

BRUCE McLACHLAN —

Brisbane's premier trainer

by HELEN COUGHLAN

Now that bustling Bruce McLachlan has attained the position of premier trainer for the state of Queensland, 1978-79, he gives every indication that he's going to be a hard man to oust from the top of the ladder in forthcoming seasons.

With 60 horses in his care — 30 in full work and 30 spelling — two sets of stables in the Brisbane racing suburb of Hendra, and a front line which includes horses like Moshoto, Brazen Gambler, Princess Reichen, Diamond Cutter, Sterlet and Into Battle, he certainly has a lot going for him.

In terms of long years of association with the racing industry, Bruce is a relative newcomer. Still on the right side of 35, Bruce has held a trainers' licence for 11 years.

But his interest in horses goes back to his youngest days, and when the McLachlan family moved from the New South Wales town of Glen Innes, to Brisbane, Bruce took his enthusiasm for horses a step further.

"We lived at Cribb Island, in the Nudgee district of Brisbane," Bruce explained. "Mal Barnes, now a very successful Sydney trainer, had his stables there, and by the time I was 14, I was going over to his place every afternoon to help with the work around the stables."

The Barnes stable turned out to be something of a home for future turf stars. Bruce McLachlan was a strapper, and the apprentices at that time were a couple of young fellows called Darby McCarthy and Larry Olsen.

"I can't speak too highly of all the help and advice Mal Barnes gave me," Bruce said, "he is a top trainer, and he taught me a great deal."

Bruce continued with the Barnes stable for four years, in which time he cared for such good horses as Dream Prince and Alspick. Barnes took horses south to race on several occasions, and Bruce accompanied him.

The one thing that the young Bruce McLaughlan failed to learn in those four years was that once the love of racing gets into your blood, it's useless to try to fight it! He left the stables, and embarked on a career with the Queensland Police Force.

Constable McLachlan was stationed in Brisbane for some five years, and then transferred to the mining city of Mt Isa.

He'll tell you, that he made some very good friends in the Force, and developed a talent for shorthand typing. But Bruce was not able to shake the desire to be part of the racing industry.

Now policemen are not allowed to own or train racehorses, and although Bruce was able to assist with caring for other people's horses in the feeding and grooming department, that was as far as he was able to be involved.

And so, the inevitable decision was made, and B. J. McLachlan resigned from the force to become Bruce McLaughlan, Horse Trainer, with an open permit to train from stables at Cribb Island.

"The man who really started me off with a few good horses was Risdon studmaster Keith Leahy," Bruce told me, "I think everyone knows Keith. He's one of the really colourful personalities of the horse industry."

Keith gave the young trainer horses by the stud sires Ivanhoe and Bronzino. His first race winner was Risdon Gem in 1968 in a Novice Handicap at Albion Park. The winning form continued when Charak won a Maiden at the country track of Esk.

Another Leahy galloper was Beersheba, a very handy racehorse that won his Maiden at Albion Park and was guided by McLachlan to four wins in restricted class on the grass surface at Bundamba.

"Yes, I certainly owe a lot to Keith Leahy," Bruce recalled, "and I must mention the support that has been given to me by Col Richards, Kev Toomey and Col Shields."

Brisbane real estate businessman Col Richards grew up with Bruce on Cribb Island. He has been a client of the McLachlan stable from the very beginning, and has been rewarded with good winners such as Cronin Island and Bonne Lark.

Col Richards owns Rosemount Farm Stud, near Beenleigh, and stands Crewman and Call Report. His first sire at Rosemount was Colonel Ayre, and Bruce was also successful with the progeny of this sire which included Colonel Blimp, winner of the Albion Cup for owner Noel Simpson.

Bruce is very optimistic about the progeny of the American import Call Report, a half-brother by Raise A Native to Battle-Wagon.

"His yearlings are beautiful," he enthused, "really strong, well balanced young horses with plenty of size and bone. Yes, I reckon you will hear a lot of Call Report in the next few years."

Needless to say, Bruce is looking forward to training the Call Reports for the classics.

Bruce did in fact nearly have a semi-classic winner very early in his training career. Latin Romance at 40-1 came close to causing the upset of the Randwick Easter carnival when he ran the great galloper Tontonan to three-quarters of a length in the AJC Sires' Produce Stakes.

"Latin Romance had had only four runs before we took him south," Bruce explained, "he'd won two races — a two-year-old maiden at Doomben, and a juvenile at Eagle Farm."

"I suppose you could say that the juvenile win was the decider as far as the Sydney trip was concerned. That day he beat Dual Light very easily by nearly a length, and as Dual Light was the boom two-year-old of the season, we considered we had a horse that was capable of holding his own in the south."

That prediction very nearly came off, as the comparatively unknown two-year-old overcame several checks in the straight to be rapidly overhauling Tontonan on the post.

"No doubt Latin Romance was unlucky," Bruce recalled. "I was disappointed, but at the same time, I was quite pleased that my assessment of the horse had been right."

Kev Toomey and Col Shields gave Bruce the opportunity to select and train a well-bred horse for them soon after the trainer made the decision to transfer his training establishment from Cribb Island to Bundamba.

"I outlayed \$5000, the most I had ever spent on a horse to that time," said Bruce, remembering the purchase with obvious pleasure.

"The horse was by Latin Lover. We called him Latin Peak, and I would say one of my greatest thrills in racing was the day he won his first race."

With success following success, and the McLachlan polish evident on all his runners, it was not long before Bruce was being given commissions to purchase yearlings at prices that he would have never dreamed a few years earlier.