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## THE VIEW DOWNUNDER ~ HAROLD HOWE

# MAKING THE MOST OUT OF SUSHI

Sushi Sushi has collared two of the big money three-year-old events in the Southern Hemisphere, has been the subject of a serious offer of purchase and is managed expertly. A trip to North America could come next.

By North American standards, a campaign of just a dozen starts by a three-year-old is very light but it just might be the key to Sushi Sushi becoming one of the premier free for all horses in the Southern Hemisphere.

The now three-year-old Art Major colt is clearly the best sophomore in Australia and New Zealand. He's won all seven appearances to date, set a national speed record in Kiwi land and handily beaten all comers. In a rare demonstration of insight, his connections have made it clear that they are not trying to squeeze out every last dollar this campaign but are looking ahead to greater things next year.

"I don't think we've seen the best of him yet," declares Australian trainer Fred Taiba who operates a 12 horse team near Melbourne.

"What he's done to date has been remarkable. The Victoria Derby was probably his best run in that he showed great versatility.

"He's a very low maintenance horse and not because he is my barn but aside from having a bit of a temper I just can't fault him."

Few could as he has almost made a mockery of this class to date. He's earned \$639,361 (AUS) plus another \$246,555 (NZ) in a brief sojourn there earlier this year. With continued good fortune in his remaining starts he could push the total over the \$1 million mark, which is quite a nice return on his \$38,000 yearling price.

Sushi Sushi has a pedigree which is thoroughly North American and quite recognizable. His dam Sabilize comes from the family line that Perretti Farms made notable which includes Royal Mattjesty, His Mattjesty, Sablevision, Little Miss K, etc.

Sabilize found her way to Australia after the 1990 Tattersalls yearling sale where celebrated Australian trainer Brian Hancock selected her for a syndicate that encompassed Weona Standardbreds and

himself. The daughter of No Nukes required a final bid of \$50,000.

As a racehorse Sabilize proved well worth the money earning \$355,000 with 31 victories in 54 starts. While not a champion she was much better than average and with her bloodlines much was expected in the breeding shed. However, in that department she had been a disappointment.

That is until Sushi Sushi came along as her eighth foal. Despite matings with Artsplace, Abercrombie and Christian Cullen the results were left wanting. She also either slipped or came up barren on no less than five occasions. She now has a Four Starzzz Shark colt at side.

"I picked out Sushi Sushi at the Australian Pacing Gold Sale in New South Wales. Giving \$38,000 was enough considering he was well down the chain among her foals," relates Taiba.

"But being an Art Major, which generally sell strongly, and having his looks he demanded that price. A lot of



Photo by Irish Dunell

the Art Majors have a bulldog type of look to them but I say he now looks more like the former runner Michael Johnson, lean and mean.

"He's a dark bay and would be 15.2 hands and weigh around 440 kilos. He's an athlete and had that athletic look from the start."

Sushi Sushi was all colt though which led to the easy decision to have him gelded said the 28-year-old Taiba.

"Once we got over that he was a quick learner. I first got the sense that he had something one day when I worked him with an older horse who had won \$200,000 and he out stepped him for a piece. Not every horse can do that."

When the dust had settled at the end of Sushi Sushi's maiden campaign he had banked \$234,000 from seven wins in 15 starts. He finished second in the \$308,000 Australasian Breeders Crown at the end of the campaign or could have been declared Two-Year-Old of the Year.

"We were very happy with the season and not all that disappointed when he finished second because we were quite sure then that we had maybe the best two-year-old out there. That's not to take anything away from Royal Verdict who beat us because he is a quality horse."

Sushi finished third in the \$300,000 Australian Pacing Gold after an unlucky

"When you put it all together we felt the chances were very good that we were going to have a hell of a three-year-old and we were right," said trainer Fred Taiba of his star son of Art Major, Sushi Sushi, whose win in the Victoria Derby may be seen by [clicking here](#).

run but then won the Kevin Seymour Nursery Stake in Queensland where he showed he was a man among boys says Taiba.

"If you look at his record you will see that we started him out as easy as we could for several starts. That was deliberate and the way I like to bring along a horse before he moves into Group 1 competition.

"We had some driver changes but now have Greg Sugars who is one of our top young guys in Australia. He's cool, calm and collected. So when you put it all together we felt the chances were very good that we were going to have a hell of a three-year-old and we were right."

The time between the two and three-year-old campaigns for pacing horses in Australia is very tight compared to North America. Whereas here the two-year-olds finish in November and won't surface again until May, the Aussies have them concluding in August as rookies but then have them back in action again before Christmas.

"I know it is different here. Because of what I feed I have to be a little careful

in bringing these horses down. When Sushi finished we eased him down rather than just turn him out right away. He was probably out of training for just two months and the second month we used a water treadmill to keep his conditioning.

"The colt was pretty mature at two but he's added weight and grew into himself. If anyone gets close to him they like his type," says Taiba.

As he did in the juvenile campaign, Taiba eased Sushi Sushi into his three-year-old season. Starting just before Christmas there were three very easy efforts as lead ups to the \$200,000 Victoria Derby at Tabcorp Park at Melton near Melbourne.

"That was a strong effort against a very good field of horses. He went 2,240 metres in a mile rate time of 1:55.7 and as I said probably the best run of his life in the way he handled the actual racing challenges."

New Zealanders just hate to see Australian horses crossing the Tasman in an effort to take "their money." So when Sushi Sushi showed up for the \$400,000 Northern Derby at Alexandra

Park in early March, it was expected that he would be a player and he was.

After winning the elimination a week earlier, the gelding blitzed the field over a distance of 2,700 metres with a New Zealand record time of 1:57.4 (mile rate). Not only was it a record for his age but also it was the third fastest time every produced for that distance.

"All I could say after the race was 'wow.' He keeps surprising me with his talent and I expect will continue to do so. He always seems to be up to the challenge," says Taiba.

"That was the longest distance he has ever raced; most of the Aussie races are 2,240 but at home I work him 3,200.

"The fact that it is a record is nice but speed doesn't provide any rewards. It's all about beating the competition, whatever it takes. And having a sound horse afterwards."

By then it was virtually impossible for anyone to argue that the colt was not the best of his class downunder. And the telephone calls began.

"There really had not been a lot of interest from anyone to buy the horse until he won the Victoria Derby but it really kicked in after the trip to New Zealand.

"The four lads who own him are all mates of mine and none short of a bob. They kicked back a \$700,000 offer because they think so much of this horse," says Taiba.

"What we are targeting now is the Breeders Challenge in New South Wales in June and the Australasian Breeders Crown in August here in Melbourne. Those are the targets

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**... trainer Fred Taiba**

that will end his year and bring him back to race at four," says Taiba.

"But don't rule out us showing up in America. The owners would love to race a horse over there. They love to travel and so does he so who knows?"

The final chapter on Sushi Sushi remains to be written but at this juncture he has all the earmarks of a money making machine and his connections appear to be dedicated to give him every opportunity to maximize that potential. 🏇



Ray Bednarz



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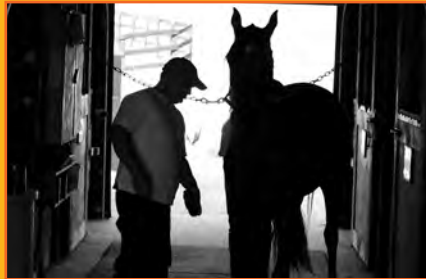
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