

U P T O T H E C H A L L E N G E

Aaron Lambert is another in a growing line of Australian horsemen making his mark in North America.

By Harold Howe • Photos by Pacing Queen

It's Wednesday night at 8:30 p.m. and Aaron Lambert has just made it back from Monticello Raceway to his home in Wrightstown, New Jersey. He calculates he has been on the road eight hours today. Morning will come early but that is the way life is for this transplanted Australian.

Through September it has been a good year for the Lambert stable which is based at Winner's International Farm. With a team of just 10 the purse earnings stand at just under \$700,000.

"We'll get to the million before the end of the year," he says confidently.

"I'm looking for some good things from Dynamic Youth who is a very good two-year-old. He'll be in the New York Sires Stake final the end of the month and has a good shot."



UP TO THE CHALLENGE

That's a Bettors Delight colt that his ownership group ponied up \$85,000 to buy last fall. As of this writing he's earned back \$65,000 of it but the big paydays could be ahead.

Then there is three-year-old Townsight Hanover who recently came within a neck of winning the \$342,000 Cane Pace which may be watched by clicking [here](#).

He's not among the very best sophomores but he's still a very useful horse with just under \$200,000 to his credit so far this year.

"This is my best year ever. I guess anyone who has a good year explains it with the same reasons: good owners, a bit of luck and hard work. I know people back home do not understand what it is like here.

"The pace of running from track to track is anything but easy. It's an entirely different way of life than what they are accustomed to."

So given the treadmill existence which one faces in North America did Aaron ever consider returning to Australia, particularly to New South Wales and its newfound riches?

"No, I'm not established enough yet to do something like that. Plus I'm married and my wife, Lynn, is an American girl who has no interest in living in Australia," says the 34 year-old Brisbane native.

"We have three kids and this is home for me now. Plus anyone who thinks that they can just walk into Sydney and take the money is kidding themselves.

"It will be as tough there as anywhere in the world and attract the best trainers and horses there are in that part of the world."

Lambert has not been back to Australia for 11 years. He's been too busy trying to make a place for himself in his adopted homeland.

"I'd be lying if I did not say it has been a struggle. I started working for Mark Kesmodel and then Noel Daley who is a great friend to me. In my opinion Noel is the best guy in racing, just look at all the people he has helped over the years," he offers.

"I guess I worked for Noel off and



Owner Ken Tucci poses with the stable's good sophomore pacing colt Townsight Hanover, a son of Bettors Delight who has earned \$367,374 in his two seasons of racing.

on for four years. Next to my father, Jim, he has had the biggest influence on my life. My Dad, Jim taught me the basics and was a great man breaking in horses.

"He doesn't do that now but I still remember many of the things he taught me about horses. He follows what I'm doing over here closely and we talk."

In Lambert's case it has been a slow climb up the ranks in New Jersey. In 2009 he made some inroads with Sharks Legacy, a Four Starzzz Shark colt that he selected for \$26,000 as a yearling.

He developed the colt and won \$77,000 in his rookie campaign before the ownership group elected to sell him at public auction in January of his three-year-old season. He brought \$100,000 so it was a tidy profit and served as a springboard to others.

"I would have been just as happy to have had him in the barn but listen, he was bought for \$26,000, made \$77,000 and then was sold for \$100,000.

"If every owner could do that with their horses, everyone would be happy," says Lambert who could not have known at that point he had a better one in the stable.

Townslight Hanover is an interesting tale.

"My owner Ken Tucci had bought a yearling from Hanover Shoe Farms the year before and it turned out to have EPM. The farm took the horse back and gave Ken credit.

"I was talking with Jim Simpson (president of Hanover) afterwards and told him Ken was really keen on having a pacing colt. I asked him if by any chance the farm might have held back something that did not sell at the Harrisburg sale. He told me to give him a day and he'd call me back.

"There were three, including this one, who all had some sort of problem. In his case, he had chipped a P1 bone in his right hind ankle and the leg looked real ugly. He could not have gone to auction.

"Jim said take the horse, give him a try and if I liked him we could work something out. So I did and we came up with a deal to buy him."

It proved to be a smart move as the colt won \$173,000 in just eight starts as a

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two-year-old. Add that to his nearly \$200,000 this season and he looks like a bargain.

"If he hadn't had this problem he would have been a \$60,000 to \$70,000 colt.

"He is a good looker although a bit on the slight side and is by Bettors Delight out of Towners Image (a great pacing mare who won more than \$700,000 during her career) which makes him a half-brother to Riggins who won \$820,000.

"My biggest concern was whether or not he would stay sound enough on that ankle and it did bother him right at the end of last season.

"He's not a big rugged type and has had some bad racing luck this year. He may not quite be up to being with the best but he picks up pieces and never disgraces himself."

Another staple in the stable is the five-year-old Astreos gelding Mr Massimo. Last August Tucci plucked the horse from a \$20,000 claiming contest.

He went on to win nearly \$70,000 before the end of the year and has won over \$200,000 so far this season.

"What a great horse to have in the barn," praises Lambert.

"He's not world class but tries his guts out and gives his all every week. It's not very often that he does not have a payday. A trainer cannot get enough of that sort."

Winter is a time when many North

American trainers set their cap to make money. The heavyweight horses are gone and the racing is a bit softer.

"I think the barn looks pretty good for the winter. The yearling sales are just coming up and I expect to have 15 head of yearlings and racehorses.

"We don't have a big team and my wife is out there in the barn with me which is a big reason why we are succeeding.

"Really, I don't know what else I would ever do. I've given it some thought and can't wrap my mind around anything."

Having said that the grind is more than a little tiring for Lambert. Recently he drove seven hours to race at Batavia Downs and arrived home at five the next morning.

The following day he raced at nearby Chester Downs, then Pocono Downs on Friday, back to Pocono on Saturday and Sunday it was off to Tioga Downs four hours away.

"I'm not complaining but it is a grind. I fully understand why Brett Pelling retired when he did. Running a team the size he had is overwhelming.

"I was there when Noel got up to 100 head and it's way too much."

Being a professional horse trainer has plenty of challenges in 2011. Lambert is steadily building his reputation as a competent horseman who brings his horses ready to race. It's all he or anyone else could ask for. 🐾