



He remembers his favourite was the Dalray horse Tails, whose many victories featured races such as the QTC Queensland Derby, AJC The Metropolitan on two occasions, AJC Queen Elizabeth Stakes and QTC P.J. O'Shea Stakes. He also finished third behind Silver Knight and Igloo in the 1971 running of the Melbourne Cup.

Another favourite in those days was the 'Goondiwindi Grey' Gunsynd, whose many wins included the MVRC Cox Plate, an AJC Epsom Handicap, Doncaster Handicap, VRC George Adams Handicap and VATC Toorak Handicap. Gunsynd also ran third in a Melbourne Cup, behind Piping Lane and Magnifique in 1972.

"I'd have posters of Tails and Gunsynd on the wall at home. I taped just about every one of the races Tails contested and I think I still have them. I also had all the newspaper clippings about him, and they would still be in a box somewhere.

"In those days I'd also have tipping competitions with my sister Margaret."

He also still has vivid memories of his first venture to the races. That was at Randwick on Australia Day, 1970 when his parents, Louis and Margaret, "you might notice the similarity in the names," took their children along.

"When we arrived we had to ask someone how to put a bet on. There were seven races and I had 50 cents a place on each of them and I won 70 cents. I thought that was the greatest day of my life - just sensational."

He soon came back to earth, however. After talking his mother into taking him "and a couple of mates" to Canterbury in the May school holidays he again had seven place bets, but that day they all lost.

"It was a reality check on betting," he chuckled, which later led to him switching sides. For during his high school and university days Louis, who was a sports enthusiast playing cricket in the summer months and soccer in the winter, began doubling as the team bookmaker.

After marrying Jill in 1980 the pair moved to Harris Park, which was within walking distance from Rosehill racecourse.

"I joined the local soccer team whose players included the trainer Bryan Guy," Louis said.

"One day all the team got on to Nordic Prince at Bryan's insistence . . . it won at 7/1 and I was cleaned out - which ended my days as a bookmaker."

Switching to the firm of Coopers and Lybrand in the early 1980s Louis was based in those days at nearby Parramatta, but by then he was beginning to become disenchanted with the prospect of a career in accountancy.

"After four years at Coopers I knew I no longer had the enthusiasm to continue climbing up the ladder," he said.

Around that time, half of the soccer team - "I was in the other half" - owned a horse named Lackacoin, who won first-up at Gosford and that prompted the others to buy a horse.

"At the next yearling sales, that would have been in January, 1983, Bryan bought a horse by Jukebox who was named Bullet Performer.

"As well as people from the soccer team, there were people from work and the cricket club in him. I was the lynch-pin and was in charge of the accounts as well as the communication, so that gave me my first experience of managing a racehorse.

"At his debut at Rosehill he ran sixth in a race in which Red Anchor came third, at 200/1. He then ran third at Randwick to Street Cafe and McCluskey at 33/1 - and I was hooked from that moment onwards."

Unfortunately Bullet Performer was kicked in the jaw at trackwork one morning, went off his food and consequently lost his form although he did register a win at Nowra.

Approaching 30, Louis decided he could no longer continue as an accountant, and two days before his birthday he resigned from Coopers Lybrand and soon afterwards he and Jill embarked on a seven-month trip around the world, staying with relatives and friends to reduce the costs involved.

About that time, with the mortgage paid off and Jill working, Louis decided he was going to begin syndicating racehorses.

"In those days there were only one or two syndicators around, with Hyperion being the

biggest name," he said.

"On our world trip I took a copy of The Bloodhorse Review. It was probably the first one I'd ever bought, and I think I read it from cover to cover about 19 times. I even started writing to people while I was overseas, seeking backing and support.

"When we arrived back home in November, 1985 we formed a company and eventually came up with the name Laurel Oak Bloodstock Pty Ltd.

"We went to the sales the following January, and on the advice of Steve Hood who was my mentor, we bought our first two horses but we just missed out on Potrero."

A gelding by Red Tony from the Bogan Road mare Extra Special, Potrero proved to be an outstanding performer winning, among numerous races, the VATC Show Day Cup (1400m) at Caulfield and the AJC The Galaxy (1100m) at Randwick at Gr.1 level.

Sadly the yearling Laurel Oak bought 10 lots later, did not reach the racetrack.

"About a week after the sale, Celebrity Thoroughbreds had the first advertisements in the newspapers, and with others also appearing, suddenly there were a number of syndicators. So from being a small market it turned quickly into a growing market.

"While the big companies were doing 40 and 50 horses a year we did five horses in the first year and we kept everything very small. Of the first five horses we bought three were winners and two, Georgian Gold and Crown Joker, were city winners.

"Because the Hoods only had limited space they recommended Kerry Walker, so we've had some horses with him from the start."

These days the syndicates have horses with Kerry Jordan and Gary Portelli in Sydney; Keith Dryden in Canberra; Tony Noonan and Robert Smerdon in Victoria, as well as John Wallace on the Gold Coast and Peter Moody in Brisbane.

Over the years, although syndicating up to only 10 horses each season, they have had the likes of Crown Joker, who won 15 races; Tehuacan, winner 19 times; and Georgian Gold who produced March To The Sea and Rustaveli.

There have also been Lightyear, Carolina Moon, Gangbuster, Our Girl Dawn and Trinket Time as well as most recently the dual city winner Berlin.

In all Laurel Oak has syndicated 25 horses who have won in the metropolitan area or been multiple winners.

Importantly too in the formative years, Kerry Walker introduced Louis to golf on Fridays at Castle Hill where a number of identities including Malcolm Johnston, Shane Dye, Nigel Tiley, 'Doc' Chapman and Ray Warren also played.

With his sporting involvement Louis came up with the idea of holding special golf days, and Laurel Oak now conducts three at Castle Hill each year as well as one in Melbourne at Cup time.

"Through golf I came to meet higher profile people in the racing industry fairly quickly," he said.

Also with an eye very much on public relations and keeping everyone informed he has, for the past 15 years, been publishing a newsletter entitled Grandstand View for the benefit of syndicate clients.

The company was still in the throes of its initial development when the financial crash of 1989 struck mercilessly.

Fortunately Laurel Oak had only three horses to syndicate, "none of which we could fill", while the Hyperions and Celebrities with all their horses folded.

After that period, to supplement the family's income during those difficult years, Louis began providing an accounting service for people involved in the industry.

"Also around that time, Jill announced that she was pregnant. Their son Alexander is now 10 years-old, but I thought 'oh well, I still have nine months of my cushy life to live' and Jill worked up until the day she was due.

"Then I became fully responsible for providing for us, so I did accounting work while continuing to syndicate three or four or five horses a year."



LOUIS and JILL MIHALYKA whose hard work as a couple has created a successful racing enterprise.

In 1992 the opportunity to further extend the operation was developed when Louis was approached on behalf of Englishman Patrick Brain, to act as his Australasian representative.

"Back in 1987 I went to the races with Kerry Walker," he recalled. "He had quite a few runners and asked me whether I would mind looking after the owners of a horse named Fidelis.

"There were two gentlemen named Peter Cormack and Patrick Brain, so I spent the afternoon with them. It turned out that Peter Cormack ran a guest house on the south coast of NSW which friends of ours visited and had recommended, so we had a common link straight away.

"Patrick Brain was over from Japan where he was working, to watch his horse run.

"Over the ensuing years, when we began going to Bawley Point, Peter would be telling Jill and I how Patrick was doing a lot of research into pedigrees.

"By that stage I was right into pedigrees and a firm believer that pedigrees had an influence on the performance and results of horses.

"I was very much into looking at the nicks and past results in selecting the horses we bought as yearlings.

"Having great confidence in what I was doing, I wasn't all that interested in hearing what Patrick was up to but, in 1992, Peter rang me and said Patrick was looking for an Australasian agent.

"Patrick had begun to offer his services in the United Kingdom where the breeding season had just finished, and the demand for his work was starting to decline. Consequently he felt the Australasian breeding season would complement his workload over there.

"Anyway, I said I'd love to be his agent and over the next 48 hours Patrick showed me samples of the research he had been doing in terms of pedigrees, results, good matings and bad matings.

"It was at that moment that I realised everything I had been doing was very amateurish and what he was doing was the top of the premier league.

"His approach was very scientific and very professional.

"The amount of research he had done made my readings pale into insignificance, so from that day onwards we became his agents in Australia and New Zealand. That's been extremely successful, and the pedigree analysis is another service we started from scratch.

"It's grown virtually every year and now we've levelled off with an established clientele, who are enjoying highly satisfactory results. That, in turn, helped us improve the stock we were buying and racing.

"It also helped us to meet more people in the industry because we suddenly had a direct connection with prominent breeders and

major stud owners - so that broadened our contacts."

As Louis said there were very few, if any, other pedigree analysts offering their services commercially. This enabled Brain Scientific Pedigree Analysis to be among the first companies to begin advertising and having editorials written about its systems.

"In this way we promoted pedigree analysis as the tool for people to breed and race better horses. We were the forerunners of what has evolved since, because now a far greater percentage of breeders and racehorse owners use some form of pedigree analysis in their selection.

"Even people who were quite cynical in the beginning are now using some service, if not ours.

"Without knowing what other people do it would be hard to imagine that we are not the largest pedigree analysis providers in Australia."

With Brain widening his company's scope, Louis and Jill have been able to develop a firmer base in the industry.

It has also led to their becoming an agent for stallion bookings, which Louis describes as a "natural progression" once Laurel Oak started managing a number of broodmares and race fillies.

Further business went their way when Brett Howard of Randwick Bloodstock, asked Louis to take over his client base for bookings after he joined Coolmore.

"Through natural evolution we also provide a service looking after the accounts of high profile owners.

"We once had a client who is a very wealthy owner but was a very slow payer.

"When we asked if we could be paid he said 'the account is here in a pile but I am so busy that I haven't come across it'.

"I suggested we help him out because we already had our own accounting system set-up for the syndicates we manage, and we could treat him like another syndicate with his own bank account.

"That way he could just pay the one cheque for all his horses, and he thought that was a great idea.

"He was so happy he told one of his mates, and he told another mate and before long we were inundated with people wanting to take advantage of the service."

It has all been very rewarding for Louis.

"I started the business because of an enthusiasm for the industry. That has not waned despite all the trials and tribulations we've had over the years," he said

"In fact it is this enthusiasm, plus the on-going support of Jill and a fantastically loyal client base that has enabled us to survive for so long in a tough industry." ■