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Marathon journey to a sweet first win

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Victorian hobby trainer Jamie Egan is no stranger to marathons – but getting his first harness racing winner has certainly been an endurance test of its own.

Egan has loved horses and racing all of his life, and his passion has extended to gallopers, greyhounds and standardbreds, but his first winner as a harness racing trainer with five-year-old mare Malava Miss (**Shadow Play**) at Cranbourne on Sunday (Oct 1) was 20 years in the making.



Jamie Egan and his fiancée Rebekah Dudley with their first winner, Malava Miss

"It was extremely special – it's been a lot of work and a long road, but the feeling was just amazing," an elated Egan said.

Egan, who is 44, grew up in Melbourne, but from a young age gravitated to Wangaratta at every opportunity to spend time with extended family, the famous thoroughbred clan, the Hoysteds.

"Growing up, my family wasn't at all horsey but every school holidays and every chance I got, I was up at the Hoysteds, mucking out boxes and doing waters and just learning everything I could about horses through them," Egan said.

"There were a couple of harness racing trainers around where I was living and I just ended up hooking up with them and the 'hobby man's sport', because it seemed so much more accessible for the average person," he said.

"I got my licence when I was 18 and just dabbled in and out, learning off people and loving being hands on."

But when Egan married and began a family, life took some dramatic changes in direction.

"Our son Jason was born with a disability, and I just needed to be there for him," he said.

"As he grew up, I started trying to work out a hobby that he would enjoy and that we could do together, and I thought I'd try running. I'd never been any sort of runner, but you've got to do what you've got to do for your kids!

"At first I just took him around the block in his wheelchair and he absolutely loved it, being outside in the fresh air, and it just went from there. We progressed to five-kilometre fun runs, then 10 ks with me pushing him in his wheelchair. We got to half marathons and then full marathons and then one time we ran six days along the Hume Highway to raise money for him for a wheelchair bed.

"But when we were doing our 10th marathon and about seven kilometres from the finish, Jason got distressed and started crying. He had severe scoliosis and every bump had just become too hard and painful. It stopped being fun and enjoyable for him so I started to think about something else we might be able to do together."

Racing came back into the frame and Egan, who is a farrier, took out a greyhound trainer's licence as well as getting back to the trots, taking Jason to Melton meetings.



Jamie Egan and his late son Jason in their marathon-running days

“I hadn’t been a greyhound man before, but we travelled the countryside with the dogs. At the same time, we’d also go to watch the harness racing and Jess Tubbs would always arrange for passes for us to get into the stabling area. Kate Gath took Jason under her wing too – I remember she won a Group Three race once and came and gave the trophy to Jason because she said the owner already had plenty of trophies! People were great to us and to Jason in particular.”

The family was devastated by Jason’s passing in 2017 at age 15 but Jamie and his daughter Kristy continued to share the love of the trots.

“I got my trainer’s licence again and at the same time Kristy got into pony trots – she really enjoyed it and she won quite a few races, including the Victoria Cup for the pony trotters.”

Based at Arcadia, near Shepparton, Egan’s racing interests took another turn when he met his new partner and soon-to-be-wife, Rebekah Dudley.

“Rebekah was a picnics jockey, and it was her life’s ambition to get a thoroughbred trainer’s licence. She’s now got her pre-trainer licence, where she has to be an assistant for 12 months, and that finishes in December with the chance to get her full training licence,” he said.

“I’ve got a thoroughbred strapper’s ticket and Rebekah has taken out a harness racing stablehand licence. And we’ve both got greyhound trainers’ licences so we share that interest as well!”

Egan said the couple purchased Malava Miss earlier this year after their previous horse had failed to come back after a tendon injury.

“I wanted something to race, but we’ve got our wedding later this month, so funds were tight. I was looking around for a cheapie and Malava Miss came up,” he said.

“We race her together and she is just perfect for us – a very sweet horse and so easy to train. She’s run a couple of good placings, as well as the win, in the six starts we’ve had with her.

“I had the master Greg Sugars on at Cranbourne, and we definitely had some luck in the run. But Rebekah is very particular with diet and making sure they are 100 percent sound, so I attribute a lot of the win to her thoroughness and guiding me on ways to improve my training.

“We just love it, and to be honest, even when we’re running places, it feels like a win to us!”

by [Terry Gange](#), for [Harnesslink](#)

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