move in racing circles but few know his backstory. He freely admits that he prefers to let his horses do the talking.

Flower was raised in Bronte and with the beach on his doorstep, took to surfing at a young age which propelled him to being crowned NSW State Champion as an early teenager.

“When you really like something you really get into it and I lived right on the beach so I was lucky there – it's a freedom sport. You go out into the ocean and are relaxed. There's no mobiles. I still love it to this day,” said Flower.

However, a freak accident when Flower was in his final year of high school ended his surfing career but as fate would have it, also inadvertently created the name that would see Flower turn his long-time passion for racing into a profession.

“When I was 17, I stepped out across the road and a guy came around a double-parked car and cleaned me up. It was very serious for about 11 months,” Flower recalled.

“A good friend of mine came in looking for me in the hospital. My face was grazed. He walked in and the nurse said ‘2B’ but he walked back out and said ‘I can't find him’ before she said, ‘no, that's him’.

“He said no, ‘that can't be him, he looks like a Snitzel’ and the nickname has stuck ever since.”

Before the story of Snitzel, however, comes Flower's first foray into horse ownership and talk about starting on a high.

“Clangalang was a horse I picked from a paddock and bought a share in. He was already racing with Gerald Ryan and was the very first horse I owned. He went on to win the AJC Derby and the Epsom becoming the first horse to do that in the same year,” said Flower.

“I built a relationship with Gerald and went on to buy Snitzel with the proceeds from Clangalang and it snowballed from there. There is luck in everything and I



Prominent owner Damion Flower – is familiar to most people who move in racing circles

was very blessed to get a horse like that.”

Snitzel, of course, went on to be one of the most dominant two-year-olds of the 2004–05 racing season before later claiming honours in the 2006 Group 1 Oakleigh Plate.

The now 15-year-old is one of the most in-demand stallions in the country. In the 2016–17 season just gone, Snitzel's progeny earned \$16.2 million in prizemoney and he equalled Danehill's record of 26 stakes winners for the season.

“When we first arrived (at Magic Millions to buy Snitzel) I said to Gerald that I want to buy a horse that could make a stallion. I wanted to buy a Redoute's Choice and it was pretty much the last year of the Danehills.

“We picked out three horses, he came out first as lot 51 and I really liked him,” Flower said.

“I had just started using my own breeding system and he matched up really well.

“We went there thinking he was a \$150,000 horse but we ended up going higher. I told Gerald that I've got \$250,000 because that's the share I had in Clangalang.

“It got to \$250,000 and I started walking away. The auctioneer took a half bid and went to \$255,000. Gerald grabbed me and said \$260,000 and we'll get him because



that's all they've got. We landed him at \$260,000."

The two other horses that Flower had picked out of the catalogue ended up being Stratum and Gonski but Flower "wouldn't swap Snitzel for the world."

"Mentally, he had the best attitude. He was a very good walker too. He wasn't an overly big horse which put a lot of people off but in his temperament, he had something about him.

"The first thing I'll look at when I get to a sale is if they can walk. If they can't walk, they can't run but that's a just me.

"Then I'll look at their body, shoulder and size. Attitude is also very important to me because I like to buy colts.

"I don't know why, but I wrote it on the book that day to call him Snitzel."

Fast forward 13 years and Flower shakes his head when asked to reflect on how a schoolboy whose imagination was captured by the likes of Empire Rose, Shaftesbury Avenue, Beau Zam and Sky Chase, is now a proprietor with "around 30 horses".

"For every second week when they'd race at Randwick I would save my lunch money for 10 days, race down there and break pencils in half to sell out the front just so I could get in the gates," Flower said.

It all started with Flower's early friendships with Dean Edser, whose father George 'Hollywood' Edser was one of the biggest punters of his time, and Robert Tidy, the son of popular Sydney bookmaker Col Tidy.

The intrigue. The adrenalin. Flower was hooked.

Platinum Park is five acres with 11 day yards and 33 boxes, with plans to add another 20 in the near future, a 70m pool, a walker and a round yard while it's only "50 yards" to the Hawkesbury course proper.

Walking around the tranquil five-acre property, you certainly don't feel just an hour away from the Sydney CDB.

Flower stumbled on the land by accident one day when a detour sent him down Rickaby Road, a street that Platinum Park's trainer Brad Widdup shares with the likes of Noel Mayfield-Smith and Scott Singleton.

"It's easy for me to say but it's one of the nicest properties I've seen outside of the Hunter Valley.

"The place is probably 70% done and I've always wanted a place where I could have my own horses and trainer.

"The horses are happy and relaxed and the establishment itself is incredible," said Flower.

Given that Widdup trained 10 winners from his first 32 runners, with a further six placings, it's fair to say that



Flower's eye for a trainer is as good as his eye for a yearling.

"I didn't know Brad personally but when I was thinking of things, he was the first person that came up.

"He is so well respected but after a couple of conversations I didn't expect to get him as he was so well entrenched at Godolphin," Flower said.

"He is a fantastic guy first off but a fantastic horseman and all of my staff have stayed.

"The horses are winning in town and away from town. You couldn't possibly ask for anything more.

"As soon as I walk through the door, Brad is the boss. I'm the owner but in here, he's the boss.

"I come here three mornings a week at 4:30am and don't mind filling up water buckets, doing a box, handling a horse.

"If it has got to be done, it's got to be done. I love all aspects of it – the racing side, the sales but the horse themselves, they are beautiful animals."

Upon Flower's arrival at Platinum Park, Widdup was out the back on a ride-on lawn mower cutting the grass.

According to Flower, Widdup simply doesn't stop. Seven days a week and he'd have to tell him to have a day off.

Flower, who also still dabbles in construction, is the type of bloke that you meet for the first time but feel like you've known a lifetime and you don't have to spend long with him to discover that outside of racing, his family



means everything to him.

'Jadeskye' is a combination of his two daughter's names, Jade and Skye, while he is adamant that he wouldn't be able to do what he does without the support of his wife Camilla.

Even his silks, the now familiar red with white polka dots, represent his family's Austrian ancestry.

"The silks are very dear to me. My Nan was passing away at the time and as people know, I had the Snitzel silks with the green and she said to me why don't you race the horses in the colours of the Austrian flag.

"The Austrian flag is red and white therefore I changed my silks over upon her passing," Flower said. **RNSW**