

Luck's a fortune for WILLIAMS

IT WAS LESS THAN A TWO-HOUR DRIVE BUT ON A LONELY STRETCH OF COUNTRY ROAD, A YOUNG JOCKEY CAME PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO LOSING HIS LIFE

WORDS: MARK BRASSEL PICTURES: JANIAN MCMILLAN



Williams roars encouragement to Dalhero (green & blue with yellow cap) on their way to victory at Orange

Chris Williams is a late bloomer at 26 and is well aware he has been afforded a second chance at life.

The talented country-based rider was involved in a serious car accident that could have gone either way.

"I was on my way back from Orange [to Dubbo] early one morning and fell asleep at the wheel," Williams recalled.

"My car hit an embankment, went down a gully and smashed into a tree.

"I found out later I was quite lucky as the car hit the tree right in the middle and not the driver's side – if it had, I don't think I'd be here."

Williams said the entire accident was surreal and 'hazy': "I don't remember much but that it was 4am and absolutely freezing.

"I was trying to wave cars down and

it was a good couple of hours before a married couple with a daughter pulled up and took me to hospital.

"They told me later if I hadn't regained consciousness and got out of the car and up to the road, it might have been anyone's guess when they would have found me."

Williams's progression into horse racing is not the typical apprentice yarn, in fact a few years back he was termed 'a lost cause' when it came to riding.

"I rode a little work when I was first starting and someone said they thought I was the worst rider they'd seen throw a leg over a horse! That was like waving a red flag at a bull and made me more determined to do better and make it as a jockey," Williams explained.

The Chris Williams story goes back

to his family's property in Bourke where he dreamt of being a jockey but had never ridden a horse by the time he attended Carinda Primary School.

"I was at that school until I was 11 but as there was no high school, I had to go to Dubbo for a couple of years.

"I went OK at rugby league and there were 12 or 14 footy fields so I was in my element and knew a lot of the students so I felt like I was home.

"I then attended St Greg's College at Campbelltown and was playing well but the rugby league coach clicked me back into 'racing' mode as he would constantly tell me I was so small I'd make it as a jockey.

"Mum wasn't keen and wanted to protect me and Dad, being a builder, wanted me to become an apprentice builder.

“I then attended St Greg’s College at Campbelltown and was playing well but the rugby league coach clicked me back into ‘racing’ mode as he would constantly tell me I was so small I’d make it as a jockey.”

“Anyway, I talked them around and ended up at Anthony Cummings’s stable.”

By then, Williams hadn’t even touched a horse’s bridle let alone ride a racehorse: “I spent a year mucking out boxes and washing horses; they were all great people at Mr Cummings’s place.

“But I was still keen to ride so I booked myself in to Moore Park Equestrian Centre a couple of afternoons each week to learn.

“But it was costly and one of the girls must have told Anthony as he let me trot and canter horses out to the centre of the track.

“I also spoke to Mr [Ron] Quinton and his apprentice Sam Clipperton.

“They suggested I go to the industry’s riding school at Hawkesbury and Joan Pracey and Brian Wood got me up and running.”

It was another trainer, Peter Robl, that suggested to Williams he head to the bush to gain some one-on-one mentoring.

Williams landed at Peter Nestor’s Dubbo stables for a three-month trial where he remains, having now booted home 35 winners.

“Peter said I have a long way to go but would teach me if I was willing to work hard.”

Nestor is regarded as one of the State’s best mentors of young riders.

“Chris has come a long way in a short time,” Nestor remarked.

“Fellas like Hugh Bowman are horsemen and Chris doesn’t have that advantage, but he’ll get there.

“He’s a little bloke and never been into horses and couldn’t sit on



Apprentice Chris Williams – rarely ‘sits on the fence’

one. To his credit, he has no natural instinct but is getting there quickly.

“He’s a good boy and has done it tough since the car accident. I once told him to ‘shape up or ship out’ and he has really put his head down and had a red-hot crack.

“I enjoy working with kids; they’re good people. I teach them skills and old-fashioned respect – it goes a long way.

“I’ve mentored Kody [Nestor nephew], my brother Michael, Dave Pisani, Eleanor Webster-Hawes, James Innes junior, Jake Pracey-Holmes and, of course, Kathy [O’Hara] who I am very proud of – proud of them all!”

And going to script, Williams booted home his first winner Watta General at his beloved Carinda in August last year.

“It was my first raceday and I had three rides. I stuffed up the first two then won on the third horse after sitting three-deep throughout.

“It was fantastic as the entire family was there. It was a rush and a blur and better than winning a grand

final of footy.

“Kody [Nestor] said to me my first win will be one of my best as I’ll always remember it and he is right.”

Williams has since advanced in long strides, guiding home four winners from only five rides at Brewarrina last November including the Cup.

“It was crazy – a few of the family was there and I was blown away by all the cheering.”

Williams has also ridden doubles at Orange, Wellington, Mudgee and Scone.

“My favourite two horses would be Our Sarastro with whom I’ve won four races [Narromine, Dubbo (twice) & Gunnedah] and Zarhron [Japan Cowra Cup & Bill Aspros Cup at Bathurst].

“And my double at Scone was important as I rode two different races – Azzie’s Ready led all the way and Artistic Beauty came from near last, hopefully many people watching would have noticed.” **RNSW**