

THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE'S LEADING STUD FARMS



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THE VIEW DOWNUNDER ~ HAROLD HOWE

MARCO POLO GOES TO VICTORIA

David Aldred, who left his position as GM of the BC Standardbred Association to return to his native Australia two years ago is on the move again, this time with the general manager's role at Bendigo Harness Racing Club.

What BC wouldn't give to have him back right now.

When David Aldred announced he was leaving the BC Standardbred Association and the BC Standardbred Breeders Association in December of 2008 it was a major blow to Canada's horse racing industry on the west coast.

Aldred was returning to his native Australia to be closer to his family of adult children taking a position as general manager of Harness Racing South Australia.

He's on the move again as he recently took over as general manager at the Bendigo Harness Racing Club at Lords Raceway which is under the umbrella of Harness Racing Victoria.

To put that in perspective, Bendigo is a city of 76,000 located 130 kilometres north of Melbourne. It is hardly a metropolis just yet. But like Milton, Ontario, which is the fastest growing city in Canada, Bendigo has

been identified by the Victorian government as one of two satellite cities in the state that will be the growth areas for population. Melbourne, like Vancouver, has become one of the most expensive cities in the world to live so people are heading for the hinterland.

As far as the racing goes, the Bendigo Harness Racing Club would be a bit like Flamboro Downs is to Woodbine. Tabcorp Park in near Melbourne is the heavy-weight like Woodbine whereas BHRC is the more rural first cousin.

"Bendigo races 40 days a year and would pay out somewhere near \$3 million in purse money. It has a very good racing surface and is the home for the Bendigo Harness Racing Training Centre which is the national industry training centre for people to work in the racing industry," explains the 51 year-old Aldred.

"The tracks in Australia do not have any



David Aldred

Bendigo Harness Club at Lords Raceway



slots as you call them in North America. But it has a restaurant, catering business, etc. It has some very good growth opportunities with what is happening to the community for sponsorship and community involvement.”

Aldred is an administrator and has steadily compiled an enviable resume.

“Recently, I was at a conference and had to introduce this gentleman who in his opening remarks thanked me and described me as the Marco Polo of horse racing. The reference was to my having worked around Australia and Canada. I have to admit the hat does fit.”

When Harness Racing Victoria came calling he knew that it was the opportunity he'd been waiting for and he has a five year contract.

“This is a newly created position and truthfully, the fact that it is a very nice part of the world to live in had a lot to do with it. There is a balance of lifestyle there and it brings my wife and I closer to our grandchildren too,” he offers.

“Victoria is a very vibrant state as far as harness racing goes, the best in Australia. It's the richest program and Harness Racing Victoria would be a bit like a combination of Standardbred Canada on a state or provincial scale and the Ontario Racing Commission combined. It is an umbrella organization which controls just about everything related to racing in the state.”

When Aldred came to Canada in 2006 it was a bold move and one he made in many ways for the sense of adventure of leaving home and working and living in a new country.

“Canada is somewhere I'd always wanted to come and spend some time. I had heard very good things about the racing across Canada, particularly when I was in Tasmania where Canadian stallions have had success. I wanted to work overseas to get another viewpoint and angle on racing.”

In his three years in British Columbia he did get that. He continues to follow the events there and is dismayed at what has happened since his departure.

“There are very tough times in B.C. It's a shame what is taking place. I loved my time there, which was very different from what I was accustomed to. It was like a big family community and I quite liked the fact that people were stabled on the grounds. We don't have that in Australia.”

And one other thing they do not have in Australia is a recession. The economy is white hot and the country is one of the very few who seems to have sidestepped the world's economic woes largely to huge mineral resources.

“That is reflected in the racing economy too. People are still spending

with confidence on horses and the wagering is strong. The breeding game seems fine and over all it would be difficult not to say that it's very healthy. Clearly though, Victoria is the leader in all regards.”

Australian racing does not allow for private ownership of racetracks and from a Canadian perspective the Aussies have it right.

“They've kicked the idea around of privately owned racetracks in Australia for some time and thankfully they haven't done it. In most cases, you have shareholders that have to be satisfied they've being driven by the bottom line. When you're making decisions for the profitability for shareholders or owners you don't always make the right decisions as far as the horsemen are concerned,” he stated in a 2006 interview for *The Harness Edge*.

Aldred moves into his new role this month and relishes the challenge.

“It's another chapter in my career. I wanted to get back to being involved with an actual racing club as opposed to an administrative authority. I'm a hands-on person and think my strength is in that environment.”

Even Marco Polo had to settle down at one time. 🐎