

Inside Racing December 09
Melbourne Cup Week wrap 1880 words

MAIN HEADING:

Drama, Triumph, Shocks Galore in the
KAV & BART SHOW

PRECEDE:

The VRC's Melbourne Cup Carnival changes careers. This year, the reputations of several jockeys and trainers were enhanced by some stunning performances in the eight Group 1s. But as MARK HARDING reports, two men dominated – one an icon, the other a human rollercoaster.

About half an hour after the presentations for So You Think's Tatts Cox Plate, when most of the hullabaloo about Bart had finally died down, someone asked Mark Kavanagh how he was feeling about the defeat of his favourite Whobegotyou.

"How do you think I think I feel?" he replied with a half-laugh and a typically demonstrative wave of the arms. "We've all been skun alive by an 81-year-old. Let's just hope the future is front of us."

The future was indeed in front of Kavanagh – and a very bright future it was too. But what was significant on this day was not his disappointment at being skun but his unabashed admiration for the man who did the skinning.

Kavanagh would have his "revenge" on Bart Cummings in the Emirates Melbourne Cup and not surprisingly as a long time student of the Cups King, his win with Shocking would come straight from the pages of the Cummings training manual.

The VRC's Melbourne Cup Carnival of 2009 was very much the Kav and Bart Show. There were plenty of other magnificent performances – gallopers All Silent and Typhoon Tracy, trainers Peter Moody and Mike Moroney, jockeys Corey Brown, Luke Nolen, Nicholas Hall and Michael Rodd.

But for the highest acclaim, it had to be the old Legend and the ex-jumps jockey.

It's acknowledged that no-one else has been able to so regularly peak horses with the Swiss-watch perfection of Cummings. The manner of Kavanagh's Cup with Shocking – his second Group 1 for the season after the win of Whobegotyou in the Yalumba Stakes – was confirmation, in that regard at least, he's the trendsetter of the generation of trainers behind the great man.

There's also little doubt the comparisons with his idol gave Kavanagh almost as much pleasure as the Cup win itself.

Shocking, a \$64,000 purchase by Laurence Eales at the 2007 Magic Millions National Horses in Training Sale at the Gold Coast as a two year old in October 2007, was set for the Cup after his rousing second in the Queensland Derby in June.

Every one of his five lead-up runs in his four-year-old campaign saw marked progress towards his Cup target, but nothing demonstrated Kavanagh's genius better than the middle leg of those five when he was beaten 3.3 lengths by Alcopop.

Many people left Caulfield on Guineas Day thinking they had seen the new Melbourne Cup favorite in the Herbert Power Handicap, but Kavanagh went home confident it was his runner and not the fairytale Victor Harbour stayer which had turned in the better trial.

"I knew how much improvement I had in my horse ... and how far the Cup was away," he said later.

Backing up seven days later in the Coongy saw another solid second and then two weeks later Shocking blossomed in the Lexus Stakes, scoring by 2.3 lengths in what many veterans felt was the strongest Cup trial they had ever seen come out of the old Hotham Handicap.

Even then, Kavanagh was convinced Shocking had still not peaked.

"I was tickled pink because I knew how much improvement there was in him," he recalled. "On the Saturday afternoon after the Lexus he just plucked up a little bit over the back. I said to wife 'I don't know if he will win the Melbourne Cup but he will be going into it absolutely at his peak.'"

Kavanagh's pride in his to-the-minute campaign is almost palpable. "To get a horse to be winning the Melbourne Cup, you can't peak too early," he said. "You have to peak on the day - I have watched Bart do it. Once you get a horse to its peak there is only way to go and that's backwards. He improved in each one of his runs.

"Not all good plans come to fruition but it was the perfect preparation and he peaked perfectly on the day.

"I also peaked Maldivian on Cox Plate Day (2008). It is hard to do but if you can get them to absolutely shine, they have only got to shine for ten minutes. And if you can get them to absolutely peak at that time, you will get an amazing run out of them."

Shocking's win was immensely popular with rank and file racegoers, mainly because of the terrible woes that have always seemed to afflict Kavanagh between his big successes. The Maldivian barrier mishap before the BMW Caulfield Cup in 2007 is his most famous slice of bad luck but Maldivian's breakdown this year and the Derby morning virus contracted by his favourite Shamoline Warrior have also been spectacular examples of his capacity for extremes of luck.

There's not much he does by halves. Even his media interviews can vary from expansive to curt and not much in-between. They were the latter on Derby Day, despite Shocking's win, because the pain of Shamoline Warrior's scratching was still raw. But it was the Kav everyone loves after the Cup. Bubbling with excitement, laughing and hugging one minute, barely able to speak with emotion the next.

His progression from journeyman jumping jock to the pinnacle of racehorse training is truly one of the turf's great stories. He has ridden at picnic meetings at far flung places on

Melbourne Cup Day, he rode in the Cup Hurdle in What A Nuisance's year of 1985. Once he rode at Bordertown when the jockeys' room fell down.

He's here now as master mentor, shrewd tactician and student of history and yet the most remarkable thing is that there has been no accident about it. He planned his entry into training and he planned his entry into Melbourne – it may have succeeded quicker and more spectacularly than he thought but it was most definitely planned. With the precision we all witnessed with Shocking on Cup Day.

WHAT MORE CAN HE DO?

With all the publicity received by Kavanagh and Cummings, Corey Brown must be wondering what he has to do to become Man of the Carnival. Three Group 1 wins in Emirates Melbourne Cup Week - the Cup on Shocking, the AAMI Victoria Derby on Monaco Consul and the Emirates Stakes on All American – was an historic performance.

His minimum haul for that treble was \$240,000 at five per cent but it is the respect and security that comes with such a performance that will mean more to him in the long term. Brown has hit more than his share of brick walls in his time. As a 16-year-old apprentice he anguished over his chosen career after riding in the race in which Ken Russell was killed; he was suspended for six months by Hong Kong stewards for a drug related offence in 2005; he was sacked by Lee Freedman in 2007.

Even last year's improbably narrow defeat on Bauer had him despairing of ever winning a big race in Melbourne and yet there's never been any doubt about the Group 1 ability of the 33-year-old.

That his wins came for three different trainers made his efforts even more commendable.

THE ENGLISH PATIENCE

If Kavanagh provided the individual training performance of Cup Week with his Shocking preparation, Mike Moroney wasn't far behind him with Monaco Consul in the Derby.

After the High Chaparral colt won a 1400 metre maiden first up from a spell in New Zealand in August, Moroney and his brother Paul gave him one more lead up run for a second in a Rating 70 race before sending him to Australia for just two starts – the Spring Champion Stakes and the Derby.

Not only becoming the third horse after Nothin Leica Dane and Stylish Century to win the two spring features, he was also the only one to do it without another run in between.

Moroney figured on "an English style" preparation, fittening the colt on the training track and giving him the chance to recover from the heavy track he encountered in Sydney. It not only worked a treat but established Monaco Consul as one of the potentially classiest Derby winners in years.

Those judgements, of course, can only be made retrospectively as indeed can the impact on High Chaparral's stud career. One suspects, though, it will be astronomical and should have some positive flow-on effects for the northern hemisphere brigade shuttling here.

TYPHOON MOODY

The other Group 1s on Derby Day went to Scenic Shot for Dan Morton and Shane Scriven in the Mackinnon Stakes and two stirring victories by Peter Moody and Luke Nolen with Headway in the Coolmore Stud Stakes and Typhoon Tracy in the Myer Classic.

Moody's spring didn't have quite the highs and lows of Kavanagh but there were plenty of undulations. He should be well satisfied with a haul that could have been even better had not some of his stars gone well, notably the brilliant Black Caviar.

Golden Slipper runner up Headway saw the return of Makybe Diva's colors to the Cup Week victory stroll through the roses – and what a valuable broodmare she has now become. Typhoon Tracy was nothing short of sensational, overcoming early difficulties to record one of the easiest wins in a Group 1 race for many years. And Luke Nolen's Group 1 double was overdue recognition for a rider now firmly established as one of our best.

SILENT BUT DEADLY

If Typhoon Tracy was the easiest feature winner, All Silent was perhaps the best. His last to first assault on the Patinack Farm Classic on the final day of Cup Week took his Flemington record to four from four and established his credentials as the one to beat in the Hong Kong International Sprint at Sha Tin on 13 December.

He gave Nicholas Hall his second Group 1 and his ninth metropolitan win since the opening on Turnbull Stakes Day.

All Silent and Grahame Begg also took some of the attention away from All American's win in the Emirates Stakes for David Hayes. The Red Ransom entire had threatened to win big races at two and has finally hit the jackpot for John Messara's Arrowfield All American Syndicate and a host of other influential part owners.

OH YES, BART WON TOO

He didn't win the Cup and So You Think couldn't quite pull off a Taj Rossi in the Emirates Stakes, but Bart was still a giant influence throughout Cup Week. His filly Faint Perfume won the Group 2 Wakeful Stakes in a canter and then had to fight just a little bit harder before taking the Crown Oaks.

The filly's win was just reward for Michael Rodd, who had been struck by a run of bad luck in the other Group 1s but had been riding under the radar picking up plenty of other wins along the way. This was one of six victories for him in Cup Week but the biggest publicity he got was as a congratulator in the Kavanagh camp as Brown returned to scale on Shocking. Faint Perfume, a smallish filly by Shamardal from the Zabeel mare Zona, was clearly the spring's stand-out filly although she might have to do some filling out if she is to retain her advantage next year.

If anyone can help her it is surely Bart. This was his ninth win in the race, his 24th in Oaks around the nation and his 257th Group 1 win.