



A GIRL
A HORSE
A DREAM

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A NASTY VERSION OF NATIONAL VELVET

Press Kit

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LOGLINE

A Girl, A Horse, A Dream, recounts the epic story of Australian women jockeys and their extraordinary battle to compete with men on the track. Horse racing is one of the only sports in the world in which men & women compete equally...or so the theory goes.

The narrative focuses on a year in the life of Bernadette Cooper, the top female jockey in Australia, as she competes for victory in Australia's most prestigious races. 20 years after the breaking of the ban, the glacial progress of female jockeys means Bernadette is one of few women racing (& winning) on major Metropolitan tracks today. Funny, articulate & full of joie de vivre, she's a force of nature. Female jockeys, like Bernadette, fuelled by a determination to race thoroughbreds fight an almost medieval culture of rigid tradition, discrimination, endemic sexual violence & harassment at odds with the glamorous image of the Australian Racing Industry.



BACKGROUND

The 1st hurdle for Australian women jockeys was cleared when Pam O'Neil, following a 15 year fight, broke the industry ban against female riders in 1979 to become (& still is) the only jockey in the world to win 3 races on their 1st day of professional riding. After this victorious leap – the obstacles got nastier, more dangerous & harder to detect & they keep rearing up to this day. Despite this, a few women, like Bernie, driven with a passion to race manage to clear the field & win.

Bernadette Cooper's career has been a roller coaster of triumph & heartbreak. At 8 she got her 1st pony. 10 minutes later she decided she was going to be the best jockey in the world. She began her jockey apprenticeship at 15. At 20 became the first woman to win champion apprentice of the year in Queensland. Within 6 weeks of turning professional she couldn't get a single ride. Refusing to give up she went to country tracks at the back of beyond & spent years clawing her way back to the big races. Finally a break came when a trainer invited her to ride in Sydney.

Like any jockey, Bernadette's success was contingent upon getting access to good horses & finally it seemed as if what she had wanted all her life was going to happen. This is the point at which we meet her.

SYNOPSIS

The documentary begins in January 2002 with Bernadette Cooper racing in the Triscay Stakes then moves to the 2002 Sydney Autumn Carnival - 8 days of Australia's richest races including the Coolmore Classic, the Golden Slipper & the Doncaster. This begins a year-long romp of record-breaking achievements & days of appalling results. We travel around the country to metropolitan & provincial tracks & in November we head with her to the Melbourne Spring Carnival (& the Melbourne Cup). With Bernadette we enter the seldom seen engine rooms of the races – jockey enclaves, Stewards inquiries, Barrier Trials & the back breaking daily trackwork that starts at 4am with steaming, edgy, foul tempered horses pounding down the turf. Her tale takes us into contact with a cavalcade of racing identities that include the likes of John Singleton, Gai Waterhouse & Roy Higgins. We also see her competing with Australia's best jockeys such as Darren Beadman, Chris Munce, Scott Seamer & Damien Oliver. We learn of the horrific dangers faced by every jockey, the history of women ice-breakers who took on male bastions of racing & observe some eye-opening footage that reveals, disturbingly, how very dark the heart of this glamorous industry can be. Bernadette's extraordinary talent, warmth, openness, self deprecating humour & insights that accompany these images allows the audience to embrace this parallel universe in a completely unique & fresh way.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE MAKING OF THE FILM

During 2001 *The Australian* conducted an incendiary investigation into the treatment of women working in the racing industry. The articles revealed an extremely disturbing endemic culture of overt & covert discrimination, sexual harassment & sexual violence toward female race workers which included jockeys, strappers & stable hands. Not only was this contrary to the glamorous image projected by the industry, it also seemed clear that these women had to contend with the kinds of obstacles most of us assume died out decades ago in order to pursue a passion, born in childhood, to work with horses.

I immediately found myself glued to the revelations of these articles & in the inexplicable grip of wanting to make a film about women jockeys. Despite all the darkness even a cursory glance demonstrated that these women refused to be victims. Their tales smacked of true underdog resistance against the baddies - dark horses beating the odds. Their audacious victories read like high stakes sagas & were often (despite some of the horrors associated with them) impossibly funny. Still I had no subjects, no story & despite coming from a family who included many committed punters, no great personal fascination for the hoopla of racing beyond the odd sweepstake for the race that stops the nation.

'It feels like it comes from the heart... I ride because I love Horses'
- B.Cooper



Yet, with a vague idea, I headed off to Rosehill Racetrack for my 1st day of research. I arrived trackside as the horses were coming down the straight. As they crossed the line the caller bellowed "so it's lady jockey Bernadette Cooper to win the 1st race on Ladies day". I felt it was a sign. She was the only woman riding that day & as it was 'Ladies Day' the only one not in heels, frock & hat. In fact peering into the enclosure at the milling jockeys in bright silks, gloves & helmets, I couldn't immediately pick her out before the starts of the subsequent races. That was until I checked the form guide that helpfully put a large Ms. before her name so you could distinguish her from the men.

I met the redoubtable Bernadette a week later when she barreled into the home of LeeAnn Olsen, the president of the NSW jockey association. She stood in the doorway with her red hair flying & told me that as a little girl she would lie in bed & dream of being this champion jockey that there was absolutely nothing that was going to stand in the way of her passion for horses & riding fast. I thought in that instant: 'that's it, she's it'.

So began over a year of lobbying in & out of absurdly small lady jockey rooms all over the country filming this remarkable woman & making a friend in the process. Her courage, warmth, vivacity & sheer endurance, in this

male dominated industry that's dealt her some pretty viscous blows over the years, make her impressive company. Yet it's her good heart & unwavering good humour that makes her so endearing.

She put up with us strapping radio mics to her safety vests, camera's to her helmet, cramming a crew into her room poking a camera in her face on both her very worst & best days. We even invaded her bedroom at 4 am a few times so we could cover her daily ritual of heading off for track work in what most of us regard as the middle of the night.

What is lovely about Bernie is that she regards her self as part of a continuum of women who have spent decades fighting discrimination in racing (Australia's 3rd largest industry). She both acknowledges those that came before her & works to change the culture for the next generation of female jockeys. When we traveled from state to state interviewing different generations of women riders it was clear that they shared a sense of pride in their collective & consistent fight against the status quo as they took on one edifice after another. They are some of the most extraordinary people I have met. This conjoined with the fact that the documentary was made with such a wonderful production team made up of old & new friends meant that - from pre to shoot to post - the whole project was a sheer delight.

PRODUCTION STORIES

During the course of filming I became palpably aware of the intoxicating lure of the track & those exquisite thoroughbreds that are the stars of the show. At the same time I became aware of how dangerous & disgusting a sport it could be. On my first day filming out at the barriers a horse bolted backwards out of the cage, pig rooted & swung it's hooves about an inch from my camera & my head. Only Billy Dale (the Rosehill foreman) murmuring "be a tree Rachel, be a tree" stopped me from vaulting over the fence. Some production days would have us lying in fields of clover shooting spring foals who were trying to eat both camera & boom, watching the sun rise over trackwork or going absolutely ballistic as Bernie crossed the winning line on horses that we expected to have no chance at all.

On other days we saw hideous falls, which had horses destroyed & jockeys carted off to hospital. We were filming trackwork when news of Jason Oliver's fatal accident came through just before the Melbourne cup. I was sitting with Bernadette the day the young female apprentice Kaylene Gillman, who we had filmed a few months earlier, suffered a terrible fall. For a week or so it was unclear whether she'd survive. While jockeys are fairly low key about the dangers of their sport, filming them day after day makes you acutely aware of the high stakes involved as much for money as for life & limb. Finally, the contrast between the intelligent, helpful, enlightened men of the track {the true gentlemen who made much of the film possible, from jockey room attendants, foremen, trainers & to the Chairmen of Stewards} to those dark age misogynists who still permeate the industry at every level certainly made the production an adventure that will be hard to forget.



It's very hard for girls unless people realise & appreciate they're not girls they're Jockeys'- Paul Sutherland. Trainer



'If we had that with a trainer and a top jockey we coulda won' - John Singleton on why his 200 to 1 horse Gentle Genius, with Bernie on board, failed to beat the favourite Sunline in the 2002 Coolmore Classic.

BIOGRAPHIES

BERNADETTE COOPER

(Jockey)

Bernadette received her 1st pony (Kitten) at the age of 8. She began her apprenticeship at 15 & had her 1st race at 16. She became the 1st female rider to win Champion Apprentice of the year in Queensland. Now aged 28 she has ridden over 600 winners including the Gosford Classic, Group 3 Japan Trophy, Listed Triscay Stakes, The Orange Cup, The Dubbo Cup, The Crown Cup & the Group 3 Moet & Chandon. On June 15, 2002 she became the 1st female jockey to win three races in a single day at a major metropolitan track. Bernadette writes a regular column published in *The Hills Shire Times*, *Northern District Times*, *Parramatta Advertiser* & *The Sydney Turf Club Online Magazine*. She has appeared in dozens of racing magazines, newspapers & racing programs including being featured in John Tapp's *Inside Racing*.



RACHEL LANDERS

(Writer/Director)

Rachel Landers completed a PhD in history at Sydney University & a post graduate directing course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. Working in theatre after graduation she then moved into film as a writer and director of both drama & documentary. Her films have won & been nominated for a number of awards that include: the Gold Hugo from the Chicago Film Festival, Best Cinematography from the Australian Cinematography Society, nominations for 2 AFI's (writing & direction) for the short film *Revisionism*; won a United Nations Media Award & Outstanding Production Award at the Melbourne Film Festival for the documentary *Whiteys Like Us* and a Logie nomination for the documentary series *Drama School*.

The documentary *A Girl, A Horse, A Dream* is the first film for her production company Pony Films. The company currently has two projects in development with the AFC & NSW FTO - the documentary series *Missing* & the feature film *Storage*. Both projects, written & directed by Rachel, will go into production in 2003.

“They used to call us Lady Jockettes and I used to say: well, Jockettes are men’s underpants & we’re not it.” - Pam O’Neill, Australia’s 1st professional female jockey

IAN IVESON

(Producer)

Qualified as a solicitor in London, working with such clients as Kevin McClory, producer of the Bond film *Never Say Never Again*. One of Australia’s most successful commercial producers during the 80’s and 90’s, he has also produced the feature film *Lost Things*, the TV series *Kideo!* for ABC TV and Channel 4, the sports documentary *Winning* and the short films *Get Down*, *Get Up Again* and *A Cut in the Rates*. He is in the process of casting and financing several new films including Stephen Sewell’s directorial debut, *Sisters*, starring Stellan Skarsgard, Jacqueline McKenzie and Rachel Blake and Stephen Wallace’s new film, *My Chinese Lover*.

BIOGRAPHIES

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EMMA HAY
(EDITOR)

Emma has been a freelance Editor, specialising in documentaries since 1994, editing independent projects for the ABC and SBS television. In 2001, she was awarded by the AFI for Best Achievement in Editing for *The Secret Safari* directed by Tom Zubrycki which also won best documentary at the Dendy Awards in Sydney. Films that she has edited include *The Christmas Cake* directed by Katey and David Grusovin, Winner of the Rueben Mamoulian Prize, Best Documentary, Dendy Awards, Best Australian Film, Flickerfest Sydney, *Whiteys Like Us* directed by Rachel Landers. Winner of the United Nations Media Award. Winner Outstanding Production, Melbourne Film Festival. *Stolen Generations* directed by Darlene Johnson shortlisted for an International Emmy Award 2000 and most recently *Gulpilil: One Red Blood* also directed by Darlene Johnson was invited to the Margaret Mead Festival New York 2002 and is a finalist in the Logies 2003. Emma is a committee member of the Australian Screen Editors Guild and is occasionally asked to consult on independent documentaries and funding boards.

'Houston we have a problem & the problem is gender' - B. Cooper.

ELLIOT WHEELER
(Composer)

Elliott is a Sydney based composer, currently working out of Human Worldwide. Trained as a classical and jazz pianist, he studied composition and trombone at the Sydney conservatorium and philosophy at Sydney University. At the age of 23, whilst working for Arizona Productions, he won both AWARD and the ATV award for best music, and was shortlisted for a Cannes Lion. He has worked as a composer and orchestrator for MGM, has worked in theatre and TV (including this year writing the new theme for Disney), and has written music for many international advertising campaigns (including Heineken, Visa, and Sony). He has been working at Human since September 02.

SIMON SMITH
(Cinematographer)

A graduate of the Australian Film Television and Radio School, Simon has worked as cinematographer on feature films, documentaries and music videos for many producers, including National Geographic USA, the BBC and Channel 4 UK, and has won ACS awards for his cinematography on music videos for Dannii Minogue and Jimmy Barnes. Recent documentary shoots include 6 weeks on the Kokoda Trail in PNG, 5 weeks in Indonesia, UK and USA for film about the 1965 coup in Indonesia, and 6 weeks in the Great Sandy Desert with a group of Aboriginal artists from Balgo. He was nominated for a 2002 AFI award for best cinematography in a non-feature film for the documentary *Surviving Shepherds Pie*. He also co-owns the fabulous Italian restaurant Cucina Marchigiana.

CHRIS BOLLARD
(Sound Recordist)

Chris has been recording films and documentaries for over 15 years and is regarded as one of Australia's best documentary recordists, working with ABC, SBS, BBC and Discovery Channel amongst others. His recent work includes *Making Burly Man*, about the making of the sequels to *The Matrix*, *Super Surgeries – Robotic Surgery & Restoring the Senses: Eyesight, Island at the Bottom of the World*, a journey through Tasmania & India and family legend in search of Merle O'Beron, *Whitey's Like Us* and *Drama School - NIDA* an eight part documentary series looking at a year of NIDA life – the renowned school of dramatic arts.

