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‘He knew’: Wave of emotion builds from owner’s dying wish



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Richard Matthews loved his harness racing and loved his horses, and he knew that they would eventually bring his family together.

So on his deathbed, Matthews made a call to his trainer, Andy Gath, about his emerging horse, Catch A Wave.



Catch A Wave leads all the way to win the Miracle Mile at Menangle.

“The most confronting phone call I have ever had,” Gath said of that conversation last September.

“He just said: ‘Mate, I have two days left and you have to do something for me. Don’t let them sell that horse. Don’t let them sell Catch A Wave. It will bring them all together’.

“He just stressed it over and over, and kept repeating it.

“He finished by saying, ‘I have to ring them all now, but do that for me’.”

Matthews died with his family by his bed within a couple of days.

Catch A Wave failed in the Victoria Derby heats soon but has since fulfilled his passionate owner’s prediction by winning the Chariots Of Fire and Miracle Mile. Now he returns to Menangle for the inaugural running of the \$2.1 million Eureka – the world’s richest harness race.

“The family always knew about his horses, and at the Chariots win there were four or five of them there, and by the Miracle Mile there was 16 of them,” Gath said.

“Richard knew. I think there will be more than 20 there on Saturday night with his wife, Pauline. They will be in purple ties and scarves; you won’t miss them.

“You will see on the sleeves of the colours there are purple, red and yellow bands, which are Richard’s colours.

“He has become the most special horse I have ever had something to do with because of Richard.”

Gath had trained for Matthews for more than 15 years, but Catch A Wave was always different from when he bought him as a yearling.

“He had a lot of horses with me. The first was Diamonds N Furs, which made the Inter Dominion Final at Moonee Valley [in 2008] and the following year at the Gold Coast.

“He had good ones, but not like this horse.

“Richard was always patient with his horses, but when we got this bloke it was different because he knew time was short.

“We would usually take care of them as two-year-olds, but, with Catch A Wave, he said, ‘I don’t have long left so let’s run him’.”

Catch A Wave won six of seven starts as a two-year-old and the Breeders Crown, and added the Gold Bullion as a three-year-old with Matthews watching.

“He got a bit of joy out of him, but the last year has been incredible. Catch A Wave has just kept improving,” Gath said.

The Eureka (2300m) is a slot race restricted to Australian-bred three-year-old and four-year-old pacers. Slot-holder Daniel Cordina signed Catch A Wave because of his potential before the Chariots Of Fire but admits he has got a lot more than his \$100,000 worth already.

“We wanted the best chance in the race and we have got it,” Cordina said. “But to be involved with this story of Richard and his family is amazing.

“We only share in the prizemoney in the Eureka, but seeing this family on Miracle Mile night and being close to them was great.”

Catch A Wave will be the second pick in betting at \$3.80 behind \$1.80 favourite Leap To Fame for the Eureka, but Gath believes he can do it again.

“He is as good as we can get him, but we are running into a very good horse in Leap To Fame,” Gath said. “At some stage, he is going to have to do some work and go around them, but he is tough and the best horse we have had.”

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