

KING ISLAND

Fly-In to history



A LOT HAS changed on King Island since they first commenced racing in 1892.

For starters, winning owners get a cheque these days instead of wallaby skins.

The obvious incentive for changing the 'stake' – aside from political correctness – is that you're likely to get more horses at your race meeting if the owners can put something in their hip pocket.

But the main thrust of King Island racing is having fun. Always has been.

And let's face it, by the King Island Racing Club's own admission, it wouldn't have survived the past 117 years if racegoers didn't have one helluva time.

With King Island stuck out in the middle of Bass Strait, they have to fly in the bookmakers, stewards and jockeys, while a good number of patrons also head on down from the mainland.



Ironically, while King Island is famous for its beef and crayfish – and especially cheese – horse racing gets little fanfare.

However, believe it or not, they have seven race meetings between the end of November and January, including one on Boxing Day, New Year's Day (King Island Cup) and the Fly-In program on 23 January (for a full list of sale dates, see 'Diary' on page 60).

Rather uniquely, King Island's race programs are 'dual code': a mix of gallopers and pacers which BOTH race on the one mile (1600m) grass track. A number of clubs throughout the world could lay claim to staging dual meets, but it's unlikely many of them would have them both running on grass.

(Anyone who has munched on a King Island steak would attest they have the best grass too!) >>

KING ISLAND

But while racing on King Island is all about having a punt, a good feed, a few drinks and as much fun as you can standing up, the Islanders are focused on getting their neddies cherry ripe for race day.

Come September, around 80 odd horses go into training and Ian Johnson from King Island Travel reckons most of the trainers ride their own work or drive their own horses.

Ian, who claims to weigh in around 120 kilos and would surely be the biggest trackwork rider in Australia (could even be another world record for King Island) has a couple of gallopers in work and also puts a standardbred through his paces.

“Having both codes has drawn in people from all across the Island. It really is a family affair and, let’s put it this way, if you don’t own a horse, you’re related to someone that does.”

Ian is particularly proud that a bloke like Cranbourne trainer, Ken Keys – an ex Islander – has done so well in the big smoke:

“Ken’s brother Codge (Robert) still lives on the Island and has 10 horses in work.”

Next year, for its Saturday 23 January meet – the Fly-In program – the King Island Racing Club has taken the bit between its teeth and will offer over \$10,000 in prizes, totally separate to stake



money.

With around five gallop and three pacing events scheduled for the day, King Island will also stage its first Human Hurdles event.

Ian explains: “The heats commence at 8am and the final will be run between the fifth and sixth races where eight finalists will jump out of the starting stall carrying a champagne flute full of liquid (hopefully not the real gear!).”

“They have to jump five hurdles and finish in the fastest time with the most liquid left in the glass.

“You don’t have to be a skilled hurdler – just have a good balance and a sense of fun.”

Everyone gets a prize, while the winner will be awarded a holiday



to the value of 10 grand.

That’s better than a flick on the backside with a wallaby skin.

Registration for the Human Hurdle closes on 18 December.

Additionally, private plane owners (it takes around 45 minutes to fly in from either Tasmania or Victoria) will have



landing fees waived for the day and have the opportunity to convert their plane registration to a horse running in the race.

“The registration winner of each race will be presented with a King Island Produce Hamper and, those registering prior to 21 January, will be eligible to win a three night accommodation package to Broome. Registration is free,” Ian adds.

“It should be a great day – we’ve also got a jazz band and you can sample our cheeses or have one of our lip smacking steak sandwiches.”

For information relating to any of the King Island race meetings, phone Lucinda Dengerink on 0408 546 469 or email kingislandtravel@bigpond.com for further information.

Lucinda will be able to help you out will travel, accommodation, dining and entertainment, registrations, what hat you should wear ...

In fact, if you have any questions at all, give Lucinda a bell (although we’re not prepared to vouch for her race tips!)

For another good source of info on King Island visit www.kingisland.org.au

Evidently the average temperature on King Island throughout November, December and January is in the early 20s which, if like most of Australia, you’re currently sweating your way through what could be a long, hot summer, sounds like a godsend.

Book me in! ■

**COUNTRY RACING
ALWAYS HAS
A STORY TO TELL .
BUT NONE
LIKE KING ISLAND**