

# THE SLIPPER

## *fits Pickford perfectly*

**CRAIG PICKFORD, A PART-OWNER OF GOLDEN SLIPPER WINNER STAY INSIDE, HAS GOOD REASON NOT TO EVER FORGET BEING LOCKED DOWN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

WORDS: BRAD GRAY PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS



*Craig Pickford (right) and fellow part-owner Mitchell Skinner share the spoils on Longines Golden Slipper Day*

In a year railroaded by COVID restrictions, what better way to punctuate the past 12 months than with a colt named Stay Inside winning the \$3.5 million Longines Golden Slipper (1200m) at Rosehill Gardens.

One of the two-year-old's majority owners Craig Pickford ended up with a much bigger share in the son of Extreme Choice than he had originally intended, so the naming rights fell his way.

"It was during one of the lockdowns and I thought what about something about staying inside like everybody is, and his dam is Nothing Leica Storm too," said Pickford.

After enjoying only moderate success in horse ownership, it all took a turn when a friend of Pickford's, James Moss, set up Tricolours Racing.

Tried horse Pecans got the ball rolling before Fasika

followed soon after. Pickford was soon hungry for more.

Now Pickford's bulging stable also includes Forbidden Love, Mustajeer, Raheen House, Southern France and Gin Martini.

"I've really only been in ownership for four or five years in any serious scale, I was always just a punter," said Pickford.

"I went to high school with (Sky Racing form analyst) Paul Joice; he was always into horses because of his family, and it was in Year 12 at high school that he got me into them.

"I never thought I'd ever get into ownership; I am a bit tight as well and you could get a couple of people back me on that too.

"This year I've bought into another 14 yearlings with Tricolours and the Freedmans."

Growing up, Pickford adored Freedman-trained stars



*Tommy Berry celebrates on Stay Inside after winning the Golden Slipper*

Schillaci, Mahogany and Naturalism. It was that connection that eventually led to Pickford buying into Forbidden Love and later, Stay Inside.

"They had too many good horses to name, I always followed them," said Pickford.

"I always liked the Freedman stable and listening to Richard on the radio, so I reached out to him on Twitter after the sales asking if he had anything available.

"Richard put me onto (bloodstock agent) Rick Connolly who I met with to talk about the stable's plan for the Magic Millions.

"Rick was texting me from the sales, I missed out on one because it sold so quickly. He then said, 'but I've just bought one that is potentially a two-year-old', and it was Stay Inside.

"To be honest, I was a little bit uncomfortable taking 20 percent and a few months later went by and he still wasn't sold.

"That's when I got a friend of mine in, Mitchell Skinner, and a little bit extra came up so we took that too. I ended up with nearly half of the horse when it first raced."

The sky blue and red colours worn by Stay Inside are borrowed from the flag of Chicago, the American city where Pickford worked for seven years at a start up as a stock market derivative trader. It was also where he met his wife, Rui.

"We are getting sentimental about the colours already, it was really cool to see them painted up there on the finishing line at Rosehill," said Pickford.

"Michael (Freedman) was always of the opinion that he was pretty smart and Tommy Berry liked him in his second trial but he was already booked for Ashema," recalls Pickford.

"He opened \$35 on debut and started \$7 so somebody knew he was pretty good."

Stay Inside then improved again to win the Pierro Plate by an even bigger margin than his debut win. That was before Stay Inside's luckless fourth in the Todman Stakes brought Pickford back to earth.

"I was left thinking that he is still good but he isn't invincible, it just released some of the pressure. "Looking back on the Todman, I had a lot better feeling going into the Slipper, I wasn't as nervous," he said.

"I was quietly confident going into the Slipper. We had a box of 25 of us and I normally stand away by myself when the races are on. I was about six feet away from my mum and my wife was on the other side of her with all of my mates behind me.

"I stopped watching at the 100 metres. He had it won so far out. I didn't realise how close Anamoe got. "The last I looked he was winning by three or four lengths."

As for what's next for the diminutive Golden Slipper winner, the TAB Everest in October is the number one target.

"I'm no expert on breeding but that might be the only race that would add some value to him. That said, beating up the two-year-olds is one thing but even looking at the TJ Smith field this year, it won't be easy," he said.

"I recently went through and looked at the last 12 Slipper winners and it makes for pretty bad reading, he is only 450 kilos so if he keeps growing he might be one of the exceptions." **RNSW**