

Breeding barn miracle takes the first step

The big thrills in harness racing come at all levels and Victorian couple Jess Tubbs and Greg Sugars experienced the full spectrum this past week.

Their two interdominion heat wins at Ballarat grabbed the headlines last Saturday night (Nov 26), but a more modest two-year-old maiden victory at Warragul earlier in the week (Nov 22) had the tears flowing as well.

Owner, breeder and proud trainer Jess Tubbs said Vee Em Gee Macray (**Sweet Lou**) had defied the odds when she arrived as a healthy foal, born from a thoroughbred surrogate mare in 2019.

“The breeding game is not for the impatient! Things go wrong, but I think it’s good for people to understand how much these special horses mean to us as well,” Tubbs said.

“It was a very long, emotional and expensive road to have this foal, and to have her take the first step meant a lot,” she said.

Vee Em Gee Macray is from Tubbs’ undisputed “special girl” Wya Mya Macray (**Pacific Fella**) – the mare that the Tubbs-Sugars property Larajay Farm is named after.

“She is the original – she means everything to me, I just love her so much. Dad (the late Alan Tubbs) trained her and she was one of the first horses I raced with (co-owner) Ian Kitchin,” Tubbs said.

“She didn’t show too much at the start and to be honest she probably got some reprieves because she was mine – another horse might have been shown the door!” she laughed.

But Wya Mya Macray “came good” and went on to win 11 races and \$86,000 in stakes including, most memorably for Tubbs, finishing third in a Vicbred 4yo mares final in 2009.

“Lara” was retired in 2010 and was an immediate success as a broodmare, leaving Tee Cee Bee Macray (Ponder) the following year, a winner of 17 races (including a Gr 3 Vicbred Platinum final) and \$250,000 in stakes. In 2015 Wya Mya Macray foaled Larajay Macray (Sportswriter), a winner of \$150,000 in stakes, including runner up in the Tatlow and heats of the 3yo fillies Breeders Crown and VicBred super series.

“In January 2017 I bred my girl to Sweet Lou and sadly in December of that year she had the most traumatic foaling,” Tubbs said.

“Greg was away driving when she started foaling and I was on my own – the colt was breach, and upside down as well. I couldn’t help her deliver him, so when Greg got home, we rushed her to the Ballarat veterinary clinic.

“They were waiting for her and had her prepped for a C-section and got him out just in time to save Lara. The foal had died, but Lara prolapsed and suffered quite a bit of trauma and her cervix was damaged.”

Tubbs said vets had advised Wya Mya Macray could now possibly carry a foal, but that wasn’t something she and Kitchin were ever prepared to do. Instead, a year on, the decision was taken to flush an embryo from “Lara” and find a suitable surrogate to carry the foal – which turned out to be a thoroughbred mare.

“It’s not been easy to get her in foal, and embryo transfer is between \$8000 and \$10,000 and that’s without stud fees and all of the other costs of breeding, so it’s not a procedure you decide to do lightly,” Tubbs said.

“But everything went well, and Romsey Equine Services safely delivered us a lovely filly – fast forward to today, that is our girl Vee Em Gee Macray. So you can see why the win at Warragul was just a little bit special.”

The foal was named in honor of the North American harness racing couple Yannick and Vicki Gingras.

“Yannick and Vicki somehow managed to get us tickets for (country singer) Tim McGraw’s concert in Melbourne and we were at his show in 2019 when I got the phone call to say we had a little filly –we couldn’t name her after Yannick, so Vee Em Gee it was!”

Tubbs and Sugars also have a Sportswriter yearling filly (a full sister to Larajay Macray) and a Poster Boy weanling colt, who will be “Lara’s” last foals.

“She’s enjoying life in the retirees’ paddock alongside Tee Cee Bee Macray and I think that will probably be the end of her breeding days. She’s done her bit!” Tubbs said

A little miracle: Vee Em Gee Macray as a foal

Winning driver Bailey McDonough with Vee Em Gee Macray