

Kevin Lafferty

A legend of The 'Boo

Warrnambool trainer Kevin Lafferty rode as an amateur for several years, on the flat and over jumps, before his race riding came to an abrupt halt when his left leg had to be amputated following a fall while riding with the Findon Hunt Club at Wollert, north of Melbourne, in July 1934.

The determined Lafferty usually combined training with a nine-to-five job from December 1934 until he began training full-time in the early 1950s. He was licensed continually until the 1981-82 season.

Lafferty (1912-1987) and his success at the 'Boo are highlighted in author Mark McNamara's book, *The 'Boo—The History of Racing in Warrnambool, from 1848*, as this edited excerpt shows:

Aussigg, who was Kevin Lafferty's first runner in the Grand Annual Steeplechase, had a chequered past. Messrs R. and J. Johnstone of Cassady's Bridge purchased him from the Terrinallum Pastoral Company of Pura Pura station, near Mortlake. The Johnstones intended to use Aussigg in the show ring but his bad temperament made him unsuitable for this. The gelding was instead driven in a jinker for two years. He had still not been broken in as a hack and was one of the star performers in a buckjumping show at Koroit.

Joe Brown of Warrnambool subsequently purchased the gelding, and showed him at district shows under the name Echo. Turned to steeplechasing, Echo finished second in a field of two at the Warrnambool Hunt Club races at Wangoom in November 1946.



KEVIN LAFFERTY: a swag of Warrnambool features among his more than 800 wins. PHOTO FROM THE BOOK

Upon registering the grey as a racehorse, Brown chose the name Aussigg, this having been the last P.O.W. camp in which he was held in Europe (in World War II). In the care of Kevin Lafferty, with whom Brown raced the gelding in partnership, Aussigg won the steeplechase at Penshurst on Easter Monday and the Dundas Steeplechase at the Hamilton Cup meeting, before finishing third in the Brierly Steeplechase in 1947.

The *Standard* reported that a win for Aussigg in the 1947 Grand Annual would have been especially significant for Brown as on the day of the race he was celebrating the first anniversary of his release from the P.O.W. camp whose name his old horse carried. It was not to be and the gelding finished third.

Kevin Lafferty officially scored his first win as a trainer at Warrnambool with Oro Blue in the Gallipoli Hurdle at the Warrnambool Diggers' picnic meeting in December 1947. He no doubt had a hand in the training of Big Mat who won two races at the picnic meeting in December 1943 but was recorded as being trained by his owners, Leo Howard and Kevin's sister, Mildred. Lafferty won his first professional race on his home track with Solvale in a Restricted Handicap at the Purnim races in February 1949.

Within a few years the trickle of winners turned into torrent.

Lafferty scored his first feature win at Warrnambool with Keith Bullock's Promis d'Or in the 1953 Brierly Steeplechase. It was the start of an incredible run for Lafferty in Warrnambool's two feature steeplechases. Between 1947 and 1967 he trained three Grand Annual winners, three seconds and five thirds. His record in the Brierly was even more imposing. Between 1947 and 1969 he trained five winners,

five seconds and four thirds.

Despite Lafferty's many successes on his home track, it was the wins of Royal Pentzia and Royal Pageant in South Australia in the early 1950s that launched his training career, and enabled him and his wife Doreen to buy the house they were renting in Liebig Street (Warrnambool).

Keith Bullock bought Royal Pentzia for 45 guineas and gave him to Lafferty to train. He was the linchpin of Lafferty's unique training treble at Oakbank in 1952, winning the Von Doussa and Great Eastern Steeplechases. The Oakbank carnival started inauspiciously for Lafferty, when Solvale was a well-beaten 11-8 favourite in the Mount Barker Hurdle. (Jockey) Keith Denham was feeling the effects of wasting to ride Royal Pentzia and because of exhaustion was not able to fulfill that engagement. Cliff Bickham, who travelled to Oakbank without having been booked to ride there, picked

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up the ride on Royal Pentzia in the Oakbank steeplechases after Lafferty spotted him in the betting ring.

Denham was left with the consolation of winning the Harry D. Young Hurdle on Solvale, but suffered a demonstration from punters over the gelding's improved showing. The stewards accepted the explanation of the connections that they had invested considerably more on Solvale on Saturday than on Monday, and also took note of the effects on Denham of wasting in an effort

to make Royal Pentzia's weight.

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Royal Pentzia had a mixed career over fences at Warrnambool, beginning with a win by a furlong in a field of three in the steeplechase at the Woodford races in 1952. The bold front-runner held a commanding lead in the Kilmoree Steeplechase six weeks later when he fell at the first fence of the Tozer Road double. Royal Pentzia then cleared out and was eventually located at Jerry Moloney's stables in Koroit Street.

Royal Pentzia did not contest Warrnambool's feature jumps double after his Oakbank triumphs as he developed heat in a front fetlock just prior to Warrnambool Week. He was paraded before the Amateur Turf Club Plate as a recording of his Great Eastern win was broadcast. A friend loaned jockey Cliff Bickham an umbrella to keep his silks dry in heavy rain, as owner Keith Bullock was about to wear them while riding Promis d'Or in the Amateur Turf Club Plate. In thanking Bickham for keeping the silks dry Bullock told Bickham Promis d'Or would win, and Bickham secured some of the 4-1 on offer.

The Grand Annual always eluded Royal Pentzia. He finished second in 1953 and 1954, and third in 1955.

The limited room for boxes behind his home meant that Lafferty never had more than 18 horses in work at any one time. Remarkably, he turned out more than 800 winners. Lafferty trained over 100 winners in successive seasons in the 1960s, the most of any trainer in the State in those two years. U

CLIFF BICKHAM: keeping Royal Pentzia's silks dry. PHOTO FROM THE BOOK

The 'Boo—The History of Racing in Warrnambool, from 1848, by Mark McNamara. Produced by the Slattery Media Group for Mark McNamara. RRP \$45; on sale at the Warrnambool Carnival, May 1-3, or at books.slatterymedia.com



LAFFERTY'S FEATURE WINS AT WARRNAMBOOL

1953: Brierly Steeplechase (Promis d'Or)

1954: William Lindsay Handicap (Royal Pageant)

1955: Lindsay Handicap (Forest Land); Beach Steeplechase (Mac Union)

1956: Lindsay Handicap (Caropia); Grand Annual Steeplechase (Mac Union)

1957: Lindsay Handicap (Royal Sirius); Beach Steeplechase (Elandery); Brierly Steeplechase (Franstone); Grand Annual (Solight)

1958: Beach Steeplechase (Elandery)

1959: Beach Steeplechase (Solight); Brierly Steeplechase (Solight)

1961: Lindsay Handicap (Clouded); Brierly Steeplechase (Kirkwood); Amateur Turf Club Plate (Clouded)

1962: Lindsay Handicap (Chavey Gold); Brierly Steeplechase (Kirkwood); Hopkins Hurdle (Big Strike)

1963: Hopkins Hurdle (Baybridge); Amateur Turf Club Plate (Gay Port)

1967: Grand Annual Steeplechase (Yes Sir)

1969: Wangoom Handicap (Stanaswa)

1977: Warrnambool Cup (Puramaka)

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Source: *The History of Racing in Warrnambool, from 1848*

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