

Missile mission

Portelli looking for Rebel to show true colours



Trainer Gary Portelli is hoping Rebel Dane can produce his best from in tomorrow's Missile Stakes at Randwick

By RAY HICKSON

TRAINER Gary Portelli admits his star sprinter Rebel Dane could be at a crossroads if he doesn't finish in the first two, or maybe three, when he returns at Randwick tomorrow.

The five-year-old looked in for a big autumn and winter when he chased home Lankan Rupee in the TJ Smith Stakes during The Championships but came up winless in three subsequent runs.

Added to that is the surprise defeat in his barrier trial a couple of weeks back that Portelli is hoping was just due to being "a bit fat".

With the likes of milers or stayers Boban, Messene, Hawkspur, Weary, Kirramosa, plus smart mare Sweet Idea, kicking off their spring campaigns in the Group 2 \$175,000 McGrath Estate Agents Missile Stakes (1200m) Portelli says his charge has to go close.

"Realistically he's fit enough to

win, and he has the best form at this distance in the race, and it just comes down to where he is at in life," he said.

"I'll be disappointed no doubt if he doesn't perform.

"I just wish he had trialled a little bit better. If he'd trialled enormous I'd be declaring him, he just didn't trial as good as I was hoping and my theory is he was a little underdone going into it.

"I just want to see what he is like under race pressure because there's nothing wrong with the horse other than he pulled up a bit big and looked like he needed the gallop."

Rebel Dane appeared at last Saturday's Rosehill meeting where he galloped between races with new jockey Blake Shinn on board.

Portelli said the gallop has helped bring him along in condition and taken some of the nervous energy out of him.

"I think I have him pretty close to where I want him, I think he is a little

underdone but at 1200m it shouldn't really matter with him," he said.

"He'd only had one three furlong gallop leading up to the trial, but that would have been sufficient in previous preparations.

"It was obvious after that trial he's needing a bit more work as he's getting older."

Portelli is hoping to strike an early Group 1 blow with Rebel Dane by sending him to Caulfield at the end of the month for the Memsie Stakes, all going well tomorrow.

It's the scene of his Group 1 win in the Sir Rupert Clarke last September and another race where he could catch a few classy middle distance horses early in their preparations.

"It won't be a weak Group 1 but it might be a rung below taking on a horse like Lankan Rupee later in the carnival," he said.

Gai Waterhouse will be chasing just her second win in the Missile, after Dance Hero in 2005, with 2013 Golden Slipper placegetter Sweet Idea.

The mare hasn't raced since finishing midfield in the TJ Smith and Waterhouse's foreman Mark Newnham said the very heavy track had an effect on her that day.

"A lot of horses didn't perform up to their best that day and she was one of them," he said.

"She is very rarely out of the money and she galloped really well the other day between races."

Sweet Idea galloped with Forever Loved at Rosehill last Saturday and Newnham said the subtle addition of blinkers for the gallop showed she's on track for a big first-up run.

The on-pace mare, already twice Group 1 placed and a Group 2 winner, appears the likely pace in the Missile.

"The difference in the two gallops was she galloped in the blinkers last week and it really switched her on," Newnham said.

"Gai wanted to see her work a bit sharper and she did and she will take a fair bit of beating."