

HARNESS JEWELS: THE PUNTER

Punter turns life around with \$245,000

By BARRY LICHTER

A SOUTH Auckland punter who admits he knows almost nothing about horses won \$245,000 last weekend on his first visit to the races for 20 years.

The man, who for much of the last four years has been so poor he took a calculator with him around the supermarket aisles, cleaned out the TAB bookies in a series of stunning multi bets on Harness Jewels day at Cambridge.

On a day which the bookies rated nearly their worst on record, and saw punters plunder more than \$500,000 from the bagmen, he raked in collect after collect.

Driving home in his "beaten-up old van", with his wallet packed with winning tickets, the man said his head was spinning and he was constantly pinching himself to see if he was dreaming.

But when he met the *Sunday Star-Times* yesterday to tell his life-changing story he arrived in a new \$55,000 car, and with a new outlook on life.

"This has been a real blessing for me," he said. "All of a sudden all the pressure is off."

The man had to give up work four years ago when his wife had a brain haemorrhage and stroke, and they survived on an invalid's and caregiver's benefit.

Forced out of their big home in a nice suburb they lived in a two-bedroom unit above their son's house.

"We had nothing and life was really hard. We had \$220 to live on each week and I had to use a calculator at the supermarket to make sure I didn't go over the \$40 we could afford to spend on groceries. "I couldn't go visiting because I didn't have money for petrol, and I spent my whole time looking after my wife, cooking and cleaning.

"I had to look after her like a child and I began to wonder if it was going to be like this for the rest of my life. The doctors said she'd never walk again."

Earlier this year when his wife started to show real improvement he was able to take part-time work and afford the odd bet.

"I'd bet on and off, without much suc-



Bookies' nemesis: Safin, inner, wins at Cambridge last Saturday. Photo: Trish Dunell

cess, relying on horse names or jockeys I liked. I've heard of Cardigan Bay and Christian Cullen but don't know much about horses at all."

When he saw an advertisement for a telephone tipping service run by Craig "The Whale" Thompson, he decided to call, even though at \$1.79 a minute it wasn't cheap.

"I got a few winners but when the telephone bills came in I thought perhaps I shouldn't be doing it."

But when the man found he was winning consistently, he became a regular caller, met up with the Whale, who marked his *Best Bets* and told him to take a few multis, then accepted an invitation to Cambridge for the big Jewels day.

"I didn't know what a multi was a few weeks ago and this business of one out-one back and lead-trail is all gobbledegook to me.

"But my whole life has changed since

I met the Whale. Now I love the multis and I just take what the Whale tips." What the Whale tipped last Saturday is the prime reason the TAB took a pasting, believes head bookie Paul Lally, who would say only that their losses were closer to \$500,000 than \$1 million.

In an extraordinary feat Thompson, as guest selector on *Trackside TV*'s morning preview, picked all nine winners on top, including two upsetters.

And in the big tent adjacent to the winner's circle at Cambridge, bystanders watched amazed as all the man's horses came in, spawning a series of multi collects, from strings of two horses to as many as six.

Most tickets were for values of only \$10 or \$20, but they multiplied into huge collects, the best a \$20 six-leg multi, paying a dividend of \$83,205, the biggest of the day.

What few knew was that it was only a

continuation of the previous night when another series of Whale-tipped horses saw him collect nearly \$50,000.

The man is adamant he won't squander his sudden change of fortune – he's already given his son \$25,000 to thank him – and plans to invest some of the money.

"If I can get my wife a medical clearance I want to take her on holiday too. She can walk now and has even started to drive."

He's attacking more multis too while his luck is in – he's in line for a nice collect on today's Silver Collar final at the Auckland dogs after starting multis on the Whale's greyhound Another Pride, who upset at \$38.10 last Friday night.

But the best is yet to come. "I had a dream about a year ago. I was in a TAB and they were writing me a big cheque. I could see the amount so clearly, it was \$191,600.

"I know I'm going to win it."

BIG BROWN

Hotshot all rage in Belmont

THE BELMONT Stakes is a proven graveyard for Triple Crown contenders, but Big Brown's trainer is convinced the punishing distance won't have any effect on his unbeaten and still untested colt.

"I think it will work to our advantage," Richard Dutrow Jr said of today's tough mile-and-a-half affair at Belmont Park, New York.

"In all of his races, all you've got to do is watch him from the eighth pole to where the pony boy has to pull him up. You just can't imagine that this race is going to be too far for him."

Big Brown, easy winner of each of his five starts, breezed through the Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes and is a prohibitive favourite in the Belmont in his quest to be the 112th Triple Crown champion.

However, 18 horses have won the first two legs of the Triple Crown only to see their dreams of equine immortality dashed at Belmont Park.

Even Big Brown's jockey, Kent Desormeaux, lost his previous Triple Crown shot in 1998 when Real Quiet was worn down in the final strides of the Belmont by Victory Gallop.

Big Brown's task was potentially made easier when it was revealed yesterday that second favourite, Casino Drive, has a bruised hind foot.

Hall of Fame trainer Nick Zito has a couple of 30-1 shots running in the Belmont, Anak Nakal and Da' Tara, and he says anything is possible.

He should know, having saddled Birdstone to a stunning upset victory in the 2004 Belmont, dashing the Triple Crown hopes of Smarty Jones.

The Belmont will be televised live on *Trackside*.

– Reuters

BELMONT TODAY

	BELMONT STAKES	10.25
	\$1,280,000, m&d, sw, 2400m	
1	11111 Big Brown (1) 57.0	K Desormeaux
2	X7832 Guadalupe (2) 57.0	J Castellano
3	6712 Macho Again (3) 57.0	G Gomez
4	11153 Denis Of Cork (4) 57.0	R Albarado
5	11 Casino Drive (5) 57.0	E Prado
6	13952 Da Tara (6) 57.0	A Garcia
7	4X614 Tale Of Ekati (7) 57.0	E Coa
8	X6757 Anak Nakal (8) 57.0	J Leparoux
9	2X123 Ready's Echo (9) 57.0	J Velazquez
10	11313 Icabod Crane (10) 57.0	J Rose

SELECTIONS: Big Brown, Casino Drive, Icabod Crane

WELLINGTON REVIEW

Mega Belt seals the deal for Grays

THE HONG Kong owners who bought a weanling brother to Mega Belt the day before his win at Trentham yesterday will be patting themselves on the back.

Manawatu trainer Kevin Gray completed the six-figure deal last Friday – and Mega Belt did the decent thing by proving too strong in the \$25,000 open class handicap over 1400m.

Gray said the sale came about mainly through Mega Belt's recent good form, which now reads three wins and three seconds from his six last starts.

"They'll be rubbing their hands, now that he has won again," Gray said.

The weanling was put through extensive examination before the sale was agreed to, Gray said, the tests including 45 X-rays.

Mega Belt is owned by Gray and his wife Kathleen, who bred the O'Reilly five-year-old gelding from their Kingdom Bay mare Shy Belt.

The horse has raced 24 times for seven wins, six seconds and two thirds, earning more than \$118,000.

That's a record Gray is proud off, considering Mega Belt had an operation for a respiratory problem last year.

Gray admitted he had doubts about Mega Belt in the yesterday's heavy ground but successful rider Hayden Tinsley reported conditions were not as bad as some anticipated.

Mega Belt trailed the leader Lord



Ration Point and jockey Buddy Lammas win the Porirua Club Cup at Trentham yesterday. Photo: Ross Setford/NZPA

Monty most of the way but, after reaching the lead at the top of the straight, was headed by Mr Benny Hill.

But Tinsley was simply biding his time on Mega Belt and had only to ride the horse hands and heels to score by half-a-length.

Mr Benny Hill held second and there was a length to Rat Tat in third.

Lord Monty was 1½ lengths further back fourth in his third start since fracturing a cannon bone last August.

OTAKI APPRENTICE rider Buddy Lammas lost his one kilogram claim when riding two winners at Trentham yesterday to take his career tally to 101 wins.

Lammas' first win came aboard First Class Rose, who dead-heated for first in a maiden race, and his second win was with Ration Point in the Porirua Club Cup.

Lammas had been able to claim a 1kg allowance, but with 100 wins can no longer claim any allowance.

BRISBANE REVIEW

Mr Baritone puts Moroney in fine voice

TRANS-TASMAN TRAINER Mike Moroney claimed his fifth group one win of the season when upsetter Mr Baritone took the \$A1 million Stradbroke Handicap at Eagle Farm in Brisbane yesterday.

The victory was the 42nd group one triumph for the Melbourne-based Kiwi trainer, who earlier this season claimed the Whakanui International at Te Rapa with Mission Critical, the Queen Elizabeth Stakes and Doomben Cup with Sarera, and the Coolmore Classic with Eskimo Queen.

"I'm not sure, but I think this has been my best season," Moroney said, revealing he almost decided not to push on with Stradbroke plans after Mr Baritone finished third to Litter over 1500m at Eagle Farm on May 31.

"We almost changed our minds and thought about running in the 1600-metre race today after Steve Arnold said he struggled in the ground last start."

Mr Baritone was bought by Moroney's brother Paul, his training partner in New Zealand, on behalf of Australian clients, but the trainer was reluctant to reveal the gelding's purchase price.

Moroney has been a big supporter of yesterday's winning apprentice, Sebastian Murphy, and had no hesitation calling on the inexperienced rider for the high-pressure sprint.

"He's only young but he's a very, very good rider – one of the best young riders in Australia."

The champion Victorian apprentice emulated his father by claiming his first group one victory in the Stradbroke.

Murphy, 18, snatched victory on the six-year-old, who started at \$31, by half a head over Queenslander Hard To Catch in the 1400m feature.

Murphy's win was the first by an apprentice since Greg Hall won the Stradbroke on Innisfree in 1978.

Murphy, who has been riding for only three years and is apprenticed to Ballarat trainer Darren Weir, said the victory was an emotional moment and easily the highlight of his brief career.

"My dad won his first group one race as a rider when he rode Plush Embassy. I couldn't be happier," Murphy said. Murphy's father Gary won the 1990 Stradbroke Handicap in a race which was also run on a badly rain-affected track.

Earlier, the John Wheeler-trained filly PETUSHKI ran a brave second in the Queensland Derby, rider Leith Innes bringing her from second last in the 20-horse field. Fellow Kiwi MISSION CRITICAL did not handle the soft footing, weakening to ninth after being prominent early. Winner Riva San became the fourth filly to take out the Queensland Oaks-Queensland Derby double after Analie (1973), Bravery (1988) and Royal Magic (1992).

BOOKIES BACK FOR MORE

TAB head bookie Paul Lally has put the Jewels day bath down to "a freak of nature" and says they'll be back to take on punters at Alexandra Park this Friday night.

It might be Black Friday this week, but few days were blacker for Wellington's bagmen last Saturday when a freakish run of winning favourites at Cambridge left TABs skint for cash. "It wasn't our worst day but it was close to it," said Lally. "But we're back on course on Friday and we're looking forward to getting it all back."

Claims in some quarters that punters raked in as much as \$1.5 million from multi bets were "ludicrous," Lally said.

"It was pretty bad but nowhere near as bad as everyone thinks."

While he could not be specific, Lally said "the amount we lost was closer to half a million than a million."

Lally said while three-year-old filly Safin had set up many of the big multi collects, their final result would have been "horrific" had hot favourite Lizzie Maguire held on in that race.

The single biggest collect of the day, which included Safin and two-year-old filly Lauraella was a \$20 six-leg multi which reaped \$83,205.

Second best was another six-leg ticket for \$10 which collected \$54,826, while next on the winning tree were two seven-leg multis, one for \$10 netted \$46,861 and another for just the minimum of \$5, was worth \$43,861.

"All the ducks just seemed to line up for punters on the day," said Lally, who revealed payouts were escalated by a run of favourites at the gallops too, many including Ellerslie open handicap winner Pindy.

Lally said a review of the markets they'd framed for the nine Jewels races

showed none of their prices were significantly wrong. While Safin had opened at \$31 seven weeks earlier, and Lauraella had been at \$21, no multis on the futures market had been of any significance.

The opposite was in fact correct, the bookies cashing in from most early multis through the scratchings of Auckland Reactor and One Dream.

"A lot of the damage was done on the day and we believe a lot of that was through the phenomenal tipping of the Whale."

Craig "The Whale" Thompson, guest selector on *Trackside*'s morning preview, selected all nine winners on top.

"A lot of his clients did very well," said Lally of the Whale's *Harness Hotline*, a telephone tipping service run by the South Auckland form analyst.

"That's why Lauraella paid only \$4.90 on the tote (\$15 at close on fixed odds). After Safin won, we believe people were following Craig's tips."

Lally said he would be conducting a full review of betting on the Jewels, and whether the futures market should be open so early,

but he doubted the TAB would suffer any similar debacle at Ashburton next year.

"The pattern of racing at Ashburton will be a lot kinder to us," said Lally explaining how the bigger 1400-metre track gave more horses the chance to win.

"I don't think many horses came from the back at Cambridge which is more suited to the sit-sprint horses and where barrier draws are crucial."

Lally cited the case of Ashburton's inaugural 2007 Harness Jewels winner GTH Aveross, who slaughtered many multis when winning the opening race at \$81.70.



PAUL LALLY

Lucky escape

KUMEU'S KELLY Blakemore was lucky to escape serious injury when she was catapaulted through the air in a home-turn smash at the Alexandra Park workouts yesterday. Blakemore was unable to avoid two horses who fell in front of her and was thrown heavily and knocked unconscious. She was taken to Auckland Hospital for X-rays, but was discharged early last night. "The one in front went down and I had nowhere to go," Blakemore said on returning home. "I've cracked a couple of ribs and have a very sore hip, and can't walk." Blakemore's father Danny said he believed Kelly's safety vest and helmet, "which is cracked", saved her. Fellow drivers Jay Abernethy and Andrew Sharpe escaped unhurt.

Ellerslie jackpot

THE TAB will offer a \$300,000 Pick Six at Ellerslie on Saturday after just 0.2 winning units bagged a share of yesterday's \$250,000 pot at Te Rapa. The Six Pack will be worth \$50,000.

Drug illness

A BRISBANE amphetamine laboratory raided by police could be the source of a mystery illness that has flattened talented galloper Chasm and ruled him out of tomorrow's Queensland Guineas. Queensland stewards launched an investigation into the puzzling ailment which has left the gelding with severe virus-like symptoms.

Stackhouse warned

APPRENTICE DANIEL Stackhouse was warned yesterday over his riding of Te Rapa two-year-old winner He's Licarocket. Stackhouse was held up for a run in the straight and, several times while trying to work clear, hit the hindquarters of Helen's Recipe. The filly was eased down over the final 150 metres and was later found to have minor abrasions to her hind legs, and to be shin sore.

Rain pain

SEACHANGE'S NEW trainer Graeme Sanders has arrived in England to oversee the mare's preparation for her first scheduled run in the Golden Jubilee Stakes at Ascot in two weeks. Seachange continues to train well, but the weather in England is still wet and cold, spawning fears she might strike a wet track. Poppy Diary: www.sstlive.co.nz

BRISBANE CUP TOMORROW

	AUSTRALIA POST BRISBANE CUP	5.50
	\$A305,000, group 2, 2400m	
1	25141 Scream Shot tdm (8) 59.0	G Colless
2	38X67 Roman Arch dm (6) 56.5	S Scriven
3	57356 Stormhill d (16) 55.5	-
4	10335 Like It Is (14) 55.0	S Murphy (a)
5	13716 Viewed b (13) 54.5	D Oliver
6	DDX00 Art Success tm (2) 54.0	A Pattillo
7	DDX01 Devastating tdm (3) 54.0	G Schofield
8	17913 Fulmonti t (19) 53.5	R McMahon
9	70882 King Latarmiss dm (9) 53.0	J Taylor
10	21401 Luvuleo d (12) 53.0	P Wells (a)
11	50244 Scattergun mh (17) 53.0	D Nikolic
12	99125 Tommifrancis m (18) 52.5	C Brown
13	28101 Ezkone t (10) 52.0	M Morris
14	12543 Sky Biscuit d (1) 52.0	D Spriggs
15	32297 Eskimo Dan t (11) 52.0	L Morrison
16	02136 Teddific b (15) 52.0	S Galloway
17	09093 The Sportsman m (20) 52.0	B El-Issa
18	X6253 Doug's Mate t (4) 52.0	J Byrne
19	74326 Fast Future db (7) 52.0	-
20	32198 Chiefcomingfirst dm (9) 52.0	-
Emergencies: Fast Future, Chiefcomingfirst.		
SELECTIONS: Viewed, Scenic Shot, Fulmonti		