

TRIO'S AIMING TO JOIN ELITE HONOUR ROLL



At Sydney's headquarters, Royal Randwick: Ben Osmond, Molly Bourke and Zac Wadick

THREE YOUNG RIDERS ARE HOPING TO JOIN AN HONOUR ROLL AT ROYAL RANDWICK WHICH IS SCATTERED WITH THE NAMES OF SOME OF AUSTRALIA'S FINEST JOCKEYS

WORDS: RAY HICKSON IMAGES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

"It's a good board to be on. You can see all the names on there, you've almost got to be on there to give yourself a chance."

When it comes to getting a foot in the door in Sydney's senior riding ranks it's a good head start if you can be champion apprentice – the honour roll attests to that.

For the leaders of our current crop of junior riders – Zac Wadick, Ben Osmond and Molly Bourke – it's getting close to crunch time as each are due to complete their apprenticeship in 2025 and one of them will likely walk away with their name on that board overlooking the old scales at Royal Randwick.

It's a board you could easily walk straight past but it has names that, as Wadick rightly pointed out with the above comment, have stepped up to the mark beyond their indentures.

As they prepare to do battle for the 2024/25 title, the trio discuss the significance to them of the crown and the Theo Green Medal that comes with it.

Zac: "You only really get one crack at it and it's good to catapult your career after your time. If you look at the board the ones that have won it have gone on with it."

Ben: "It keeps us competitive with each other as well, when I see Zac or Molly ride a winner it makes you want to ride one next."

Molly: "It gives you that kick along to have something behind your name when you come out of your time."

Not only are they competing against themselves they have to do battle with the leading riders in Sydney. That makes every win a vital one when it comes to the premiership.

There are times, like in January and from May to July, that are seen as crucial for apprentices to shine when the top jockeys chase interstate or international glory or take holiday breaks.

And it creates a lot of interest in Sydney racing when the carnival moves on.

Zac: "It's the hardest riding district in Australia. Most of the year it's a grind and you've got to keep putting your best foot forward and trying your hardest."

Ben: "You've got to show up, really work hard, and hopefully it pays off."

Molly: "It's all about working hard, about momentum, as long as you can keep that momentum and keep improving you'll make it."

Osmond's apprenticeship is currently due to end on May 31 but it'd be likely he'll extend his time until at least the end of the season if he remains in contention for the title.

It's been a breakout season for the 25-year-old who is considerably taller and therefore has to watch his weight a little more than the others but is seeing the results since joining Kris Lees at Newcastle having started his career with Todd Howlett and a winner at Gulgong in 2021.

"I think Kris is a really good boss, he gives you a good go," Osmond said.

"He's got that confidence in his apprentices to put them on his better horses which gives you more confidence as well. I haven't looked back since going there.

"I ride work for Chris Waller once a week and it's been a snowball effect since then getting support from other Sydney trainers."

Lees guided the early career of Group 1-winning jockey Dylan Gibbons who was runner-up in the apprentice title battle of 2022/23 with champion Zac Lloyd, and Osmond would like to think a rivalry with Wadick and Bourke can propel each of them to greater heights.

Bourke, 21, is wary that she needs to use the remainder of her apprenticeship, due to finish before the end of the season but again likely to be extended, to lay the groundwork for her future.

She said trainer John Sargent has been instrumental in promoting her and hopes to capitalise on what she's achieved so far.

"Probably at the start I never quite thought I'd end up being at this level of riding but now I definitely have (the apprentice title) in sights and it'd be great to win it," she said.

"Just being here was my first goal but now I've made an established name and am a chance, I definitely want a shot at it.

"That's the scariest part of coming to the end of an apprenticeship, whether you can continue the success as a senior rider without that claim.

"Sarge is great to me, he allows me to go once a week and do outside work and I ride for other trainers when I finish for him in the morning at Randwick. Both the boys are riding great so it'll definitely be interesting."



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For Wadick, his shot at the title is a long time coming given he was due to follow previous champion apprentices Robbie Dolan, Tom Sherry and Tyler Schiller through the Mark Newnham 'production line'.

Not long after Newnham moved to Hong Kong, Wadick joined the Brad Widdup stable at Hawkesbury and he said the trainer is keeping him confident and focused on his goals as he also nears the end of his apprenticeship.

The 22-year-old sees it as quite important to get his name on that roll of honour at Royal Randwick to

Talented young jockeys Zac Wadick, Molly Bourke and Ben Osmond

give himself the best chance for longevity in the city – but he realises it's not a given.

"You've got to keep riding well. I've never been under the illusion that I'd come out of my time and be like James McDonald," he said.

"If I'm still needed here in Sydney I'll keep riding here and riding as well as I can. It's good to be competing at this level but I wouldn't be the first who hasn't quite fired coming out of my time.

"You've got to have some sort of grounding and some sort of success so when you do come out and you're on the same playing field as everyone else so there's an attraction to put you on.

"If you've won a premierships, albeit an apprentice one, it goes to show you've competed well.

"We all get our own support from different trainers but I think we're all equally getting good opportunities in our own rights." **RNSW**