

DAMON GABBEDY hails from Fremantle in Western Australia but currently resides in Melbourne where he operates as Belmont Bloodstock Agency.

He went to CBC Fremantle and was sports mad. Captain of the football team, tennis squad, swimming team and athletics and excelled at all of them. He even won 'best and fairest' on the footy field for three years in a row.

Perhaps if Damon's father, John, had actually come home with the boat he was supposed to instead of a racehorse his life might have continued in the sporting field, but the family's interest turned to the racetrack when Bynsaab turned out to be a star (Group 2 winner and Group 1 placed). That was it - they were all hooked!

Damon started his career with Goodwood Bloodstock by working for nothing (even he can't believe it!) but he was doing work experience during university holidays. He must have created some sort of impression because his boss John Chalmers created a job for him in the pedigree department.

Damon remembers it well, "Simon Vivian taught me pedigrees, Mike Becker, Noel Carter and Russell Betts were there at the time and Mark Pilkington came along later.

"In those days it was pre-computer so we did all the research and pedigrees by hand. We looked up the stud books then looked up the race results and wrote it all by hand before it went to the printers. It took hours and hours and there were many late nights."

It was possibly this grounding that helped Damon with the knowledge he has today, instead of just pressing a button on the computer.

I asked Damon if he could recall any funny incidents whilst at Goodwood. Well, I should have known better - but here goes.

"Yes, I can remember helping sell a broodmare one day and the veterinary report came through," he said. "We all shared a big desk in a communal office so there were about ten people around as I was reading the report. The vet noted that the mare had a slightly sloping vulva and as a young sweet and obviously very naive young man, I asked the room, "What is a vulva?" You can imagine the reaction, especially with that lot! (I blamed my parents - I think they forgot the birds and the bees chat!)

Apart from that disaster, which I am sure took forever to go away, Damon obviously enjoyed his work at Goodwood as he stayed there for



He's the best dressed bloodstock agent in town, but behind the good looks, acerbic wit and smart clothes is a man with an excellent eye for a horse and a wealth of knowledge about pedigrees. **Sunspeed** recently caught up with Damon to find how he went from a Fremantle boy to an 'A' Lister Bloodstock Agent.

DAMON GABBEDY

five years and graduated to sales manager.

Then, with four months paid leave accrued because of the long hours at Goodwood, Damon decided to further his knowledge and work for a year in London. Well that was the intention but the lure of the London nightlife and the shops were too much of a distraction for Damon, although he did manage to spend time with the famous Tattersall's auction house in Newmarket.

One thing he did do was make some great contacts and friends which he has kept, one of them being Martin Mitchell, Director of Tattersalls, who stayed with him in Melbourne this year.

The other good thing that happened was while swanning round Europe doing his best, Damon was approached by astute Bloodstock Agent Debbie Evans and offered a partnership deal. Damon jumped at the chance and they worked together for the next 8-9 years under Belmont Bloodstock Agency that Debbie founded. This is where he gained valuable knowledge and experience.

The move to Melbourne was inevitable Damon recalls, "At that stage, the bloodstock scene in Western Australia was shrinking. All the big players had either died, gone to jail, skipped the country or gone broke! Debbie had a child and was spending more time out of the office and I was starting to get a little bored. After family consultations finally all agreed that if I wanted to get ahead I had to move East, so that's what I did.

"It was the only way to go. Although it was hard leaving at the time. There is only so much you can do by electronic media. Through Debbie I had built up many good contacts but I needed to get to know people personally and make new contacts."

South Yarra will probably never be the same, but needless to say, he loved Melbourne and settled in very quickly.

Damon's preference has always been selling breeding stock and he gets great satisfaction from watching a mare purchased for a client develop into an outstanding broodmare. Some of the more notable purchases are the dams of Northerly, Covertly and Shirazamatuzz to Neville and Susan Duncan and also the dams of Dizelle, Brockman's Lass and Oceanfast, the dam of Alingi and her



Top - Damon Gabbedy with Shane Crawford and Bob Peters. Above - Astute bloodstock agent Debbie Evans with Damon Gabbedy who worked together for 9 years under Belmont Bloodstock Agency.

\$2.6 million dollar yearling filly.

Other notable purchases are this year's VRC Derby winner, Benicio (he was a \$525,000 Easter yearling), Encosta De Lago and Le Zagaletta for Joe Throsby and the Oaks winning Zabeel filly, Fatal Attraction.

On the private front, Damon negotiated the sale of Group 1 winners Jezabeel (in foal to Danehill), Dashing Eagle (in foal to Zabeel) and Danelagh (in foal to Fusaichi Pegasus), all in excess of one million dollars.

One thing he never gets sick off is attending race meetings and yearling sales. He loves Moonee Valley

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“AN AGENT FRIEND OF MINE GOT US IN THE MEMBERS’ BOX AREA AND I WENT FOR A WALK AND SPOTTED SARAH JESSICA PARKER AND HUSBAND MATTHEW BRODERICK. BEING A BIG SEX IN THE CITY FAN I COULDN’T HELP MYSELF - SO I WENT AND INTRODUCED MYSELF...”

(especially Cox Plate day) where the atmosphere is electric.

With regard to sales venues, Damon says without a doubt, Karaka is the best in the southern-hemisphere as it’s very user friendly but says there is also something special about being under the famous tree at the Inglis complex at Easter time. “It was an amazing atmosphere this year with record prices being set everywhere.”

Being the well-travelled bloodstock agent that he is, I asked Damon for one of his most memorable moments overseas.

“One of my most memorable fun moments was being in New York at the Belmont Stakes watching Funny Cide

attempt to win the Triple Crown. An agent friend of mine got us into the members’ box area and I went for a walk and spotted Sarah Jessica Parker and husband Matthew Broderick. Being a big Sex In The City fan I couldn’t help myself, so I went and introduced myself. I got a bit tongue-tied (most unusual for me) and starstruck and introduced myself as ‘Damon from down under’. I felt like a dork and then blubbered on about loving her, loving the show, loving him and loving everything! I did manage to get a photo with them though.”

When asked where he would most like to work, Damon says London but admits he would have to be earning heaps - we all know how expensive it is to live in London, particularly with Damon Gabbedy’s tastes. In his words, “I went to the December sales in Newmarket last year and spent 10 days in London and couldn’t believe how much everything cost. I was paying the equivalent of \$15 for a vodka in a nightclub and that’s not good when you have a drinking habit like mine!” - and let’s not mention his penchant for shopping.

Although the Australian market has been very strong this year Damon still feels it’s a long way behind America and Europe in dollar terms.

“The top priced yearling in America this year was US\$9.7 million and ours was \$3 million and don’t forget they had a two-year-old in a ready-to-run sale fetch US\$16 million - UNBELIEVABLE!”

As a bloodstock agent attending all sales in Australia and New Zealand Damon feels WA breeders still need to become more professional and efficient, especially when preparing and presenting yearlings at sales time. He feels

the standard between Sydney, Melbourne, New Zealand and Western Australia is very noticeable.

“We breed and produce some outstanding gallopers in the West but WA breeders need to keep investing in new bloodlines by adding new broodmares to their band. This then helps increase the appeal to Eastern State’s trainers and buyers and will entice them over to the yearling sales.

“I also feel that it would be great if breeders got together (as they are starting

to do) to try and import new stallions to stand in the West and then help support that stallion and each other.

“The industry has changed dramatically since my days at Goodwood Bloodstock. It went backwards for a while but now seems to have turned and is improving all the time. The current Committee have done a great job with prizemoney, racing is booming and the 2006 yearling sale was very strong.”

On a more personal note, what does a busy racing man about town enjoy for relaxation? Dinner with close friends (preferably celebrating a winner), lunch at the Stokehouse, exercise (when being very disciplined in the gym swimming laps and jogging).

And the race he would love to win? The Melbourne Cup of course!

His future ambitions? Own a top class Group 1 winner then syndicate him to stand at stud and live off all future earnings.

Well fortunately for us, with Damon’s outrageously expensive tastes, London is probably out of the question on a permanent basis. So breeders will still be able to avail themselves of his expertise for a while longer. We always look forward to seeing him at yearling sale time and many of us seek his advice. For breeders looking for broodmares or stallion bookings on the eastern seaboard, Damon is your man.

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