



Shaun Guymer grins after piloting Millijule to victory at Goulburn. He has won on the mare three times. Picture by Bradley Photographers

One of the good guys

Shaun Guymer hasn't just had his rivals to overcome to get back on top.

Like many teenagers, school simply wasn't for Shaun Guymer. He couldn't wait to leave his Goulburn classroom behind and a stablehand job with Danny Williams provided his ticket out as soon as he was old enough.

"I worked as a stablehand for about a year then Danny threw me on the pony, Crackles," Guymer remembered with a laugh.

"Before I knew it I was riding in barrier trials. A lot of hard work followed.

"I'd be riding and Danny would be driving in the car beside me yelling out tips and advice. He's the best horseman I have ever worked with."

Back then Williams's stable was a shadow of the country powerhouse it is today, so after nine months Guymer packed his bags and headed down the Hume Highway to the bright lights of

QUIET ACHIEVER SHAUN GUYMER IS CELEBRATING HIS MOST SUCCESSFUL SEASON TO DATE, RIDING ALMOST FOUR TIMES THE NUMBER OF WINNERS AS THE PREVIOUS SEASON

WORDS: JULIEANNE HORSMAN

Canberra in search of opportunities.

There, under the guidance of Mark Schmetzer, he excelled and took out the Canberra Apprentice Jockey Premiership in 2011 at age 19.

"We formed a solid partnership then and we still have that relationship now," Guymer said. "It means a lot to ride winners for him."

Guymer stayed in Canberra for a couple of years then moved through other stables on three-month-loans to

gain more experience.

He spent time with Stephen Farley at Wyong and Kevin Moses at Randwick before jaggging a spot with Black Caviar's trainer Peter Moody.

"That was a phenomenal time for me," Guymer said. "There were 200-plus elite horses in the stable. I was riding work every day alongside champions like Luke Nolen and Linda Meech.

"Top jockeys were always coming in and out and I loved watching them and talking to them."

Guymer came out of his time in early 2015 and headed to the Barossa Valley in South Australia where he linked up with Tony McEvoy. He was feeling the pressure but trying desperately to hide it.

Fast forward to the middle of the 2015/16 racing season and Guymer was having serious doubts about his career as a jockey.



High Mode salutes in NSW's longest race – the 3800m Riverina Cup. Picture by Trackpix, Wagga

The once champion apprentice who was touted as the next big thing in racing was struggling to get quality rides as a senior without a claim.

"It's tough when you're just a kid and you're up against great jockeys with decades of experience," Guymer reflected. "Whether you have one ride or eight, winning chances or complete outsiders, you still have to waste and travel."

As Guymer's hopes and dreams seemingly began slipping through his fingers, he wrapped them around a bottle. He began abusing alcohol and often drank himself to sleep.

Those who loved him watched on powerlessly as he spiralled out of control and it wasn't until he hit rock bottom that he reached out to his girlfriend and two of his closest friends who encouraged him to seek professional help.

He made a commitment to them and himself that he wasn't going to let his second chance go to waste.

Guymer stayed true to his word. When he was offered the chance to be Rosehill trainer Richard Freedman's main track rider he jumped at it.

"As a senior I don't have to ride work every day, but I choose to," he said. "It keeps my head in the game. Looking back at the hard work I've put in over the past 12 months and the results that have come from it makes it all the more satisfying.

"I'm grateful for the opportunities I've been given. I think to be a successful jockey you need to be aligned with a big stable or someone who can back you.

"When people see you're riding for a good stable you automatically get noticed, especially if you're winning.

"I feel lucky Richard put me on some good horses early which got the ball rolling. Latin Boy was a special horse for me as I rode him in work and notched five wins on him in the past year. He had a breathing problem but always tried his heart out."

The last 12 months have been good for Guymer on a personal level as well. He married his long-term girlfriend, Champion Thoroughbreds Racing Manager, Emma Walsh, and together they bought a home at Glenmore Park in Sydney's West.

"Emma is my rock," Guymer said.

"She knows full well the preparation that goes into every race meeting and supports me every step of the way.

"That understanding makes a huge difference. I spend time with Emma whenever I can and I've recently taken up golf. It's important to have a passion away from the racetrack.

"I also take things a bit less seriously. I still want to win and give 110% every time but I know there's more to life than racing. I've found my balance."

Guymer is poised to eclipse his 2017/18 performance in the new season with two wins in the first two weeks including NSW's longest race – the 3800m Riverina Cup.

He piloted High Mode to victory for Anthony Freedman and admits he was glad to see the winning post come up.

"It was a damn long race," he joked. "I'd never ridden further than 2900m which I did the day before at Newcastle, so I certainly felt it.

"For now, I am focused on riding frequently and consistently. The more I ride the better I will get. As long as I keep improving, even if it's only gradually, I will be happy." **RNSW**