

SOME people refer to him as Macca, The Gmac, Snap or even Bones, but to those of us who know him a little better, it's Dad or his favourite of all, Poppy.

For those who haven't caught up yet, I'm referring to Glenn McElhinney.

I could go on for days about how good he is, or how much success he has had, but last night the veteran reinsman proved to us he most certainly hasn't lost his touch.

With a late pick up drive behind the Harry Martin-trained Double Encounter at Club Menangle, a well-timed run saw Dad notch up his 1500th win.

That total is somewhat in dispute, however, as it is only according to modern records.

Dad started driving in 1977 – almost a decade before computer records - which means there are approximately 20 or so wins unaccounted for in the system.

Despite his advancing years - 61 - Dad can certainly still show the young guns how it's done, and despite the occasional murmur of "it's time to slow down", I for one am glad he has not.

He has built himself quite the reputation of getting the odd slow one to win a race or getting a beaten horse to lift and push a win out of it.

From humble beginnings at the age of 12 in Rosehill, it was actually Dad's younger brother David who showed interest first when trainer Rodney Vernon would walk his pacers past their Rosehill home to take them to "Dodger" Reynolds stables.

Mrs Vernon, Rodney's mother, paid for his first driving permit at 16 years of age and from their his career has blossomed.

His first drive was at Gosford on a horse called Rambling Brovado in January 1977, with his maiden win coming a week later behind the Vernon-trained Love A Dollar in Maitland on January 21, 1977 in what was his fourth drive.

"It wasn't like how it is now back then," Dad said. "Young drivers didn't get as much as a go back then, you really had to prove yourself and the senior drivers were pretty happy to put you in your place if they felt you needed it!"

Even my cousin Bryse and I haven't escaped hearing "there were no concession claims, no drop backs, nothing. Everyone was out there to win, there was no drivers fees paid like there is now, no guaranteed earn!"

Throughout the years, Dad's been fortunate to have some loyal supporters, some still around, some long passed on, but names who have always stuck out include Reg Clarke, John and Joe Sultana, Bill Neave, Peter Moore, Tom and Dorris Campbell and Bruce Fox.

But nobody has ever been more supportive than family.

We pride ourselves on being a tight knit bunch with brothers David, Adrian and Timothy all holding dual trainer-driver licenses then it trickled down to myself as a trainer then driver later on, then Bryse who is now enjoying success in Queensland and Caitlin who is proving herself as a trainer-driver in Tamworth.

Although separated now, my Mum is still extremely supportive of Dad...she even still mends his driving pants or colours when needed, just like the good old days and we can always rely on my big brother Ben for encouragement and support and even help around the place when he comes to visit.

I've spoken many times to Dad about highs and lows of the industry, but he prefers to focus on the highs and always refers to his biggest highlight to date as a driver which was winning the 2008 Bathurst Gold Crown with Emjayem Grand for Bathurst local Ben Settree.

"Ben and I have been good mates for a lot of years," Dad said. "Emjayem Grand was a very nice two-year-old and it was great to win as it was mine and Ben's first Group One, so it was special to share that moment with him."

A year later Dad won the Crown again, this time on the John Tapp trained Chariot King.

That night didn't start off as smoothly though.

Dad went there confident about Chariot King but a drive in an earlier race saw him dislodged from the cart.

In true Macca fashion, however, he picked himself up, dusted himself off and away he went.

What made the win with Chariot King that little bit more special is that not only to date is he the only driver win consecutive Bathurst Gold Crowns, but the horses were out of the same mare Queen Xena and bred off of Bathurst stud, Brooklyn Lodge which is of course owned and operated by the well respected Janet and Doug Moore and their daughter, Ben's wife Melanie.

Although he's been driving for more than four decades, Dad didn't take it up professionally until he was in his late 30's.

At the time he was managing a water bed company and he felt it was time to take the game a little more seriously.

Living in Rosehill and training from Ned Feehely's Condell Park stables was the ideal platform to lift Dad into the freelance driving ranks with the help of local trainers like Neil Costello, The McDowell Family, Michael Watkins and Dottie Schmidt, but he also gained the interest of trainers like Colin Pike, Peter Morris, Sonia Mahar and Clayton Harmey.

Those years saw Dad register century seasons between 2002 through to 2007, his best season being 2005/06 with 151 wins.

His move to Condell Park also saw him build a connection with Brett Cotterill. The pair enjoyed a successful run with handy mare Theartofillusion and he was once again called upon to drive her progeny, landing a win in the 2011 NSW Breeders' Challenge with Theartofdelusion.

Ok, I'm extremely bias, but you would struggle to find someone who works as hard as my Dad.

Even as I'm writing this he's mowing lawns on our property.

Like he does every evening around midnight Dad will go to work and then be home to have breakfast with my kids Milla and Tye.

Once the kids are at school, Dad will begin working our modest team of eight at Menangle Park.

There is not one person who doesn't say to me how they don't know how he does it, but this is what he has done for as long as I can remember.

I've been extremely fortunate to inherit my Dad's passion for harness racing and have been alongside him for many of his big wins, but unlucky enough to see him become unseated a few times - the most recently only a few weeks ago at Penrith.

Let me tell you, it's a surreal feeling to hit the back straight and see your father waving his hands at the field to slow down given the last time you checked he was somewhere behind you in the field.

He's always willing to lend a hand to anyone should they need it, impart his wisdom on upcoming drivers and most importantly to me, support me with training and driving ventures.

Here's to 1500 old boy, keep punching them home with your signature yellow helmet and left handed salutes.

- TIARN SUTTON



DOUBLE ENCOUNTER



GLENN McELHINNEY