

CITIZEN ARTICLE – Written by Charl Pretorius

RACING administrators in South Africa know how hard it is to cultivate a love for thoroughbred racing among up-and-coming youngsters faced with a smorgasbord of leisure choices. It's tricky enough to lure young people to the racetrack, but what is being done when they are hooked, or, what are we doing to maximise the participation of racing's die-hards over extended periods? We should be thinking just as often of ways to keep individuals within the world of racing, even when they are in or near retirement.

In South Africa we have a knack of forgetting contributions made to racing by individuals in previous decades, in long-gone eras. Or just last year or two, three years ago. The legendary champion jockey **Gerald Turner**, although well assisted by the industry in his latter years, died poor and almost forgotten. Former star jock **Raymond Rhodes** refuses to come near a racetrack. His countless superb achievements were never recognized and his knowledge and skills are lost to racing forever. Raymond went as far as to give away or destroy his racing memorabilia. Sad, but true and there are many more examples. True lovers of racing should be kept in the game by being given parts to play in what is essentially a multi-faceted industry that has no boundaries for age. It's an industry that is flexible enough to create opportunities and active participation longer than most others.

Trevor Lange, this month's *Legend Of The Turf*, is a good example of someone who dedicated his life to horseracing and has kept himself in the loop for almost six decades. Today, as an assistant to his son in law, trainer **'Lucky' Houdalakis**, Lange's skills can still be considered in demand and he taps as much pleasure from the sport as he did when he became a jockey in 1951, a trainer in 1971, a Stipendiary Steward in 1988, a trainer again in 1994 and 2000, and a small-time breeder in between.

"My first ever ride was a winner," Trevor recalls one of his finest days, 26 December 1951. "My mount was Forage Cap, trained by Felix Coetzee's father Hennie. We beat horses ridden by **Charlie Barends** and **Bert Sage**.

Trevor was privileged to ride with the mentioned pair and the likes of **'Tiger' Wright**, **'Cocky' Feldman**, **Benny Little**, **Basil Lewis** and many other jockeys even today considered in a league of their own.

He was a successful apprentice, so good that he was given a mount in the 1952 Durban July, just a few months after starting his apprenticeship. The horse was Lord Louis and they'd struck up a good relationship in the run up to the big race, winning three on the trot and being instituted an early favourite to win. "But Mr Coetzee took me off on the day of the race, they could do it in those days, and it was a major disappointment. Lord Louis finished fourth behind Mowgli, who beat Radlington."

Trevor did get to ride in nine other Durban July's – indicative of his talent, and his best-placed finish was a third, in 1958, on Excise. He also won the 1962 God Cup on Specialist for JBK Cooper, the Newbury Stakes on Appeal Court, two PE Derby's and the November Handicap on Onyx. He doesn't come across as a braggart when he says, "I was a good jock, competitive against the best. **Roy Curling** used to joke and say I mustn't come to Port Elizabeth and steal their winners; Stanley Amos and Peter Kannemeyer and the guys in the Cape said the same when I went there in 1961 and had a big run with Sir Harvey Bruce." Trevor was a successful raiding jockey, he adapted to all circumstances to win, for example, his only ever race in Zimbabwe, the then prestigious **Castle Tankard** on Dr John for trainer **Barry Labistour**.

Interestingly seven years to the day after his first winner, Trevor was involved in what newspapers for many years afterwards would call, "Racing's Blackest Day" – 26 December 1958 at Clairwood – when a punters' revolt on the course proper led to two horses having to be put down and five jockeys being injured.

"There was a nine-race programme at Clairwood and at the start of the eight race, I recall, **Percy Cayeux's** mount, the hot favourite, refused to jump. The punters were furious. "I had a ride in Race 9, there were 16 runners I think and on the way to the start we could see that a large group of punters had congregated close to the grandstand.

"We got to the start, there were no gates in those days and **Charlie Barends** was keen to get home, he shouted at the starter that he had a plane to catch and soon after we got clearance from the stipes and the horses kicked off and ran. "But as we approached the 200m mark there were lots of people on the track. They were armed with pieces of sharp wood, picket fences from next to the track turned into spears, and they formed a human barrier in front of us!

"I got lucky that day because I was on a stayer in a sprint race and was some way behind the rest, but ahead of me the horses were being hastily pulled up. Some were hit by the flying pieces of wood; several horses came down and two had to be destroyed. Five jockeys were injured. I escaped unhurt, thank God, but it was an awful experience all the same!"

With a few weight problems and an opportunity to train in 1971, **Trevor** hung up his boots and started at a farm near Henley-On-Klip with a few nice horses including Salaman and Min Bridge. Then followed a spell at the Vaal, in the early days of the Vaal as a training centre, and Trevor fondly recalls a handful of trainers operating from the Vilhjiensdrift track including **Ormond Ferraris, Ralph Halket, Bertie Sage, later Ricky Maingard, Spike Lerena and John Nicholson.** "The Vaal training track was superb in those days. There are a few more today and they are still exceptionally good, world class!"

He won many feature races including three Jubilee Handicaps **Flannel, Baldrick and Trauhaut**, most of his winners ridden by **Robbie Thompson**, and served on the Owners and Trainers Association.

Trevor returned to Durban in 1979 for a spell at Pietermaritzburg and Summerveld, turning out feature winners like **Turnsail** (Frank Lambert Stakes and placed in the J&B Met). Times were getting tough though and racing was changing and Trevor packed it in, in 1988 to become a Stipendiary Steward, serving under **Dudley Feldman**, with the likes of **Harold Taylor and the Patterson brothers, Peter and Barry.**

But the lure of open air and the creation called "horse" brought him back as a trainer to owner **Derek Martin** in the mid 1990s, during which the undisputed highlight was when Martin's **Shoe Shac (Doug Whyte)** beat the superstar **Tommy Hotspur** in the 1996 Computaform Sprint. Trevor finally called it a day in 2002 after a brief spell on the Highveld and worked in the storage industry where he met **Coenie Strydom**, today one of the leading patrons of headline-hitting trainer 'Lucky' Houdalakis.

"There's a purpose to everything and I am so privileged to have been involved in Lucky's rise to prominence. He is a very good horseman, I try to give little bits of advice where I can but he's good, he knows his oats. "We're a racing family and most of us are now in a nice house in Three Rivers near the Vaal. My wife **Dot** and daughters **Natalie and Tracy** run the multi-functioned racing business Equilink and I get to look after the grandchildren and spend lots of time with my son in law at his stables. He knows he can rely on me when he's away, raiding another centre, or buying horses at sales."