

AGRA HALL OF FAME

Rapid Journey

Red Brindle Dog

(Amerigo Magic x Miss Courtney) Whelped May 1995

Owner-Trainer: J.Carruthers

Year of Induction 1999

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS:

54 starts: 33 wins, 6, seconds, 5 thirds

Career Prizemoney \$530,995

Track record-holder Wentworth Park 520m, Dubbo 516m, Cannington 530m and Beenleigh 555m

Major Career Wins Included:

1998 Adelaide Cup 512m Angle Park

1998 Golden Easter Egg 520m Wentworth Park

1998 Perth Cup 530m Cannington

1998 National Sprint Grand Final 530m Cannington

1998 Melbourne Cup 515m Sandown Park

1998 Topgun 515m Sandown Park

By winning the 1998 Topgun at Sandown, Rapid Journey became the world prizemoney record holder, smashing American champion Mo Kick's record.

Rapid Journey has won races at every metropolitan venue on mainland Australia



A greyhound that went straight into the AGRA Hall of Fame on retirement was perhaps the greatest Greyhound of the '90's, Rapid Journey. The New South Wales owned and bred super star took all before him in the eighteen months he graced the tracks across Australia , winning no

fewer than eleven feature races including five group ones. Here is the story of how Rapid Journey went from city class sprinter to Australian champion and the highest stake winner in the world.

THE BACKGROUND

Bred by Jane and John Curruthers, Rapid Journey or “Carl” (after Carl Lewis) as he is affectionately known by his owners, was from the smart sire Amerigo Magic, out of a bitch that Jane's mother owned called Miss Courtney.

Amerigo Magic was by one of the leading sires of the early nineties, Amerigo Man, who had produced Hall of Fame inductee Flying Amy among others. Both sire and dam had quality bloodlines that include blood of the champion Temlee. I asked Jane if they had sent Miss Courtney to Amerigo Magic with a view to produce an outstanding litter.

“Mum owned Miss Courtney, and we had Amerigo Magic, he was a really smart dog but had a bad wrist. When Miss Courtney came on season we sent her to him, like any breeding we hoped the pups would turn out alright.” Curruthers said.

The litter of eight pups were whelped on the 30 th of May 1995 , but three more pups were lost overnight. Miss Courtney developed septicemia and was rushed to the local Vet by Jane's mother, and a full hysterectomy was performed. Unfortunately the bitch later passed away. Amerigo Magic lived to a ripe old age of twelve and a half, “Not too bad for such a big dog.” Curruthers said. He died of a heart attack late in 2001.

As well as breeding Carl, Jane and John also roughly broke him in, but he was very slow to show anything.

“The breed really take their time, just like their dad did. Carl was never a dog we thought was exceptional, he was a very late maturer like the rest of the litter.” Curruthers explained.

THE EARLY DAYS

The early part of Rapid Journey's career was spent on country tracks like most young dogs that are learning the caper. Although he went on to be a champion, his early efforts hardly set the world on fire. After wins at Taree, Dubbo and Orange in March, May and June respectively, he headed to Wentworth Park where he won his first start in a time of 30.66. After 6 more starts for mixed results at Wenty', Carl headed to Appin on the country circuit to try and emulate his father.

“Amerigo Magic won the Anniversary Cup at Appin, that was his race, that's why we took Rapid Journey there, to try and win it as well. I thought he did quite well.” Currethers explained.

Although he did not win the Anniversary Cup, Carl was still fulfilling the dreams of Jane's mother who just wanted to have a dog to win in the city. He was yet to hit his peak, but was showing signs he could be a handy city performer. With a best time of 30.38 at Wentworth Park under his belt, Curruthers decided to have a crack at the Group one Adelaide Cup in January 1998.

STEPPING STONE TO STARDOM

Rapid Journey started at odds of 7-1 in his heat, the longest odds he would start at for the rest of his career. He won his heat in outstanding style in a time of 29.76, easily the quickest time he had recorded anywhere in his career. It wasn't just the time that was impressive it was the way in which he breezed home, it was as if he was keeping something in reserve.

Come final night he had the expectations of many people, experts and punters alike on his back. In an absolutely awe inspiring display, Rapid Journey won the 1998 Adelaide Cup in a blistering time of 29.34, winning by nine - and - half lengths from Plumb Bob and Brookside Cindy.

It was a night of mixed emotions for Jane and her family only two days earlier Jane's mum Kathleen had lost her battle with cancer.

"Mum loved the dogs as much as I do and I know she would have been rapt to see Rapid Journey win. I felt two extremes of emotions that night, but I know it's something mum would have wanted us to do." Curruthers said. The way the champion won the Adelaide Cup that night one wonders whether Rapid Journey had an inkling of the personal tragedy suffered by his popular trainer. One thing was for sure and certain it seemed that the Australian Greyhound racing scene had a new rising star.

From the Adelaide Cup, Rapid Journey went to Orange in country New South Wales for the Orange Cup in February, which he won by the slender margin of half a length. Then it was onto the Golden Easter Egg. After winning his heat then running second in his semi, Carl was sent out a warm 6/4 favourite. He won the final by two - and - a half-length, in a good time of 30.18 – his personal best at Wentworth Park to that point. Even though he was winning these major races, Rapid Journey was not getting the respect he deserved.

"He still wasn't highly regarded. The experts seemed to overlook him; the media did anyway. I remember we were pretty excited when we won the Easter Egg, so we rushed out to buy the greyhound recorder for the write up. We flicked through every page and not a word about him; the write up was on the very back page! We couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable!" Curruthers remembers with a chuckle.

It wasn't that Rapid Journey was not beating good dogs. He was running in what is probably best described as a vintage era of greyhounds. Dogs like Awesome Assassin, Reggemite, Poetic Reward, Billy Cruise and Cerin Bale to name a few were his opposition. Not many slouches among them. It didn't matter who he lined up against he beat them. Curruthers said she never thought that at the time he was doing anything extraordinary.

"They were just the opposition at the time. They were all good dogs, and now they are all at stud. I am a pessimist though, and every time he lined up I would think 'ooh he goes ok, and look at what she's done, it will be hard tonight Carl' but he kept winning. It was like a never ending dream, I only realised the enormity of it all much later." Curruthers explained.

After the Egg it was off to Perth for their Cup. After breezing through his heats, Carl won the final by seven and three quarter lengths, beating a strong field. Although this seemed like another major notch on his belt, his big goal was yet to come.

THE NATIONALS



“He had an injury set back before the Nationals, so we took him to Penrith for the Penrith cup. We used it as a guide and a stepping stone for the Nationals, we wanted to see if he was on track.” Curruthers said.

Rapid Journey won the cup by three lengths then was beaten at Cranbourne of all places. In the scheme of things this defeat was a small drop in a massive ocean as Carl went in cherry ripe for the New South Wales National Sprint series in August.

He started at 7/2 on in his heat and duly saluted, then blew away NSW's best sprinters by eight – and – a – half-lengths in a time of 30.09, then it was off to Perth for the final.

To hear Jane Curruthers speak about the National Sprint Final is truly something special. The way, in which she marvels at the feat of her dog, it's a true indication of the family's love and the respect they hold for their superstar. You can almost hear the smile on her face as she described the victory.

“The National Sprint is easily my favourite win. How do you come from last to beat a field as good as that and to win so well? How does any dog do that? I still to this day do not know how he did it, he's just so intelligent and had a tremendous will to win. It was phenomenal. The size of his heart ... gee to come through all those obstacles time and time again just to get to the front, I don't know how he did it. The Adelaide Cup heat was a great effort but the National Final, what a win, unbelievable, phenomenal.” Jane reminisced adoringly.

It was at this stage in the middle of his career that Rapid Journey had peaked, he was truly unbeatable. Curruthers believes that his dominance may have something to do with his post win “treat”.

“I take all my winning dogs to McDonalds for an ice-cream.” She explained.

“It didn't take Carl too long to suss it out, when he won he'd be so keyed up, he'd stand up all the way to McDonalds, and he knew the big yellow 'M'. When he saw that M he'd get even more excited. I'd give him his ice cream and he'd scoff it, then he would lie down and go to sleep. He was very intelligent and he liked ice cream.” She said.

After wins at Albion Park and a win in the Lismore Cup in September, he seemed tuned up for a tilt at the Melbourne summer carnival, kicking off in the Melbourne Cup.

THE MELBOURNE ASSAULT



Australia 's new super-dog won his Melbourne Cup heat by three lengths in a quick time of 29.92. He then shaved a hundredth of a second off that time in winning the final in November, again by three lengths. It seemed that Rapid Journey had a mortgage on the 1998 TAB Topgun, the jewel in the crown of Melbourne Greyhound racing. A race that would prove to be his swansong. On a special December evening, Rapid Journey scorched around Sandown Park then held off late challenges defiantly to win the Topgun by a head, beating Reggemite and Poetic Reward in a sensational time of 29.85. Truly an outstanding way for a champion dog to farewell racing, doing it with the dominance and class that he had displayed throughout his career.

THE CAREER

Rapid Journey left the track in December 1998 as the winner of \$530, 995 and as Australian greyhound racing's highest ever money earner. The record stakes still stands as the current world record as well. America 's current record holder is 2000-2001 superstar Be My Bubba whose record earning are \$365,734, after the conversion from American to Australian Dollars it falls well short of Rapid Journey's figures.

His race record stands at 54 starts for 33 wins, 6 seconds and 5 thirds. “Carl” took all before him in the time he graced the Australian greyhound racing scene, captivating audiences of punters wherever and whenever he raced. Perhaps his ability and tremendous strength and will to win is matched only by the affection shown to him by his trainer. Anyone that has had the opportunity of spending time speaking to either Jane or John Curruthers, about Rapid Journey you quickly understand how much this dog means to them. The affection they feel for him is felt as they answers questions and relay stories of the most exciting time of their lives. Many participants and journalists since his retirement have referred to Rapid Journey as a greyhound with freakish ability a title Jane likes to correct.

“Mmmm I don't like to think of him as a freak,” Jane explains thoughtfully. “Freak is a word you use to describe a one off occurrence. I think he was more than that, he was a true champion. I am just realising how much he has achieved. We are delighted with the way he has performed at

stud and would love to hope that as a sire he could produce more pups as good as him, or better, he deserves it.”

THE STUD DOG



Rapid Journey went to stud on his retirement with a stud fee set at \$1400 the fee at the time raised some industry eyebrows as being a little expensive. When one considers what has taken place in the stud scene since those days it seems rather tame. The other thing I wondered about is what sort of offers would have been made for the dog if he raced in 2004. He has enjoyed quite a bit of success at stud and at nine and half years old is still going strong, when pups started to race in 2001, 2002 he was siring at least 20 winners a week across the country.

He has thrown many toplineers the best being Toll Security a Vic Peters winner and Topgun runner up, Thunder Creek, Big Bad Katherine, plus Brisbane Cup winner Tricky Creek.

Rapid Journey is also the first Australian Stud dog to be used as a shuttle sire he stood for a stint in Ireland before returning to Curruthers Castlereagh property last year. Jane and daughter Courtney went to Ireland to make sure “ Carl “ settled in well in his overseas home, but couldn't bear to be away from him for too long. Rapid Journey served about 60 bitches in Ireland and to date has served between 250 and 300 bitches here in Australia and at time of writing (Dec 2004) remained in the top 10 on the Australian wide sires list.

As outstanding member of the AGRA Hall of Fame his record is hard to top and may well stand for many years to come. Current trends seem to be against racing the best dogs for any great length of time with the lure of the stud market finding many of them dogs retired early. Sometimes they are retired before they are fully tested against all comers on a variety of conditions. A situation that was never the case when we make reference to the mighty RAPID JOURNEY.



AGRA President Mike Ahern, Induction Dinner M.C. Neil Brown, sponsor John Hutchinson with Jane Curruthers at the Launceston Casino.

By Neil Brown & Michael Sharkie