

SYNDICATE BATTLERS ON TOP OF THE WORLD

IT WAS A MAGICAL DAY AT ROYAL RANDWICK WHEN A BUNCH OF BATTLERS WHO HAD DRAWN A SLOT IN THE \$1.3 MILLION THE KOSCIUSZKO EXPERIENCED THE THRILL OF A LIFETIME

WORDS: GREG PRICHARD PICTURES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

Handle The Truth's win in the 2019 The Kosciuszko is what racing is all about, according to winning syndicate's leader, Albert Tory.

"Racing wants and needs the rank and file to come to the races and to have this opportunity, and for so many people in the group to be at Randwick on a huge day and not only be a participant but share in a big win, was wonderful," he told Racing NSW.

"Many of the people in the group are elderly and living in retirement homes.

"They only go to the TAB once a week and some of them have to be driven there, but they do it because they get a lot of joy out of being a part of the punters' club.

"We're talking about \$5 punters here – \$5 for the whole day in many cases – and this was their chance to be a part of something.

"They're genuine battlers and the money they'll receive will help make their lives a bit easier.

"Racing needs these sort of stories – the Redzel story, where a syndicate of owners can come together with everyone owning a little piece of the horse and it wins The Everest twice – and The Kosciuszko, with the chance to win a slot in the race through a \$5 ticket in a draw.

"It's not a bad story, is it? It's what racing's all about.

"Days like that make everyone who's looking on say to each other: 'We can do that too!'"

Tory said the syndicate comprising 42 people who make up the Shellharbour TAB Punters Club bought 300 tickets in the slot draw for the \$1.3m The Kosciuszko at a cost of \$1500.



Winning syndicate head, Albert Tory: "This will take a bit of heat off and give everyone a bit of cash to spend"

But that, of course, was no guarantee they would get a slot. It came down to the luck of the draw after that and as it turned out they were in luck.

The syndicate appointed Tory as leader, with the major responsibility of picking a preferred horse and then attempting to do a deal with the horse's connections – all in quick time if you wanted to get one of the favoured runners.

Fortunately, Tory, a successful businessman from Kiama who has mostly been involved in the motor trade and is still working at 70, had a contact whose horse-racing knowledge he trusted to help him make the right choice.

"I've got a friend who is into sectional times and all of that, so I said to him, 'I've been asked to pick a horse for The Kosciuszko, what do you fancy?'"

"He came back to me with Handle The Truth. He's a really good friend who knows what he's talking about.

"Handle The Truth's trainer, Keith Dryden, had trained one for me before, so it all fitted together well in my mind.

"I rang Keith and said 'What do you think? Can we do a deal?'"

"He spoke to the owners about a figure for the prizemoney split that I suggested and we quickly had an agreement."

Tory said Dryden invited everyone



Members of Shellharbour TAB Punters Club celebrate after The Kosciuszko

in the slot-holding group down to his Canberra stables to see the horse and enjoy a barbecue feast.

He said Dryden, Shellharbour TAB licensee Christine Tolhurst and Racing NSW executive Scott Kennedy had each done a magnificent job in supporting the group.

"Chris runs a stand-alone TAB and it's a fantastic venue – always immaculate," he said. "It's a TAB the old-fashioned way and I like that.

"She organised a bus to take nearly 20 of the punters' club members from Shellharbour to Canberra and they had a fantastic time.

"Many of them had tears in their eyes because they hadn't experienced anything like this.

"Scott Kennedy supported us all along from the day we won the slot, to make sure everyone was happy.

"He said to me, 'Albert, if there's any problem at all, make sure you let me know'.

"He was there on the day of the race, handing out the tickets and food vouchers in The Kosciuszko marquee and making sure everyone was comfortable. He knows how to

treat people.

"The people in the syndicate were gob-smacked at how well they were looked after.

"We had 23 members of the syndicate at Randwick for the race. Some stayed in Sydney on Friday and Saturday night.

"A lot couldn't make it because they're immobile and just couldn't get there, but we're looking to arrange a celebration lunch or dinner for everyone down at Shellharbour."

Naturally, the punters' club put their money on Handle The Truth that week, but it was their share of the first place prizemoney that was the real windfall.

"Even in a big group like that, it still works out at between \$6500 and \$7000 each," Tory said.

"The ages of the punters' club members range from the 80s down to mid-20s, but most of them are pensioners.

"Some of the elderly are in retirement homes and other aged-care facilities. There are a couple of people who are severely handicapped.

"A young couple in the group with a young family are battling. They're both working and they don't have money to spend on extras.

"This will take a bit of heat off and give everyone a bit of cash to spend on something they need.

"Being a part of this has been a life-changing experience for everyone involved and one that they're not likely to forget."

Tory said he was convinced the syndicate was on the right horse when Handle The Truth was a very unlucky fifth after suffering a bad check in the straight in his lead-up race at Randwick, two weeks before The Kosciuszko.

"He should've finished in the first three and maybe won," he said.

"Keith said before that race that whatever he did he'd improve 10 to 15 per cent for The Kosciuszko. He was spot on. It was a great day and a great celebration.

"I've been to racetracks around the world and how they put on The Everest and The Kosciuszko day is at least as good as anything I've experienced anywhere." **RNSW**