

Passing of outstanding horseman Ray Sweetman

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Ray Sweetman, an outstanding horseman and the man who educated Australia's first 1:55 pacer and leading sire Classic Garry, died last week and a private funeral was held on Thursday.

Owen Raymond (Ray) Sweetman was born in 1927 and in 1942 his father Charlie leased a 2yo called Dallingwood but the gelding had a bad habit of kicking.

Teenager Ray Sweetman spent countless hours with Dallingwood before he managed to settle the gelding to the point where he could commence racing as a 5yo.

Dallingwood won six races in Perth between August 1945 and June 1946 with Ron Porter at the reins while Ray Sweetman went through the process of obtaining his licence to drive in races.

On Easter Saturday, 5th April 1947 Ray Sweetman drove Dallingwood to victory at Gloucester Park in a heat of the Easter Handicap. It was his first winner and came at his fifth race drive. The win saw Dallingwood re-handicapped from 48 yards to 60 yards for the £2000 Easter Handicap Final on April 7th.

In what was to become the norm for Ray Sweetman, he showed his initiative in dashing the 8/1 chance Dallingwood around the field to hit the front with a lap to travel before holding on to win the final by three yards.

Over the next five years, Dallingwood won a further 12 races in Perth with Ray Sweetman at the reins and developed into one of the State's best fast-class horses.

He qualified for four WA Pacing Cup finals and finished third to Dark David and Johnnie Robert in the 1947 Cup and fourth behind Bintravis, Admiral Spear and Happy Man in 1949.

Dallingwood also won the 1951 Winter Cup and finished third to Sea Born and Tony Derby in the 1948 Fremantle Cup and third to Happy Man and Brown Sheik in the 1949 Fremantle Cup.

In a career spanning some 36 years, before a disagreement with the WA Trotting Association's stewards saw him hand in his licence, Ray Sweetman drove 491 winners with 283 of them in the city.

Those 491 winners came per medium of 94 different horses and his average of five wins per winning horse has been approached by very few drivers across more than 100 years of trotting in Perth.

His best season as a driver was in 1976/77 when he finished second to Fred Kersley on the Perth Drivers Premiership with 24 winners. In 1977/78 he drove 32 winners in Perth to finish third in the premiership race.

This was an era when Ray competed against reinsmen of the calibre of Fred Kersley, Jim Schrader, Lyle Lindau, Phil Coulson, Trevor Warwick, Les Poyser, Bob Pollock and Kevin Batt.

Ray Sweetman took out a trainers licence in 1947 and the first of his 417 wins as a trainer came at Gloucester Park with Straight Dalla on 1st November 1947.

In the 1977/78 season Ray Sweetman (34 winners) finished second to Fred Kersley (36 winners) in the Perth Trainers Premiership. Sweetman had just seven horses in work at any one time that season compared to Kersley's stable which had more than 20 in work.

That was Sweetman's best season as a trainer although he also finished second in the 1976/77 season with 23 winners and was in the top five on the premiership on a further four occasions.

The list of the best horses trained by Ray Sweetman is extensive and includes the likes of Bronze Whaler which won 21 races for Sweetman. While he was Sweetman's most prolific winner he also ranks as unlucky in that in four successive starts as a 3yo he finished second to Mount Eden.

Sweetman's other top liners include Binshaw (three wins including the 1970 Easter Cup), Henry Butler (20 wins), Dale Cliffe (19 wins including the 1971 Harvey Cup), Special Garry 15 wins including the 1979 WA Derby), Wayamba (16 wins including the 1976 Bunbury Cup), Vermillion (14 wins), Lou Travis (13 wins), Ardcliffe (13 wins including the 1969 Christmas Gift), Tiara Court (13 wins including the 1965 Churchill Memorial Cup, 1965 Queens Birthday Cup, 1969 Lord Mayor's Cup and six Free-For-Alls), Prince Fandango (12 wins), Thor Rise (11 wins including the 1978 Easter Cup) and Regal Morris (6 wins including the 1981 Bunbury Cup).

Sweetman rarely drove horses that he didn't train but he did drive the Reason Why gelding Rickey Reason to a remarkable 16 wins for trainer Gordon Couper in a period of nine months between April and December 1971.

Ray Sweetman rightly developed a reputation as a fearless front-running driver – a record that he was to attribute to the stewards.

"After I got suspended a couple of times for pushing out I decided that the best way to stay out of trouble was to lead and I spent countless hours educating my horses to begin quickly from the standing start," he said some years later.

"After fast-work earlier in the week I knew exactly what my horses were capable of running on the Friday night and I drove then to run that time".

Ray Sweetman had an arrangement with Kevin Newbound from Forest Lodge Stud in Victoria for first option to purchase the progeny of Newbound's star broodmare Gay Acres.

Not long after winning the 1979 WA Derby with Special Garry, Sweetman inspected a seven month old weanling full-brother to his Derby winner and didn't hesitate in pulling out his cheque book.

The athletic colt was nurtured and educated by Ray and after he was named Classic Garry he was to become an icon of harness racing in Australia.

Ray trained and drove Classic Garry as a 2yo and 3yo winning 11 races including the Group Two Champagne Stakes as a 2yo and the New Year Handicap and a heat of the WA Derby as a 3yo before finishing a luckless second to Smooth Dave in the 1982 Derby final.

Ray Sweetman had become disillusioned with the WATA Stewards shortly after the WA Derby in 1982 and when Classic Garry resumed racing in Perth as a 4yo he was trained by Sweetman's daughter Lyn Bauskis.

After his run-in with the stewards Ray Sweetman switched to training thoroughbreds with a good degree of success.



Ray Sweetman driving Easter Gift