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Justin and Nardoo 'Ace'



By AMY
LAWSON

WORKING dog, Nardoo Ace, had proved himself in the stock yards at the Bingara property he calls home, but he had never attended a cattle dog trial before.

So it was a major upset when he took out the Australian Cattle Dog Trial Championships at Gundy, near Scone, recently.

He had little trial preparation and his first round at the championships was peppered with errors borne from trialling inexperience.

And so with this in mind, his owner/trainer, Justin Dickens, Bingara, was justifiably overwhelmed when his trusty offsider defeated about 100 other open section dogs to win the coveted title.

"I thought I'd just be turning up to make a donation," Justin said.

Justin was convinced a round one score of 66 would not be enough to elevate Ace to the final round of 15, which was testament to how trying the cattle were.

But Ace made it through as a mid-fielder behind fellow competitor, Walladin Blade, owned by Jack Van Slidregt, of Toowoomba, Queensland, which led the final's pack with a round one score of 94.

Ace came through with a final round score of 90 and pipped the front runner at the post by just one point.

The two-and-a-half year old Border Collie dog's genially stubborn nature had him deemed an "idiot" as a pup by Justin's father, Tony, but the young Bingara manager persevered and was rewarded over the weekend of October 7 to 9 when Ace scooped the pool at the hotly-contested championships at Gundy.

"Dad said he was no bloody good and to get rid of him – he thought Ace was too loose, so I took him back," he said.

"Ace has been a bit of a challenge because he's pretty strong-minded so we've had a few arguments over the years, but now he's my top dog and he's very reliable.

"He's got good footwork and is very good at keeping things together.

"He's a dog that works his cattle well and is able to move cattle on his presence without having to bite excessively.

"At the championships, the cattle were easily upset by hard bite and you just had to be lucky to draw cattle that didn't take your dog on too much."

Justin's interest in quality working dogs evolved from a life-long association with sheep dogs via his father, Tony, and their Border Collie-based Nardoo Stock Dogs.

The 28-year-old grew up in the Coolah district, where his father worked as an overseer for Antony and Barb Martin, "Dalkeith", Cassilis, east of Coolah.



■ Justin Dickens of "Belgrove", Bingara, with his dog, Nardoo Ace, which won the coveted Australian Cattle Dog Trial Championships at Gundy last month, in his first go at a cattle dog trial.

"I used to work for the Martins on weekends and with Dad being mad on his dogs, I've had dogs myself since I was 16," Justin said.

He finished his Higher School Certificate (HSC) at Coolah Central School before packing his bags – and dogs – bound for the wide open spaces at his grandfather's sheep and cattle property, "Nardoo", north-west of Wanaaring.

He stayed there as a jackaroo for a year before returning for three months at Coolah in early 1996 to help Archer Field and family at "Turee Station", prepare their Widgiewa Hereford stud for dispersal.

He was in charge of water and helped in livestock operations at the Martins' property, "Dalkeith", for two and a half years before spending a further 10 months doing mostly sheepwork as a junior stockman at the mixed farming Paspaley Pearls property, "Kurrajong Park", north of Coolah.

Justin was contract mustering sheep and cattle for six months around the Wanaaring district six years ago when a good friend alerted him, through word-of-mouth, of his current position as manager at Mack and Flora Lee-Warner's Angus cattle and cropping property "Belgrove", east of Bingara, in North West NSW.

Justin's dogs have accompanied him with all his moves and he now aims to breed mostly Border Collie working dogs with the spice of another breed in the cross.

"I think a lot of the purebred dogs are a little bit too intense for station work and tend to over-exert themselves," he said.

"The most important thing to me in a dog is temperament and trainability.

"I don't mind if they have some faults as long as they let me fix them.

"Working dogs need to shepherd their stock, demonstrate good cover, have heading ability, be very strong and able to move cattle and bite on demand.

"In my situation here at Bingara, I need a dog with a bit of stamina that's with me at 7am and still there at 5pm."

Justin's best advice to others was to attend training schools and said working dog enthusiasts including Greg Prince, Dubbo; Jeff Richie, Guyra; Billy Davidson, Tamworth; Justin Cook, Scone, and Justin's father, Tony, had taught him all he knew.

"These gentlemen have given me good advice and are people that I admire," he said.

Consistency and time were keys to training quality working dogs, Justin said.

"Greg got me off on the right foot with how to go about training dogs," Justin said.

"You've got to find a breed of dog that you like and stick to it.

"There's no shortcuts to training dogs – good dogs are not made overnight and take time and patience."

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