



The Mighty Hall

Trainer **GARY HALL** is one of the top trainers in Australia with his current standout the \$1.7 million winner Themightyquinn. By Michael Guerin • Photos by Graeme Prosser

Gary Hall's first drive behind a horse was all it took.

It wasn't very far, just down to the end of the road. And the horse wasn't any racetrack hero, just the local milk cart horse.

And Hall wasn't much of a driver. He was only seven.

But it was the start of a love affair that has defined the West Australian horseman's life.

Hall, now 62, is the biggest player in the competitive Perth training ranks, his blue and gold colours the most feared at Gloucester Park.

After years of building his reputation he has capped a remarkable four seasons with The Falcon Strike by finding WA's next pacing superstar, Themightyquinn.

Together they have conquered the

West, then the Eastern Seaboard of Australia and finally Auckland.

That is where Hall pulled off a training masterstroke by winning the \$400,000 Auckland Cup with Themightyquinn, downing Mr Feelgood.

The six-year-old then won both his heats of the Inter Dominion series brilliantly before being undone by the draw and a brutal Smoken Up in the Interdom Final.

But he, his driver son Gary Junior and Themightyquinn left all who came across them in New Zealand impressed.

Which is a lot of glory for the boy who loved the old plugger who used to pull the milk delivery cart when he was growing up.

"I don't come from a racing family," says Hall.



"So the first time I had anything to do with horses was the old horse who used to pull the milk cart.

"You know, the sort of horse who used to walk around with the feedbag tied around its mouth.

"I used to get the milkman to let me drive it up to the end of the street then jump off and run back home.

"From that moment on I loved horses."

That love was fostered by learning to ride ponies and then show horses. But it was riding of a different kind that carried Hall to what would eventually prove his field of dreams.

"A friend and I used to skip school and ride our bikes down to the track when we were kids.

"I love the horses and the action and also liked to have a little bet.

"Eventually I got a guy called Buck Jones to let me sit behind a few horses and from there I got into racing."

But first there came school. Hall's father wasn't going to let him become a horse trainer, Dad thought he needed an education.

"So I stayed at school all the way, not that it really mattered because I always knew what I wanted to do.

"I was always going into horses."

As anybody in harness racing knows though, knocking on the door of oppor-

The star of the Hall stable these days is the six-year-old pacer Themightyquinn or I'm Themightyquinn as he's known in Australia. His impressive victory in the Fremantle Cup earlier this year with Gary Hall Jr. in the bike may be watched by [clicking here](#).

tunity is one thing. Being let in is quite another.

"It was hard to start with because I was only dealing in other people cast-offs.

"Because I was self taught and did not have a big name, and there were plenty of those on West Australia at the time, I had to make a name for myself."

Which isn't easy when you have a wife and four kids at home.

"I was under a lot of pressure, like a lot of young trainers are and when that happens you sometimes doubt yourself," he remembers.

"But you have to stick to your guns. I have to train the way I want to train and that works for me.

"Since I started out I have seen other good trainers come and go and you always think maybe their way is right and your way might be wrong.

"But whenever I have tried to change my training methods that is when I have got in trouble."

Those methods marry the conservative and the unorthodox.

"I am conservative in how I fast work them," admits Hall.

"Typically we only fast work them, when they are on the way up, on Wednesday and Saturday.

"And even then we don't go super quick or anything.

"When they are racing I don't even work them some weeks, like with Themightyquinn the week between the heats of the Inter Dominions."

Much of the rest of the work is done cantering in the sand and with long, slow pacework, to build an aerobic base.

"And we try to keep the horses happy.

"I weight them occasionally but

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have never been big on the heart monitors and that sort of thing.

"I think once you know the horse how they look to the eye is most important."

Once the horses are ready you need the right driver, which in Hall's case was easy to find.

His son is a natural big race driver, unlike his father.

"I was a decent driver on my own patch, against horses and horsemen I knew.

"I drove 325 metropolitan winners in WA, which is 25th on the all time list there.

"But like a lot of decent drives, especially from over here, I wasn't up to driving against the big names drivers.

"Guys like Gavin Lang, David Butcher, Tony Herlihy and Anthony Butt, to beat those guys you need to be in those big races all the time and also you need that sort of personality.

"When I started driving in big races, with a wife and four kids back home, the big money meant too much to me and I would get too wound up.

"Whereas Gary Junior is different. He is like those other guys, relaxed. He

Gary Hall and his son Gary Junior, celebrate one of Themightyquinn's many victories. This season his victories include the Auckland Cup, West Australia Cup, Fremantle Cup and Cranbourne Cup. He was also victorious in two legs of the Inter Dominion Series and second in the final.

drives better in big races."

The father and son team regularly take cast-offs from other stables and turn them into winning machines, dominating their races with a fear factor built on the last two decades of success.

Their glamour days started when Zakara, formerly with other leading WA trainers, found his way to Hall's care and won \$500,000 under his mentoring.

"He was the first really good one and he would have been better if I hadn't stuffed four or five big races driving him."

After him came a succession of handy horses before Perth pacing legend The Falcon Strike.

The New Zealand-bred pacer won four West Australian Cups, some of them on three legs, and was just nipped by Jofess in an Inter Dominion Final.

"He was a great horse and for the last three years of his career we battled leg problems.

"For him to do what he did was remarkable."

Not long after he retired, Themightyquinn, a very different type of pacer, was purchased by Hall's clients for around \$150,000 after a successful New Zealand age group career.

"He looked very fast from what I saw of his racing in New Zealand but he

pulled very hard.

"So we put the long, slow work into him and he eventually learned to relax.

"And when a horse with his speed can learn to relax they can do great things."

Anybody who has seen the son of Washington VC launch his trademark sprint will agree, but his racing style does leave him vulnerable.

"He is very fast but that also means we are better off driving him with one run and that can be a hard way to win the biggest races, as we saw in the Interdoms.

"Gary drove him inch perfect but Smoken Up simply got the front too easily."

Hall now trains 32 horses "too many, I should have less, but better ones," and many are Kiwi bred.

"I bought my first horse from New Zealand about 1990 and have been getting them ever since.

"A lot of trainers in Perth love the Kiwi horses and so do I but you have to buy the right ones.

"We have had some luck with them so I will keep going back."

But Hall may not need to, with the cast-offs he gets these days being of a far better standard.

"I got home from the Inter Dominions and there was a call from a guy in Victoria saying he has a nice horse from New Zealand and it just went a half in 55.7 seconds at the trials.

"He wants me to train it. Those are the sort of calls I never used to get and I think that all comes down to what Themightyquinn has done."

Hall relishes the idea of a smaller stable with better horses, one that can earn him some time on the Grand Circuit.

"I used to be a bit of a homebody and stay around WA but I love travelling with a good horse now.

"You meet a lot of great people and learn new things. It's fun and I've always been up for some fun."

That might explain why the youthful Hall has had four wives. And he also loves the punt.

"I love a bet but I am a bad punter. I bet on emotion. I won't back guys I don't like, that sort of thing.

"But I'm getting better and don't bet like I used to."

So what does the future hold for the Peter Pan of Perth?

"I'll never get out of horses. But eventually when my son Clint (disqualified for five years for EPO) gets his license back I'd like him to take a role in the team.

"He comes back next year and I'd like to see him train with me as a manager.

"And travelling with the good ones," he says with his ever-present smile.

Before then will be a home state

Inter Dominion, in which Im Themightyquinn (as he is known in Australia) would be the early favourite.

"It will be great having them at home, even though Gloucester Park isn't ideal for him because it doesn't really suit those coming from the back.

"But with nine horse fields he will be hard to beat. "They tell me Smoken Up will be coming but if he doesn't draw to lead....well, I've run second in two Inter Dominions. I'd like to win one before I retire."

You get the feeling the kid from the milk cart might just do that. 🐾

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