

# WINTON JC HALL OF FAME



## Tod Hewitt

Les "Tod" Hewitt was one of the greatest horsemen of his time and started a notable career in Winton. Hewitt was not only a leading jockey in New Zealand but he had a notable career in Europe.

Nearing the end of the nineteenth century Hewitt arrived at the Heddon Bush estate, a few miles north-west of Winton, to take up jobs about the station.

The owner John Tennant, taught the lad to ride, and perceived that he had natural hands, and encouraged him.

Tennant gave Hewitt his first ride in a race on Sparrow in the Winton Guineas, which he won.

Hewitt became one of New Zealand's greatest horsemen and later an outstanding rider in Europe. Among big owners he rode for in Australia, France, England, Germany and India, were emperors, princes and numerous millionaires, and in the first 20 years of the twentieth century it was estimated that he received nearly £50,000 in retainers and riding fees, and a similar amount in gifts. He won the 1913 1000 Guineas in England and set records for winning rides at the New Zealand Cup, Eilerslie and Sydney carnivals. At Riccarton he won 14 races at one Cup meeting, and almost equalled that record at an Auckland Cup meeting when he rode 12 winners.

Hewitt was associated with G.G. Stead's formidable team and was greatly assisted in his climb to the top of the ladder through the guidance of R.J Mason, one of New Zealand's greatest trainers. He rode 298 career winners in New Zealand.

A self-educated man, with a studious nature, Hewitt quickly mastered the languages of the countries in which he rode. Hewitt certainly travelled a long way from his first ride on Sparrow in the Winton Guineas.

Inducted to NZ Hall of Fame in 2018.

## Bren Langford

In 1965 a former Winton JC President Jack Woods recalled the early racing families of the district. Woods considered Bren Langford, who was killed in a race fall in 1964 aged 34 as "the best all-round horseman in New Zealand."

Langford won 345 races on the flat, and over the hurdles and steeplechases. He also won trotting races and saddle trots. Winning the 1963 Grand National Steeplechase on No Offence was the fulfilment of his greatest ambition.

Born at Winton, he was a member of one of Southland's best known racing families. As a schoolboy he proved adept in handling and riding horses of all classes - under the watchful eye of his father, Frank, himself a trainer and first-class horseman. He served his apprenticeship with his father in Winton and later completed it with his uncle, the Invercargill trainer, J. Langford.

Langford's first winning ride was for the Wingatui trainer, H. A. Anderton, on Nightcalm. He rode for the Anderton stable for some time and then was attached to J. C. McKerrow's stable.

Moving to the North Island 1952, Langford settled in Takanini. During his final years Langford was the first horseman for the Preston stable and made his home in Levin.

His jumping wins included the Grand National, Hawkes Bay and McGregor Grant and Wellington Steeplechases, two W.R.C. Winter Hurdles, a Pakuranga Hunt Cup, a Great Western Steeplechase, an Otago Steeplechase, a Wanganui Steeplechase and Open hurdle races. On the flat, he won a C.J.C Great Easter Handicap, a W.R.C. Telegraph Handicap, two Invercargill Cups, an Ormond Gold Cup, two Geraldine Cups and two Oamaru Cups.

A man of exemplary character, both in his professional and his home life, Langford was a husband and father of three.

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**Maria Ritchie**

Ritchie was a Southland-based jockey in the 1980s-90s, recording 130 career wins. Employed mostly by trainers Gary Gibson in Gore and Len Casey of Winton. Her first riding win aboard Ace Harmony in 1984 and went on to win four more times on the Len Casey trained gelding.

Many ex-Southland jockeys, riders and trainers have worked worldwide but few have made it to the international stage like Ritchie. She got the thrill of a lifetime training Special Fighter for the US\$10 million (NZ\$14.5 million) Dubai World Cup in 2017. The cup is the second richest race in the world. Special Fighter finished 12th.

Ritchie left Southland in 2000 to be a trackwork rider at Graeme Rogerson's Melbourne stable, after two months she moved to his operation in Dubai.

Rogerson's stable was soon taken over by Kiwi Keith Hawtin, and Ritchie worked for him before she moved to John Sadler's employ in 2002-03. Sadler then left Dubai and Musabah Al Muhairi took over his stable. Ritchie worked as assistant trainer for Al Muhairi for 13 years - six years as assistant trainer.

In February 2017 Ritchie replaced her boss, after he was disqualified for 12 months when a horse returned a high reading to the drug cobalt. The transition from assistant to trainer was not difficult because she knew procedures and systems in the stable. During the racing season, she has 84 horses in training, 80 staff, including 31 grooms (all from Pakistan), 15 track riders (all from India). Security people watch the stable and horses 24 hours a day, farriers, feed merchants and vets are other staff. English is spoken in her stable.

Ritchie is married to Bazil Ferreira, of Dubai. It takes horses and riders 15 minutes to trot from Ritchie's stable to train at Meydan Racecourse.



**Neill Ridley**

Ridley enjoyed success as a jumps jockey and trainer. Ridley was brought up with horses near Winton through the interest of his father Bill.

Ridley then served his time with the doyen of southern jumps races, Bill Hillis at Riverton. Ridley became the number one jumps jockey for Brian Anderton. "He gave me great moments with his support and so did Kelly Thompson from Southland in the bigger events."

Neil was one of the country's best over fences, amongst his 170 winners from 767 rides between 1970 and 1994 were multiple wins in the Grand National Hurdles and the Grand National Steeplechase on the three southern stars, Bymai, Lord Venture and the horse the Queen Mother later raced, Nearco Bay.

He won three Great Western Steeplechases at Riverton, and a close second on Lord Venture to Rock Crystal in the dramatic 1984 Great Northern.

After race-riding retirement in 1994, Ridley and his wife, Margaret, moved from their Limehills base near Winton to set up training in Oamaru. He trained outstanding flat galloper Pinnacle to win 20 races for his father during the 1990's. Neill was the country's leading strike-rate trainer in 2000/01.

After a stint as private trainer for Keith Neylon at Burnham Ridley was foreman for Te Akau's South Island stable when they produced Rock 'n' Pop to win the 2000 Guineas in 2011. Soon after he was back on his own account and his 313 successes included the Group III winners Just A Dream, King Montrose and Prince Oz. Batman (9) and He Kin Fly (10) other performers.

Ridley pointed out he couldn't have done it without the tremendous support and help from his wife Margaret, who put in the hard yards around the stable.

Ridley, 67, who had cancer, died peacefully at his home in 2020.

# WINTON JC BEST TRAINERS



## Leda Beck

Leda Beck is a winner of one of New Zealand's top jumping races with her horse Gargamel. The jumping pride of Winton won the \$75,000 Grand National Hurdles at Riccarton in 2014.

The Beck family are a successful team; Allan, Leda and 16-year-old daughter Sarah are all fully involved. The couple train between 15 and 20 horses but have their own teams. Leda trains and owns gallopers, while Allan is a harness racing owner-trainer-driver. Sarah is a capable track-work rider, Emma Hammond also helps ride part-time.

As soon as Gargamel jumped to a clear lead after the last hurdle, Beck thought to herself: "Oh my God, he's going to win."

It was her proudest moment in 26 years of training. As a jockey, she won 36 races during her nine years in the saddle. Her first boss, Gore trainer Ted Winsloe, won the National in 1962.

After finishing third in the 2016 Grand National behind Upper Cut, Gargamel made the long trek north to Ellerslie for the \$125,000 Great Northern Steeplechase. Gargamel handled the step up in trip to 6400m distance and finished seventh of fourteen.

Beck and Invercargill man Jason Spencer owned Gargamel who had also won the Invercargill Cup in 2012.

Beck has another handy hurdler in Gold'NGuru, amongst his eight wins was the 2018 Winton Cup. The 10yo was unplaced in the Grand National Hurdles this 2021 season. Leda's up and coming stayer Fiordin has won three races in recent months.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/racing/83368536>

[/gargamel-heading-to-ellerslie-for-great-northern-steeplechase](https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/racing/83368536/gargamel-heading-to-ellerslie-for-great-northern-steeplechase)

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/news/10360740/Winning-racing-stable-a-family-affair>



## Sophie Price

Sophie had her best season in 2020/21 with 13 top three placings from 26 starts including seven wins.

Price is seldom without a handy runner in the stable. Her former star Motorboat Mike retired with seven wins including the 2016 Invercargill Cup at Winton, and earnings of \$178,875. One of his owners, Southland builder Ben McHugh, now shares the ownership of the current stable star Silent Battler with Price's husband, Corey, and father, Richard Hall.

Silent Battler's nine race starts have produced four wins, a second, and a third. "He's got all the ability in the world but is still very green," she said.

The Mole and Fiery Red are other recent winners in Price's stable.

A 5-year-old mare, The Mole has picked up three wins and a second and aiming at the Winton Cup this season.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/racing/124889698/winton-thoroughbred-trainer-overdue-for-riccarton-success>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/racing/77129706/syndicate-celebrates-motorboat-mikes-invercargill-cup-win>

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/southland-times/sport/racing/9796764/Syndicate-motors-along>

# WINTON JC BEST TRAINERS



## John Phillips

John Phillips was a valued stable foreman for NZ Hall of Fame trainer Rex Cochrane before starting out on his own account in the 1988/89 season. Phillips' best season was in 2001/02 when earning 14 wins. King Prawn was a top performer with eight wins and 24 placings before retiring in 2015.

Phillips attempted to win the \$100,000 Winter Cup in Christchurch for the second time in August – 26 years after the first success in the race.

Phillips' first Cup winner, First Look, won in 1995. Midnight Runner went into the race in good form after finishing second in his previous two starts, including the Winter Cup Trial but the consistent 7yo gelding had too much weight on the heavy track.

Midnight Runner (7 wins, 14 placings from 38 starts) is now getting ready for racing at the Winton JC's meeting in October along with Darcee Que, a winner for Phillips in Christchurch in April.

Phillips' Dunedin Cup winner from earlier this year, Madam De Soir, has completed a month's training in preparation for the New Zealand Cup meeting in November. Afterwards, the 10-year-old mare is likely to be bred from. Madam De Soir is out of five time winner for the stable, Grace De Soir.

Johnny's wife Kerry is on the ambulance staff on race day in the south and at the local jump-outs. Their son Shane part owns Midnite Runner, while their other son Brodie started his own successful horse transport business in 2016. The strength of Southland harness racing helps to keep the transport busy. Johnny helps with relief driving.

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/racing/125952199/southland-trainer-in-pursuit-of-second-winter-cup-success>