



MEDIA RELEASE

October 11, 2020

MELODY BELLE RETAINS NZ HORSE OF THE YEAR TITLE

There was a tangerine glow to the 2020 New Zealand Thoroughbred Racing Awards, with the tangerine colours of Te Akau Racing the dominant element at the virtual event on Sunday night.

Te Akau stable star Melody Belle retained her Horse of the Year title and also headed the voting in the sprinter-miler and middle-distance categories.

Her stablemate Cool Aza Beel was a unanimous choice as Two-Year-Old of the Year, Te Akau trainer Jamie Richards was the sole contender for Trainer of the Year and stable rider Opie Bosson was named Jockey of the Year. Richards and Bosson were the leading Group I performers in Australasia for the season.

Te Akau Shark was runner-up to stablemate Melody Belle in the sprinter-miler category and Probabeel was runner-up to Catalyst in the three-year-old category. Te Akau also secured the media award.

Melody Belle shared the limelight on Sunday night with veteran Palmerston North trainer Kevin Gray, who received the prestigious Outstanding Contribution to Racing Award.

Gray, 83, still runs a successful stable and finished 12th on the NZ premiership last season and was the second leading trainer in the central districts in terms of win.

Gray did not take up training till he was 43 but has won more than 1000 races and had Group I victories on both sides of the Tasman. He has also been a prominent owner, breeder, and administrator.

He is renowned for his work with apprentices has educated and mentored a host of successful riders, among them Lisa Allpress, Hayden Tinsley, Kim Clapperton, Bruce Herd and Damon Smith.

Five horses received votes for Horse of the Year, but Melody Belle was a runaway winner, receiving 90 percent of the 60 votes cast.

The five-year-old mare had an outstanding season, with four wins – all at Group I level – and five placings from 10 attempts and earning almost \$2 million in stakes. She was a Group I winner at the Melbourne spring carnival and became the first horse to win all three legs of the Hawke's Bay Triple Crown.

The Hastings series has been a target for New Zealand's premier weight-for-age horses since 1999 and tests a horse's class, consistency, and versatility, with the races run over 1400m, 1600m and 2040m.

Melody Belle recorded her 10th Group I victory when successful in the Empire Rose Stakes in Melbourne and has already added another in the new season. She has now matched Rough Habit in terms of Group I wins and needs two more to equal Sunline's tally.

In addition to her wins last term, Melody Belle was runner-up in the Mackinnon Stakes, third in the Futurity Stakes and All-Star Mile and a luckless fourth in the Doncaster Mile.

The Horse of the Year award was introduced in 1971 and Melody Belle is the ninth horse to win the title more than once. Sunline took the title four times with Show Gate, Rough Habit, Xcellent, Seachange, Mufhasa, Mongolian Khan and Bonneval the other dual winners.

Melody Belle, a \$57,500 yearling buy for Te Akau principal David Ellis, is raced by a Fortuna syndicate and has had 16 wins from 33 career starts and earned \$3.67 million in stakes.

There were no surprises in the HOY awards voting and the smallest winning margin was the 19 vote majority recorded by Catalyst in the three-year-old category.

There was considerable depth in the three-year-old division and five horses received votes, but Catalyst's outstanding domestic campaign earned him the title.

Catalyst was unbeaten in five starts in New Zealand, including the Group I Two Thousand Guineas, and won each race by more than two lengths. He had two starts in Australia, finishing a close second to top Australian three-year-old Alligator Blood at his first attempt and had an excuse when failing in the Australian Guineas.

Richards, in just his second season in sole charge at Te Akau's Matamata stable, had an extraordinary season. He won a record 11 Group I races, including three in Australia, and his 20 black-type victories included wins in the Karaka Million 2YO and 3YO. The stable headed the NZ premiership and topped \$7 million in earnings for the season.

Bosson, who has voted Jockey of the Year for the sixth time, also won 11 Group I races, including five in Australia, and was the leading rider at the Sydney autumn carnival.

Cambridge Stud proprietors Brendan and Jo Lindsay were named Owners of the Year. Their racing team was headlined by Probabeel and Matamata Breeders' Stakes winner Vernazza and also included the Group performers Bavella, Not An Option, Pretty To Sea, Manchu and Familia.

Julia-Rose Hayes became a second-generation media award winner, when claiming the prize for her work for Te Akau Racing. Julia-Rose emulated her mother, Karyn Fenton-Ellis, who won the same prize in 2012.

2020 NEW ZEALAND THOROUGHBRED HORSE OF THE YEAR AWARDS

New Zealand Horse of the Year: Melody Belle (54 votes).

Also: Catalyst (3), Probabeel (1), Te Akau Shark (1), Wise Men Say (1).

NZTR Award for Outstanding Contribution to Racing: Kevin Gray.

Champion Two-Year-Old: Cool Aza Beel (61).

Other finalists: Play That Song, Vernazza.

Champion Three-Year-Old: Catalyst (35).

Other finalists: Probabeel (16), Quick Thinker (3), Jennifer Eccles (2), Sherwood Forest (1), Travelling Light (1), Loire, Two Illicit.

Champion Sprinter-Miler (up to 1600m): Melody Belle (37).

Other finalists: Te Akau Shark (16), Bostonian (4), Avantage (3), Julius.

Champion Middle-Distance Horse (1601m-2200m): Melody Belle (57).

Other finalists: True Enough (4), Avantage (1).

Champion Stayer (2201m and further): The Chosen One (45).

Other finalists: Roger That (9), Platinum Invador (7).

Champion Jumper: It's A Wonder (36).

Other finalists: Wise Men Say (13), Bad Boy Brown (12).

Trainer of the Year – sponsored by Dunstan: Jamie Richards (only finalist).

Jockey of the Year: Opie Bosson (49).

Other finalist: Lisa Allpress (11).

Jumps Jockey of the Year: Shaun Fannin (39).

Other finalists: Aaron Kuru (17), Shaun Phelan (5).

Owner of the Year: Brendan and Jo Lindsay (47).

Other finalists: Dick Karreman (7), Trelawney Thoroughbred (3), Joan Egan (1), JML Bloodstock (1), NZ Thoroughbred Holdings (1), Hermitage Thoroughbreds, Kevin Hickman, OTI Management, Sir Peter Vela.

Stablehand of the Year – sponsored by Majestic Horse Floats – Lisa Kennedy (employed by Kevin Myers).

Other finalists: Mette Mosebo (Te Akau Racing), Tracy Affleck (Ellis Winsloe).

NZTR Award for Contribution to Media, Digital & Content: Julia-Rose Hayes (Te Akau Racing).

Other finalists: Aidan Rodley, Jo Starr (NZ Horse Ambulance Trust) and Scott Freeman, Danny Hunter and Josie Murphy (Trackside).

Trainers' Premiership: Jamie Richards.

Jockeys' Premiership: Lisa Allpress.

Apprentice Jockeys' Premiership: Kozzi Asano.

Owners premiership: Brendan & Jo Lindsay.

Newcomer to Training – sponsored by Gavelhouse.com: Chrissy Bambry.

ENDS

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