

## **Brydi Allison – Alex Scott Assistant Trainers Travel Scholarship Winner, 2017**

Thanks to the Alex Scott Scholarship, at the beginning of January 2018, I was able to travel to the Barossa Valley in South Australia to work for Tony McEvoy at Kidalton Park in Angaston. This used to belong to a huge estate known as Lyndsey Park which included the neighbouring stud farm and was all owned by the Hayes family.

When I arrived in Australia, I couldn't have been happier to leave the English winter behind me. Mr McEvoy and his son Calvin were in Sydney where it was the start of an important week – the run up to the Magic Millions! Not only were they attending the yearling sales, buying stars for the future, but also they had Sunlight, the favourite for the two year old Magic Millions Classic, prepping in her final week for the \$2.5 million race on the Saturday. Sunlight won which caused a huge buzz in the yard and it was a great start to my time there. She might have been in training at their Flemington base in Melbourne some 450 miles away but the McEvoy's two yards are very much run as a whole team and everyone counts towards each success. Calvin oversees the Angaston farm while Mr McEvoy mainly oversees the Flemington base but will often spend time travelling between Adelaide and Melbourne. As well as these two training facilities they own a farm an hour away in Murbko, which I had the chance to visit. Here they have spell horses and this is also where their yearlings are broken in.

My day started at 4:30 am. Riders and 'strappers' work the morning shift and for later on in the day there is an afternoon crew. The morning shift worked from 4:30 am till around 11am and the afternoon 10am till 5pm.

First thing on a morning we received a photocopy of the morning's exercise list. The Angaston team is split into two groups – saddlers and those that 'skip out' while the head forman Johnny feeds up. The first three trips (known as lots in the UK) are all put on the walker first thing as Mr McEvoy likes his horses to walk for an hour before going out to the track to canter. As I was a rider I was assigned a saddler every morning. I usually rode 10-12 horses a day, something I was definitely not used too. As soon as I got off one I was straight on another. This wouldn't be possible in Newmarket, as walking to the Heath and completing each lot would take just over an hour compared to the 8 or so minutes you are out on your horse in Angaston.

All the riding would be completed just before 9am which avoided horses having to work in the hot Australian temperatures. Most of the horse swim once round the pool after cantering. Swimming was rarely incorporated into a horse's daily routine at Mr Simcock's yard so learning to swim one was taught to me on my very first day. Horses that didn't swim were always hosed down.

Mr McEvoy has a mile round canter at his Angaston farm and in Australia your cantering is all timed. They have a fast way and a slow way, with two viewing towers on either side of the farm. Fast work is done on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Horses are weighed weekly on a Wednesday.

With Mr McEvoy more than often based in Flemington, Calvin watches every morning's exercise in Angaston. In each tower is a clocking machine so he knows how fast we are going. An everyday canter is about 20 seconds a furlong for five

furlongs, some days you might go twice round. Faster work is done so you are going up the steeper side of the track doing 14 seconds usually over four furlongs. Jockeys come in to do the fastest work over three furlongs. As well as their poly track they also have a grass canter on the outside of the track. Working for Mr Simcock in England you are usually told to do a 'first canter' then if you do a second one up Warren Hill you may be told to do the same again or 'slightly better' up the hill. During a work morning you'd be in a group of two or three working on either the Cambridge Road poly track or on one of the many grass gallops available over on racecourse side. All our work was usually done over 6 furlongs. Learning to have a clock in my head was a huge change for me so I bought myself a beeper (most riders have one) to clip onto my hat so I could count the seconds as I cantered or did my fast work.

Working in the UK galloping is often based on the rider's weight. In Australia, if the riders get their timings accurate according to their instructions, your weight doesn't necessarily matter so much. I had the experience of riding faster work regularly each week with riders who I've learnt a lot off. I also spent a few gallop mornings, when jockeys had come in, up at the viewing tower with Calvin. It's there I got to watch horses go 12 seconds, this is the fastest they'd go at home. Jamie Kah is stable jockey to Mr McEvoy at his Adelaide base and is one of South Australia's best female jockeys. She's an important part of the team here at McEvoy Mitchell racing and is in at least one morning every week at the Angaston Farm to ride fast work.

Mr McEvoy spends a few days every so often in Angaston. On these days he will do a stable walk with Calvin, Johnny (the head foreman) and Jodie (the on site vet). Here the staff bring out each horse. Mr Mcevoy checks over every horse individually and watches them trot up. I was given the job of taking down notes for him to reflect on later as we went round. This is a time for him to be updated on a horse's progress and to be told of any problems. Not only is Mr McEvoy an excellent trainer, he shows real horsemanship and no horse is treated the same as another.

In my first week we had 10 two year old trial at Murray Bridge. They quite often have horses trialing every week. Mr McEvoy has an excellent strike rate with two year olds. Every horse has to trial and receive a barrier certificate before they are allowed to run. This is something that English racing does not do and is probably the biggest difference to English racing that I have come across.

Trials are like 'mini races' that are done at racecourses under the rules of racing. Only licensed jockeys are able to ride in them and they wear their horse's colours. These are not as competitive as an actual race. It is a great education for them and from watching Australian 2 year old races, I noticed they tend to run less green and more professionally than two year olds in Britain. You can also get older horses that trial which is good preparation for them getting back to full fitness if they've had a long break or injury lay-off from the track and haven't ran for a while. Trial races are taken very seriously and are open to the public to view on the Internet and pundits can see how good some of the unexposed two year old are. I strapped a two year old filly called Kinky Boom at Morphettville. she won her trial by 6 lengths on the bridle. You don't have stables at the racecourses in Australia so all the horses stand in tie-ups. I was amazed to see how patiently and well behaved the horses stand in them, even the two year olds who are experiencing this for the first time. The day

after Kinky Boom's trial she went to the Flemington yard and five days later she won her maiden at Caulfield very easily.

After a month in Angaston, Calvin sent me to Melbourne to work at their Flemington track. My morning started at 4am there and I would usually ride three or four horses each morning. The horses all walk for an hour prior to exercise and here, you saddle your own first two lots then the others will be done for you. My first morning in Flemington was spent in the watch tower with Tony and his head foreman Michael Shepherdson, watching a few horses do fast work out on the main track. In Angaston we would ride a lot of the fast work but at Flemington, Tony mainly has jockeys riding it all. Luke Currie, Craig Williams, Andrew Mallyon, Lockie King and Rhys McLeod would be in most gallop mornings. After my first day I experience riding out on the big track at Flemington and then rode out most days on it. Having taken horses abroad before I had some experience of riding on a track but still it was something new for me to experience. I was very surprised at how relaxed and nice the horses were out on the track considering how busy it can be. Any horse that didn't walk to the track well was accompanied by the McEvoy 'pony'. I even got the chance to learn how to pony a horse both with a rider and without. This is something that isn't really done in Britain and with ponies being available on race days in Australia, it's good for the horses to get used to it. We also visited the Altona beach which is only a 10/15 minute truck drive away from the racecourse. It was a nice break away from the track for the horses and nearly all the horses enjoyed walking up and down the beach in the water; it certainly seemed to freshen a few of them up!

During my time in Flemington I was very lucky to lead up Pierro Belle (a very promising two year old) first time out at Flemington and then Miss Wahoo at Caulfield on Blue Diamond day. Mr McEvoy had four runners in the Group 1 Blue Diamond with Oohood finishing the best of them in third place. Sunlight also won a group 2 at Rosehill in Sydney on the same day.

Another huge difference in their training methods is the use of turnout paddocks and outside boxes. Horse can be out 24/7 in Angaston; some are having short or longer breaks in grass paddocks, while a few 'fussier' fillies are trained out of 'tank' paddocks. Those that are in stables have over twice the amount of room compared to the size of stables I've seen in Britain. They are more open boxes where they can see each other, they are light and airy which doesn't give them the stable feel compared to our typical stables back home. In Newmarket it isn't possible for yards to have much turn out with few yards being able to use pens due to being situated in a town environment.



The only downside to racing I came across, for me, is the closeness you get to your horses as a rider or groom over in England compared to Australia. You're on your horse for around eight minutes every morning and your horses often change everyday. However, prize money, the working hours and wages are considerably better out in Australia, something which attracts a lot of overseas riders.

Working for Mr Simcock and Mr King I was assigned horses to look after and brush on an evening. I also usually rode the same horses everyday but on a work morning or schooling mornings this could sometimes change. As staff over here work split shifts, mornings and afternoons, horses don't get brushed over. Once they've swum or had a hose down after exercise, they don't need to be brushed over later on.

England might be half way across the world and have very different training methods compared to Australia but one thing remains the same, no way of training horses is the right or wrong way. Hard work, a good team of happy staff and horses behind you leads to every success. Everyone is just as important as each other.

In winning the Alex Scott scholarship I have made new friends and learnt invaluable amounts from my new experience in Australia. I'd like to thank the NTF, Mr Arnold and the families of Tim Dunlop and Alex Scott for allowing this to happen. My previous employers, David and Jennie Simcock and Neil King were hugely supportive of me coming over here for which I am extremely grateful. I'd like to thank Tony, his wife Jo, Calvin and Wayne Mitchell for having me and letting me make the most of this opportunity. John Cornell the head foreman in Angaston and Mick Shepherdson the head foreman at Flemington were brilliant to follow round and learn from. As for the McEvoy team, thank you all for helping me and making me feel so welcome. I wish Mr McEvoy, Mr Mitchell and all the team the best of luck with their Golden Slipper runner and stable star Sunlight. I'm excited to get back to England and start working for Mr Bell as his pupil assistant. Hopefully it's the next step towards one day achieving my own training licence.

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