

DETERMINATION:

Rekindling (Corey Brown) outguns his stablemate Johannes Vermeer (Ben Melham) to win the Group 1 Emirates Melbourne Cup at Flemington.

PHOTO JOHN DONEGAN/RACING PHOTOS



The REKINDLING story

From tiny bottle-fed colt to the toast of Melbourne, Rekindling has created his own history and warmed the hearts of his breeders in Somerset, England. DANNY POWER has the story.

The 2017 Emirates Melbourne Cup winner Rekindling did something only one of the great Cup winners of the past was able to achieve, and that is to win the famous race as a northern hemisphere-bred three-year-old.

Comedy King (GB)—the first import to win the Melbourne Cup and a northern hemisphere-bred three-year-old—did it in 1910 when ridden by Lee Freedman's great grandfather William "Midge" McLachlan.

Comedy King (bred 1907, Persimmon (GB)-Tragedy Queen (GB), by Gallinule (GB)) was imported by big-time bookie and

prolific owner Sol Green as a foal in the company of his dam.

After winning eight Stakes races from 1600 metres to 3200 metres, Comedy King retired to stand at Noorilim Stud, north of Nagambie, where he sired 41 Stakes winners, including two Melbourne Cup winners, Artilleryman (1919) and King Ingoda (1922) and the five-time Melbourne Cup runner and multiple-placed Shadow King.

Comedy King's influence in the Melbourne Cup stretched to 1950 when his maternal great-grandson, Comic Court, won the Cup for trainer Jim Cummings and his son and strapper, Bart, who would

go on to train a record 12 winners.

Interestingly, Rekindling is part-owned by a modern-day Sol Green. Lloyd Williams is a gambler of sorts, in business and in racing. While he says he no longer bets in telephone numbers as he did in his younger days and when joining forces with his mate, the late Kerry Packer, he gambles these days on his ability to buy and select his next Melbourne Cup winner.

Like the poker machines at Crown, Williams puts in a lot for the occasional ringing of the jackpot bells, as well as the odd teaser win along the way.

Rekindling is one of those jackpots for Williams, his son Nick and his 12

THANKS FOR SIX: Lloyd Williams gives the diminutive Rekindling a rub on the nose after the colt won the part-owner his sixth Melbourne Cup at Flemington. PHOTO PAT SCALA/RACING PHOTOS

partners. While most of his recent buys from the northern hemisphere have been high-priced individuals, Rekindling, like his winner last year Almandin, was a relatively cheap buy, although the price is undisclosed.

The Williamses bought the colt privately as a yearling, before he'd established himself as a racehorse of any note. It was an inspired buy and the first of Lloyd Williams' six Cup winners that was bought as a yearling—Efficient (2007) being the closest, bought at the 2005 NZB Karaka Ready to Run Sale as an unraced two-year-old.

Almandin, Green Moon (2012), What A Nuisance (1985) and Just A Dash (1981) were bought as raced horses and transformed into Melbourne Cup winners.

The Rekindling story starts humbly on a dairy farm set in the Quantock Hills in Somerset in England's southwest.

Robert Pocock (67) stumbled into thoroughbred breeding 40 years ago when Stringston Farm's founder, Robert's father Pat, went to buy some cattle at a nearby farm. The cattle were of poor quality so Pat decided not to buy them, but he noticed a good-moving broodmare in the paddocks that was for sale and came home with her instead.

From that mare, named Fireball, Pat Pocock and his son got into the jumps scene, breeding horses for, and racing in, the powerful National Hunt as a sideline to their cattle and dairy business. At one stage, Pat took out a trainer's licence with moderate success.

Robert Pocock said the reason the family got into breeding flat horses was that competition for a small-time operation against such champion jumps trainers as Martin Pipe made life difficult, so under Robert's guidance the family switched to breeding flat horses.

Robert Pocock, in a story



in England's *Owner & Breeder* magazine, in 2009, produced this magnificent quote: "We got into horses to give us something else to look at other than cows and we had some success with our jumpers, but it got difficult taking on Martin Pipe at Taunton (in Somerset). So we went for another option and took on Sheikh Mohammed!"

Robert's son Nick (37), after showing little interest in horses at a young age, eventually saw a future in thoroughbred breeding for flat racing, and he was dispatched far and wide to learn more about the trade, including six years at Coolmore in Ireland.

It's that relationship between the Pococks and Coolmore that is the reason behind the breeding of Rekindling, a son of Coolmore's now-deceased High Chaparral.

The Pococks bought Rekindling's dam, Sitara, at the 2002 Tattersalls December Breeding Sale at Newmarket. They had sold half a herd of cattle and put a quarter of that money, 9000 guineas, towards a pinhooked colt that

doubled his money when sold as a yearling. The Pococks then arrived at the December sale with that dividend and spent 16,000 guineas on two broodmares.

They paid 10,000 guineas for Sitara (GB) (b m 1998, Salse (USA)-Souk (IRE), by Ahonoora (GB)) and 6000 guineas for the other mare, Divine Grace, and 2000 guineas was available to be spent at the bar. Modest sums, but little did they know that luck was on their side.

Robert Pocock wanted Sitara—one win from eight starts when trained by Luca Cumani—because of her Aga Khan-driven pedigree, and the cheapest way to source those famous bloodlines was to buy into mares that have skipped a generation from the Aga Khan's stars. Sitara, although a half-sister to a Listed winner Puce, was from what was then a quiet Aga Khan family.

Soon after, Sitara's two half-sisters, Puce (by Darshaan (GB)) and Shouk (by Shirley Heights (GB)), gave the young mare's pedigree a massive boost. Puce produced Pongee,

who went on to win at Group 2 level and was Group 1 placed; Shouk's 2002 foal became Group 1 Cheveley Park Stakes winner Magical Romance, who was followed by the champion filly Alexandrova, winner of three Group 1 Oaks in 2006 in consecutive starts—Epsom Oaks, Irish Oaks and Yorkshire Oaks.

The "other mare", Divine Grace, was in foal to Shinko Forest and the resultant colt, Electric Beat, sold for peanuts at 2800 guineas, but went on to win Group 2 and 3 races in Germany, the first Stakes

He didn't have the best of starts to be fair to him, but he always was cocky and had the ambition from day one.

NICK POCOCK

NORTHERN HEMISPHERE-BRED 3YOS IN THE MELBOURNE CUP

1910 Comedy King (GB), trainer James Lynch—won

2007 Mahler (GB), trainer Aidan O'Brien—third

2008 Alessandro Volta (GB), trainer Aidan O'Brien—20th

2014 Bondi Beach (IRE), trainer Aidan O'Brien—16th

LLOYD WILLIAMS' CUP RECORD

FROM 1981 TO 2017

42 starters, six winners, 23 individual years.

THE BREEDERS: Robert Pocock (right) and son Nick flank Rekindling's dam Sitara at their Stringston Farm in Somerset. PHOTO COURTESY OF POCOCK FAMILY



winner for Stringston Farm. The first time Sitara crossed the Irish Sea to visit High Chaparral, she produced a colt that made her name as a broodmare. That colt, Golden Sword, sold for 165,000 guineas as a weanling and found a place at Ballydoyle with trainer Aidan O'Brien. He finished second behind stablemate Fame And Glory in the 2009 Group 1 Irish Derby (2400m, Curragh) after winning the Group 3 Chester Vase (2500m, Chester).

Rekindling is Sitara's eighth foal and her third by High Chaparral.

Life didn't start well for the colt.

"He was a bit unfortunate as a foal," Nick Pocock said. "His mother wasn't really that well, so we had to feed him by hand all summer. She looked after him, but she couldn't really feed him, so we had to supplement him.

"It's probably why he's as small as he is. The family can be small, but having that setback meant that he was smaller than usual.

"He didn't have the best of starts to be fair to him, but he always was cocky and had the ambition from day one. In the paddock, he was the cocky horse, always happy and (the same) in his races.

"When he drew barrier one (in the Cup), we thought that would suit him, because he always liked being in the argy-bargy and coming between horses. He's always had determination."

Even despite his setback and because of the Pococks' policy of

selling most of their youngsters as weanlings, the small, good-walking colt was sent to the 2014 Tattersalls September Foal Sale, where he caught the eye of noted pinhookers, the Hydes (Tim and Tim Jnr) from Camas Stud in Ireland, who paid 60,000 guineas for the youngster.

Nick Pocock wasn't surprised smart judges like the Hydes were interested in the colt. "All the mare's foals have been good walkers with good attitudes."

Twelve months later, the High Chaparral-Sitara colt was entered for the Goffs Orby Yearling Sale by the Hydes, but he wasn't sold.

"He was taken to the sale, but was withdrawn before he was to be sold. We lost sight of him from that point," Pocock said.

The next the Pococks heard of Rekindling was when he was produced by an Irish trainer, the Coolmore-connected David Wachman—based at Cashel—in the colours of Australian owner Lloyd Williams at Galway as a two-year-old in June 2016. The colt finished a brave second, beaten 2.5 lengths, behind the Aidan O'Brien-trained Capri. It wasn't the only time the two colts met—Rekindling's final European start before winning the Cup was a terrific fourth behind Capri in the Group 1 English St Leger (2900m) at Doncaster in September.

Rekindling had three starts for Wachman. He won at his second start at Gowan (1600m) on September 16 before finishing last of 13 behind Waldgeist in the Group 1 Criterion de Saint-

Cloud (2000m) at Saint-Cloud a month later.

Rekindling was to be Wachman's final runner. Soon after he handed in his licence to take up an executive position within the Coolmore business, Williams transferred Rekindling to Joseph O'Brien on the O'Brien family property, Carriganog Stables, Piltown, County Kilkenny.

O'Brien, now 24, retired from riding in late 2015 due to increasing weight—having won 30 Group 1 races (10 Classics) in six years riding for his father Aidan—and took up training with a mixed stable of jumpers and flat horses. He had his first race starters in mid-2016.

O'Brien said Rekindling was a no-fuss horse to train. "He's a light-framed horse who doesn't need a lot of work; he trains himself," he said.

O'Brien said it was Williams and son Nick who lit the fuse on a possible trip to Melbourne for the Cup. He had his doubts that Rekindling had another big run in him after a long season, but reckoned that if the Williamses wanted him there, having won the Cup five times, then who was he to argue.

Over the years, going back to the 1980s with John Meagher-trained horses such as Nayrizi, Gopak and Shantaroun, Lloyd Williams has imported from Europe more than 200 horses to fulfill his passion to win the Melbourne Cup. Only 18 have made it to the race; three have won, all in the past six years—Rekindling (2017), Almandin (2016) and Green Moon (2012).

After Rekindling went into quarantine for his trip, the Williamses invited a group of long-time friends to race the colt in Australia, including music man Michael Gudinski, John and Frances Ingham of chicken fame, construction bosses Vin Sammartino and Phil Mehrten and surfwear founders Brian Singer (Rip Curl) and Alan Green (Quicksilver). They were also part-owners of Almandin.

Joining them in Rekindling are design and construction boss Mark Ruff (Bulla Thoroughbreds), water infrastructure businessman David Heffernan (Heffernan Thoroughbreds) and Gerry Ryan of many hats, including Jayco Caravans and the Australian

international road-racing cycling team Orica-Scott.

It was Ryan's second Emirates Melbourne Cup after winning with the popular French-trained galloper American in 2010.

Lloyd Williams said it is part of the joy of winning the race to be able to share it with close friends.

"We raced this horse with Joseph overseas, but when they (the horses) come out here, Nick likes to get a lot of friends in, so we keep 60-70 per cent of the horses ourselves and give them a little share," Williams said after this year's Cup, although "give" might not be the correct use of the word.

"That's what we did last year with Almandin. When he won the (Bart) Cummings (at Flemington) we owned him ourselves and we put some other people in to share the day, and hopefully when we do it they share the luck.

"When we get them here on Melbourne Cup day it's much nicer to have a lot of people in it with us so we can have a proper party."

That party, according to Nick Williams, was over early for him at 11pm on Cup day—"I was exhausted"—but he indicated that "at least two partners were still going two days after the race".

For the Pococks of Somerset, getting up early to milk cows is part of daily life, but nothing like getting up at 4am to watch Rekindling win the \$6.25 million Emirates Melbourne Cup on November 7. That was a labour of love that resulted in them cheering home the farm's first Group 1 winner.

"It's all a bit hyped-up at the moment and it hasn't really sunk in completely," Nick Pocock said.

"Everyone got up to watch it. We felt he had a live chance, but you don't really believe it would happen. We were hopeful of him running well as he'd performed well up here, but being a three-year-old, we felt it was going to be a big task."

It's a busy time for all at Stringston Farm preparing for the Tattersalls Foal Sale, which begins on December 1 and includes a filly by Gleneagles (by Galileo) from Sitara. She might be worth a half a herd of cows more than she was a month earlier. **U**

THE BABY-FACED

Assassin

STEPHEN HOWELL profiles Joseph O'Brien, at 24 the trainer of a Melbourne Cup winner.

As with this year's Emirates Melbourne Cup horse story, the hero of the people story is an international and is young.

Irish trainer Joseph O'Brien is 24 years old, which in his profession's terms is short-pants stuff. He is the youngest winning trainer in the Cup's 157 years. (Colleague Danny Power's research shows that Etienne de Mestre (Archer, 1861) and Ike Foulsham (Malua, 1884), are likely to be next at 29, with Foulsham two months younger than de Mestre.)

O'Brien still has teenage pimples. In fact, one commentator suggested that when young Joseph went to the winners' bar to celebrate northern-hemisphere three-year-old Rekindling's win the barman asked him for ID.

Good story, but O'Brien, like his father Aidan (48), the world-famous trainer, young Joe doesn't drink alcohol.

This year's Cup put Joseph one up on his old man, and not only because Rekindling relegated Johannes Vermeer, trained by Aidan, to second.

Joseph achieved at his first try what Dad has failed to do with nine runners in six Cups since 2006. And he did it in the year that O'Brien Snr claimed sole ownership of the world record for the most Group 1s in a calendar year.

Aidan set the mark late in October when Saxon Warrior won at Doncaster in England for his 26th success—American great Bobby Frankel's 25 in 2003 was the mark—then a few days before the Melbourne Cup Mendelssohn made it 27 when he won at the Breeders' Cup meeting at Del Mar in California.

Rekindling denied him No. 28.

No wonder Cup-winning owner Lloyd Williams described Joseph O'Brien's feat as "extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, close to being able to walk on water" and said O'Brien Jnr would become "one of the leading trainers in the world and I have thought so for 18 months or more".

"What a pedigree he's got," Williams said. "He's got a pedigree better than Galileo."

On the phone to Melbourne minutes after the \$6.25 million Group 1 Cup, O'Brien Snr said he watched the race on television with family and staff at Coolmore's Ballydoyle stables in Tipperary, and that most

there were cheering Joseph's horse so "we now know who's the most popular O'Brien".

Joseph Patrick O'Brien might look like a teenager and had his first runners, and winners, only on June 6, 2016, but he was raised in what could be called the Coolmore cocoon—thoroughbred racing and breeding's great winning business—to be a trainer at the highest level.

Aidan's wife Anne-Marie is the daughter of Irish trainer Joe Crowley. She succeeded her father briefly at Owing Hill, Piltown, Kilkenny, and was champion jumps trainer until her husband took over before they moved on to Ballydoyle in 1996 to succeed the legendary Vincent O'Brien (no relation) at Coolmore.

The Crowley Owing Hill stables, known as Carriganog, about three-quarters of an hour from Ballydoyle, are now Joseph's and he has about 120 horses in work.

Joseph is the oldest of four children, all of who rode when barely out of nappies.

I always wanted to train horses, even when I started riding.

JOSEPH O'BRIEN



JOSEPH O'BRIEN: the youngest winning trainer in the Melbourne Cup's 157 years.

PHOTO PAT SCALA/RACING PHOTOS