

Goulburn Pacey

Further Back Than Walla Walla

Excerpts of an article by Ken Dyer
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The romanticism of Walla Walla's history began in his racing days and his legend so transcends time that the stallion is not ever likely to be forgotten even though details of his racing career may be clouded in the mists of time. No other Australian Standardbred has ever had an appellation that in a few simple words evokes the hopelessness of the position and which at the same time perceives that the horse will come through at the end.

This is the story too of Walla Walla's breeder, owner, trainer/driver – Les Martin – who catapulted to fame from a small town country storekeeper and musician to national recognition of a type that had never before been attained by any Australian Standardbred owner and his horse.

Leslie Stewart (Les) Martin was born on November 2nd 1887 and at 15 years of age in 1902 started as a junior sales trainee, delivery boy and general assistant with Marcus Clarke in Goulburn. All members of the Martin family were very great musicians, the young Les playing violin cornet and trombone. Les' father was an engine driver in the New South Wales railways. The Martin family achieved considerable renown and respect for their musical prowess.

After marrying Mary Eileen Ruby McKenny in 1912, Les and Ruby started their own small business in Goulburn, which they conducted for three years before moving north to Barraba.

It was in Barraba that Les became interested in trotters where his Standardbred business started to prosper. He set up racing stables with after purchasing a package of a mare in foal, Nellie serviced by Burlington Chief and a yearling filly and an aged pacer Kia Ora. "Martin's Nellie" soon became a breeding mare for Les. The foal became known as Viking Chief. Les had continued success with his team and other progeny of Nellie who were now starting to win. These including Black Soldier whilst another local purchase Belgian Betty won for him at Armidale in 1919.

Apart from his racing stables, Les Martin was slowly building a formidable broodmare band of daughters and granddaughters of old Nellie and knew that he had to access better credentialed stallions outside the Barraba and Tamworth district.

Having his first fling at winning a "Thousand" pounder, Martin took Viking Chief to compete in the 1921 Brisbane Thousand at Kedron Park, together with Black Soldier and Winsome Gold (a maiden) to compete in lesser events.

Starting from 50 yards behind and driven by Patrick Flood, Viking Chief won a heat of the Brisbane Thousand and then ran second to Robert Simpson's Don Durfee in the Final. On this trip Viking Chief won also at Goodna, whilst other members of his team, Black Soldier and Winsome Gold, won at Kedron Park and Coorparoo respectively.

During the years leading up to 1921 Les Martin had become actively engaged in buying up broodmares from the northern regions, mares such as Lady Berris, Lady Barbara, Rene Direct, Winsome Gold, Lady Oaks, Jewell Direct and Miss Direct.

Also purchased were the mares Princess Winona and Swallows Nest. A colt by Ribbonwood from the imported USA mare Winona was also purchased and named Volant and became Martin's first publicly advertised stallion in 1922.

Martin soon returned to Goulburn purchasing a property in Dalton, some miles distant near the Lachlan River, and a general store. Dalton in the 1920's was a tiny town in a wealthy rural district with the area bounded by Gunning and Yass. Dalton boasts the reputation of the best wool grazing district in the world. In Dalton, Martin also set up his breeding operation with his embryo stud farm naming it Walla Walla Stud Farm. His training tracks were situated on seventy acres of creek flats right on the edge of the Dalton township.

The new Martin home in the township, however, was called "Wall Doone", and it was a huge home with large rooms for entertaining and dancing.

Several years later Walla Doone was surrounded by stables, a harness room, quarters for stable hands, and a large feed loft, the complex built on a corner becoming known as Martins Corner.

In Dalton, Martin was a large scale breeder of trotters with the mares he brought with him from Barraba. Martin would send his mares to a wide variety of sires at other stud farms in the surrounding districts.

Article still under construction.

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