

AN ORNAMENT TO THE GAME

Legendary clerk of the course calls it quits at 80!

EXCLUSIVE DUNCAN DORNAUF

AFTER beginning his role as a clerk of the course in the late 1970's, respected Westbury horseman David Mace officiated at his last race meeting in Launceston last Friday evening . . . just 13 days after celebrating his 80th birthday.

Despite his age, Mace, in his true horsemanship style has put his horse first, the former thoroughbred racehorse My Son Steven, who is close to 30-years-old, according to Mace.

"Within myself I feel like I can do the job for another 10 years, just old Steven (his horse) is getting on a bit in age, and although he still loves going to the races I feel like it's the right time for him to finish up," Mace said in the lead-up to his final meeting.

Tasmanian-born Mace spent a number of his early years on mainland Australia.

"I was born in Launceston but the family moved to Carlton in Victoria when I was five. A few years later we moved down to

Dandenong, where we lived down the road from trainer Jack Barron, and I was at his stables every day before and after school," Mace recalled.

"I was very much a part of their family and I went to work there when I finished school, but he got

"A couple of fellows arrived at Jack's place one morning; I had a horse in the cart, two tied up on the side and a horse in each hand about to go out and do a jog trip," he said.

"These guys said 'we need you out in the car'.

"Ray Murrilhy tried his hardest to get me to go to Sydney, he begged so hard I could have near got anything to go up there but I had to put my family first at that time." - David Mace

suspended for 12 months at the same time my parents moved back to Tasmania when I was about 20 years of age."

Mace did venture back to Jack Barron's for a short period of time where he recalled a story about getting chased up for National Service.

"So, I went to the car and they said you haven't applied for National Service.

"I told them I had been waiting for them to tell me when to go . . . it just fell out of my mouth at the time, I didn't know what to say.

"I got on the plane the next day and they were at the airport

waiting for me and they took me straight to the camp at Brighton so they wasted no time with me," Mace laughed when retelling the story.

Despite many years of filling the role as a clerk of the course across many of the Tasmanian harness racing tracks, Mace has also been a successful trainer, a driver (till 1985) and still continues to break in the odd horse or two.

"I have just finished breaking in three yearlings, my daughter Toni keeps asking why I do them but when you get to do something you enjoy doing well why not do it?" Mace said.

Some of the best horses Mace has trained include Barlow, San Eltryn, Royal Zamach and in more recent times Our Last Knight and Sarah Lewis.

Mace has been fortunate enough to work at the last three Inter Dominions held in Tasmania in 1981, 1998 and 2006.

"The Inter Dominions were terrific to work at, you get to work and handle the best horses and work with the best drivers and it was an honour to be a part of them," he said.

His efforts during the 1981 Inter Dominion at the Royal Hobart Showgrounds when he had to capture the driverless Michael Frost received high praise from officials across Australasia that were in attendance.

It also saw him offered a job by Ray Murrilhy to take up the number one clerk of the course role in Sydney, which Mace knocked back.

"Ray tried his hardest to get me to go there, he begged so hard I could have near got anything to go up there but I had to put my family first at that time," Mace said.

Family has played a big part for Mace and he has been able to see two of his grandchildren become successful in the sulky.

Josh Mace had a number of winners in the sulky and headed across to work at the stables of Peter Manning before finding employment outside of the industry.

Mace's other grandson to hit the track is Jack Laughner, who won last season's junior driver title in Tasmania. Jack, who has spent the past season in Victoria, is getting a number of drives for some of the biggest stables in that state.



"I think Jack is a champion driver because he won on my horse Rainbow Phoenix back in December," Mace grinned before he recalled a number of Jack's wins in the past month with every detail of the race.

So, what is the key to being a long-serving clerk of the course? Well, according to Mace it is simply 'use your eyes'.

"You have to be observant, you are always looking for things like a horse with its tongue out the bit or a hoppel shortener pin out and things like that but I will never forget the day a horse turned up at the start with its knee boots on the wrong way and it took me nearly five minutes to convince the driver that they were on wrong," the horseman recalled.

"There are always times in racing where someone may have a grudge against someone but when you blow the whistle in the stables until you come back after the race you have to treat everyone equal, whether it's Chris Alford or a driver just starting out and I believe I have treated them all with the same level of respect."

That is something many participants would echo.

While there have been many falls and loose horses to capture there have been many races where Mace has been able to capture those horses to avoid more trouble and more importantly allowed the race to be completed allowing, trainers, drivers, owners and punters the chance to earn some money.

In 2016 Mace was given Tasmanian harness racing's

highest honour when he was awarded the Edgar Tatlow Medal

"I was sitting there in the roo that night having a few drinks n really listening to what they were saying and the next thing I knrc they said my name, it was a b surprise and something that I w thrilled to receive," Mace said.

Mace has always taken an ext mile in the presentation of himsr at some of the Launceston Pacir Club's biggest race meeting including the Easter Cup rai meeting along with the Australk Derby and Championsh when they have been held Launceston.

His commitment to promotir harness racing must also not j unnoticed.

At one stage he was taking oi of his pascers to selected harne race meetings with firewor being let off on the sulky behir the horse.

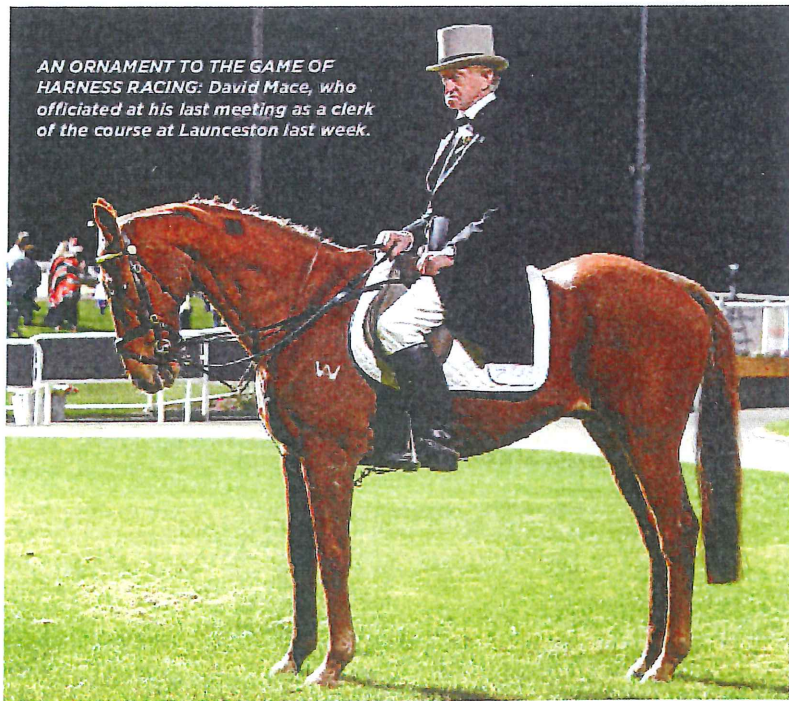
"I even did them at the Carri-Speedway stock cars one nigh he grinned.

So what will Mace miss mo after his time in the role?

"I'm going to miss the trainer the owners and the drivers tl most.

"What I will add is that sin I have first started, all the rai clubs have been wonderful anc have just loved going to the race. Mace said.

Mace will still be seen on tl Tasmanian harness race trac as he still has one horse in wo - Rainbow Phoenix, still carryir David's famous Yellow and Green racing silks.



AN ORNAMENT TO THE GAME OF HARNESS RACING: David Mace, who officiated at his last meeting as a clerk of the course at Launceston last week.