

THE PRIDE OF THE EVEREST

WARWICK FARM TRAINER JOE PRIDE IS AN ADMIRER OF THE EVEREST CONCEPT AND HAVING CONQUERED IT LAST YEAR, HE'S KEEN TO AGAIN REACH THE EVEREST PEAK

WORDS: RAY HICKSON IMAGES: BRADLEY PHOTOGRAPHERS

The TAB Everest trophy was always going to be one that Joe Pride wanted on his shelf.

It represents the peak of sprint racing in Australia and the Warwick Farm trainer has built a reputation for producing high class sprinters.

Some may not realise that reputation goes back as far as his first Group 1 winner Red Oog in 2005, to the likes of Terravista and Rain Affair and Tiger Tees to name a few, so it's no surprise the TAB Everest is a concept that appeals to him.

As the reigning TAB Everest winning trainer, thanks to Think About It's victory in 2023, Pride may have a little hint of bias but he says it's an indisputable fact that the race works and has achieved the rare feat of cutting through the racing bubble.



Trainer Joe Pride pauses to reflect after capturing last year's TAB Everest



Standing room only at Royal Randwick on TAB Everest Day

"It's tailor made for Australian conditions, the fact that it's 1200m," Pride said.

"If it was a 2000m race you'd have them coming from all over the world and that might be attractive for some people but I think punters and racegoers like the known. They like to know the form of their horses.

"Throw in the theatre of the slots. It works, it's brilliant. It really is. And I think it will continue to work really well.

"The day itself is massive, you get a good young crowd. It's clearly the best concept, I can't think of one better.

"It's easy for me to say, I've won one and placed in a few more. I've been a big part of it but I think anyone can aspire to be there.

"That idea that it's only for the elite is rubbish because any trainer, anywhere in Australia, if you've got a horse good enough can be involved."

Given his history with top class sprinters it's a small surprise that Pride's first TAB Everest starter didn't eventuate until 2020 when the warhorse Eduardo won his way into the race.

Since then, he's had a runner each year and would like to think that can continue in 2024.

It was something of an inglorious introduction to the race, though, as Eduardo finished second last behind *Classique Legend*.

But he returned the following year and was beaten less than half a length into third behind his great rival *Nature Strip*.

Then along came *Private Eye*. Pride turned the Epsom winner of 2021 into one of the nation's best sprinters and he was run down in the shadows by *Giga Kick* in the 2022 edition.

At the time *Private Eye* finished second in the TAB Everest, *Think About It* had won a maiden and a Class 1 and showed promise but little did Pride know the journey he would undertake in the following 12 months.

He would return on January 11 and win a midweek Benchmark 72 at Warwick Farm. Just over 10 months later he conquered the TAB Everest with a winning streak stretching to nine (including two Group 1s) with *Private Eye* running third.

"I had a little lull after *Terravista*, *Ball of Muscle* was an emergency one year," Pride said.

"It's not easy to get horses of that calibre and I've been fortunate since Eduardo came along to have the horses good enough to run in it.



THE TAB EVEREST

"And there'll be another time when I haven't so I'm enjoying the run we've had of late getting them in there."

There was a sense of not quite 'now or never' from Pride as the horses went to the 1200m start at Randwick on October 14 last year.

So it was a little hard for him to celebrate in the aftermath, describing Think About It's win as more of a relief on the day than anything else.

"I went into it thinking it was my race to lose, I was happy with both horses and I knew they had a chance," he said.

"I'd been in it the past few years and I felt like 'if I don't get it now when am I going to get a race like this'.

"It's a dangerous mindset but you can't help the way you feel and that's how I felt about it.

"I've got to say I don't get the enjoyment out of it that I probably should. I take it all very seriously and I don't sit back and smell the roses.

"That's not my personality unfortunately, I wish I could say I just lapped it all up and enjoyed every minute of it.

"It's pressure you know, anything can go wrong and it's a tense time, but I don't want to do anything else.

"This is a good kind of pressure. We're talking about horses getting into a race, I'm not trying to save someone's life. I'm not a brain surgeon but I take it seriously, that's what I'm paid to do.

"That's a lot of hard work and a lot of things that need to go right."

Think About It was a \$70,000 purchase and prior to the start of his spring campaign he'd banked \$12,153,050 with 11 wins from 17 starts.

Pride puts his disappointing autumn down largely to the effects of that meteoric rise.

He's taken the approach that if Think About It is there to defend his TAB Everest crown he'll be there on his merits and that will be decided depending on his performance in the Premiere Stakes (1200m) on October 5.

"Everyone talks about his last preparation and how he didn't run a mile," he said.

"The year that was 2023 for that horse was so big he couldn't just keep climbing and I think that's all last preparation was.

"I don't think it had much to do at all with the distance I stretched him out to because I watched him win a Stradbroke running away. It was a tough 2023 for him and that took its toll in the autumn.

"I've learned over the past few years not to stress about the slots, they take care of themselves.

"I hate coming into a preparation, because it rarely works, where you've got to earn your way into a race because you find yourself pressing the buttons a little too early and you spend all your pennies qualifying.

"You need to have the right horse, have them going well and not lose sight of the fact you have to have them ready on Everest Day." *RNSW*

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Think About It (Sam Clipperton; red cap) holds off all challengers in the TAB Everest