

Six weeks and no **'MISSUS'**

Billy Cray – have saddle will travel



IT WAS A LONELY MONTH AND A HALF FOR ENGLISH-BORN JOCKEY, BILLY CRAY, AFTER WAITING FOR HIS "MISSUS" TO JOIN HIM IN AUSTRALIA WORDS: MARK BRASSEL PICTURE: JANIAN MCMILLAN

But Billy Cray was not speaking about your normal 'Mrs', Cray was referring to his equisizer, a non-motorised mechanical horse that is controlled by the rider's own movement.

"I can't do without it!" declared Cray, now based at Scone and riding at race meetings around New South Wales.

"It builds strength and improves my skill; the equisizer also helps with my balance, flexibility, fitness and confidence.

"I shipped it over from England and it took six weeks to get here. I bought it from Richard Perham who is a jockey coach in Newmarket. I call it my 'missus'.

"I keep it in the spare room where I watch races on the tele and practice my riding on it."

Cray, 30, has been on a roll of late, and in mid-May booted home a quartet of winners at the Brewarrina race meeting, one hour east of Bourke.

"That was an excellent day – I had a good book of rides but to win four races on the six-race program was brilliant," Cray said.

Cray grew up in Sidcup, a working-class suburb of London: "My family were all builders and truck drivers. But I was always interested in racing and wanted to be a jockey from day one.

"I would watch the races on TV with my Dad and Grandad as we couldn't afford to go out to the races.

"We'd pick colours and see who wins; I always picked the most winners.

"I attended Newmarket Racing School for nine weeks then as a 16-year-old, worked as a stable lad for Lambourn trainer, Dominic French Davis."

Cray's time there created opportunities and he had his first ride as an 18-year-old.

"You always remember your first ride, it was on a quiet one and he finished midfield.

"Funnily enough, the horse was called Murrumbidgee and it was named after the place in Australia."

Cray's first winner was Just Call Me Handsome at Wolverhampton and he also won a race at Royal Ascot on Brandywell Boy.



Foxy Miss with Billy Cray aboard cruises to victory at Coonabarabran

"I've ridden in Germany and France, usually just the odd race when one was sent over from the UK to race on the weekend."

Cray has even ridden for the Queen: "It wasn't a big race, it was at Wolverhampton but it was certainly a thrill.

"I've ridden over 100 winners and my biggest by far was on Evens and Odds in the Stewards Cup, a prestigious race at Goodwood. At the time, it was a Heritage Handicap and the richest sprint race in Europe.

"I also rode in Bahrain for more than 10 years and it was a fantastic experience.

"I rode for Alan Smith who was one of the leading trainers and some of the runners were owned by Sheiks. I loved my time over there.

"Lots of English jockeys go overseas to ride during the English winters when the weather deteriorates."

For now, Cray is happy being based at Scone and rides trackwork every morning.

"Brett Cavanaugh (trainer) has been excellent and supportive. It's taken a while for me to get noticed but now I have a platform and hopefully I receive a good kick along from here.

"Luckily, I have a strong riding style as it's all about being robust at the finish in races here.

"It takes time to get used to the way the races are run in Australia; you have to ride more tactically here whereas in the UK it is more about rhythm.

"And I find tracks here are fairly similar with around a two furlong (400m) run home."

This season Cray has kicked home 19 winners and 28 placings and is working hard to improve his tally.

When we spoke in June, Cray was about to ride at Scone races on the Friday, then on Saturday morning he was to ride trackwork at Scone before driving four hours for a couple of rides at Coonamble (he won a race on Tully Ho).

The hoop then made the four-hour return journey to Scone after the last race: "It will be a long day but I don't mind.

"I'll drive back straight after the races as I prefer to get home and be ready for trackwork the next day.

"I weigh myself every day and I'm usually between 51 and 52 kilos so I have no problems at all keeping my weight in check."

Cray said he hopes to become a resident next year.

"I love it in Australia and the people are so friendly. I do a lot of travelling but to me it's all part and parcel of the job – I wouldn't want to do anything else!" **RNSW**