

## *Special Edition*



TRACK Magazine Photo by Ben Hudson

**Steven Stevens, Premier Campbell Newman and announcer Bill Bailey at the Houston Rodeo.**

# QUEENSLAND PREMIER ANNOUNCES PROJECT FOR QUARTER HORSE RACING

By BEN HUDSON

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At the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo Tuesday evening, a trade mission of Australians headed by Queensland's Premier Campbell Newman announced that a group known as Australian Quarter Horse Racing Development Pty Ltd (AQHRD) has been granted a license for the development and control of Quarter Horse racing in all of Queensland.

Joining Premier Newman for the announcement made before some 75,000 people attending the Tuesday evening Rodeo Houston performance were:

- Former American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) president Steve Stevens, who is chairman of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo;

- Lazy E Ranch general manager Butch Wise, an AQHA director who is a partner in AQHRD;

- TRACK Magazine owner Ben Hudson, an AQHA director who is a partner in AQHRD;

- John Hochen, a former racing executive in Australia who is a partner in AQHRD;

- Ron Dyne, mayor of the Australia town of Gympie, which includes the area where AQHRD plans to construct a racetrack;

- David Gibson, Member of the Queensland Parliament representing Gympie;

- Trey Buck, executive director of racing for AQHA.

Premier Newman and his trade mission entourage came to Houston on Tuesday from New York. Wednesday evening they were to meet with Texas Governor Rick Perry at the opening of the new Queensland Trade and Investment office in Houston. At that function the Governor and the Premier also will sign a Queensland/Texas sister state agreement.

The Premier said that the Queensland government has signed an agreement with AQHRD on a large piece of land that will house the racing facilities and could include an equestrian school, hotel, equine hospital and an associated residential development.

"While there are a number of milestones the company will need to achieve, the proposal has potential to transform Mary Valley with the creation of a new multi-million industry and up to 145 jobs," Mr. Newman said.

"Texas is the spiritual home of Quarter Horse racing, so it is fitting to announce at the Houston Rodeo the licensing agreement and start talking about the exciting potential for Australia's first Quarter Horse racing facility." Queensland Parliament member David Gibson, who had met with AQHRD investors last May in Mary Valley, said he had hoped the first horses would be racing there within two to three years. The Mary Valley property is 1,600 hectares (nearly 4,000 acres).

In addition to the aforementioned Hochen, Wise and Hudson, other partners in AQHRD are:

- Australian businessman Allan Murnane, a horse owner and breeder who developed the idea for AQHRD;

- Lee Armstrong, an engineer and horseman from Canada who is a long-time Australian resident;

- Keith Hamburger, a former Australian racing official;

- John Andreini, a California businessman and long-time horse breeder who also is an AQHA director; and

- Vince Genco, a California businessman, international stockman, and long-time horse breeder who also is an AQHA director.

In making the announcement last night, Premier Newman said that AQHRD has been granted a "control body license" that charges the group to set up rules for racing, promote the breeding and acquisition of stock for racing and to provide a facility for racing.

Premier Campbell's website says that the government is focused on promoting tourism, agriculture, resources and construction . . . and this appears to be what this project is all about.

Quarter Horse racing . . . or sprint racing as it is known in

Australia . . . was popular for many years but had faded into obscurity for various reason since 1993 when racing at distances less than 880 yards was ceased due to pressure by Thoroughbred organizations.

Murnane, who with his wife Kate has bred and owned sprint horses for many years, became interested in organizing and promoting Quarter Horse racing in Australia several years ago. They became more deeply involved in racing with the community of Mortlake in Victoria some 10 years ago. An annual community race day in Mortlake was encouraged by the Victorian Quarterhorse Association, and it became a regular spring event.

The enterprising Murnane contacted Wise about the development of Quarter Horse racing in Australia. Butch and his wife Nancy had a daughter working in Melbourne at the time. While on a trip to Australia in 2007, Butch visited with Allan concerning the development of breeding and racing Quarter Horses in Australia.

Murnane began a relationship with Buck and he subsequently came to the United States in 2007 where he attended the AQHA's Annual Racing Conference held that fall at Los Alamitos.

With support from the AQHA, Murnane produced a conference for Australians interested in sprint horses at Victoria's historic Glenmoriston College in Western Victoria April 2008. Among those on the program from the U.S. was television racing personality Chris Kotulak, Buck, Wise, Andreini, Genco and Hudson.

The more than 250 that attended the conference talked about the history of sprint horse racing in Australia, the Australia Quarter Horse



**John Hochen, Butch Wise, Premier Campbell Newman, Steve Stevens and Ben Hudson.**



**Ron Dyne**



**Campbell Newman**



**David Gibson**

Association, the American Quarter Horse Association, the meet the next day at Panmure and the possibility of expanding sprint horse racing in Australia.

At the end of the conference, Andreini, Genco, Wise and Hudson each agreed to help fund the races in Victoria the next year.

The day after the conference, the six Americans attended the sprint races and festival at Panmure. A good time was had by all at the county fair-type event. While the Americans were in Victoria, they visited several race tracks.

In 2008, Quarter Horse racing was conducted at five tracks . . . including three community tracks . . . by Victorian Quarter Horse Racing. The Murnanes then came to the U.S. and visited farms and tracks.

When the Murnane family moved north from Victoria to Queensland in 2010 after seven years of community racing, their desire to breed and race Quarter Horses came with them.

Armstrong, who had been involved in Quarter Horse racing and breeding in Canada before moving to Australia and who had participated in racing in Victoria, contacted Murnane in 2011 about putting together a self-sustaining program for breeding and racing Quarter Horses.

Murnane and Armstrong subsequently presented their plan for the AQHRD to Andreini, Genco, Wise and Hudson and the company was formed. As Murnane set about putting together a business plan and a proposal for a control body license from the Queensland government, he met former racing executives Hochen and Hamburger. That twosome joined the AQHRD team as partners in 2012.

In 2012, the AQHRD applied to the Queensland government for the control body license which essentially puts the group in charge of all matters relating to Quarter Horse racing in the state.

In May 2013, Genco, Wise and Hudson went to Queensland for an AQHRD board meeting with their Australian partners. They also visited with various government officials in Queensland (including Gibson and Dyne) and looked at possible sites for racing.

When the representatives of the Queensland government contacted the AQHRD offices in February of this year, it was decided to make the announcement in Houston as a trade commission office is being opened.

Murnane, who heads the AQHRD office, said the group in the next 180 days will be working on racing conditions and requirements; rules; operational plans; financing; site selection; enlarging its offices; surveying horses and horsemen; and looking forward to its first day of racing some two and one-half years down the road.

"This is a major event in Australian racing history," Murnane said.

"It means a new energy to racing, and I believe it is for all racing. We just look at the crazy public response that Black Caviar had with 24 wins in a row. She was a bullet, and if she ran over 400 meters tomorrow you would draw a crowd equal to Phar Lap. Speed is sellable.

"This business brings jobs, lots of them. It links Australia to U.S. racing. Big opportunities there.

"This will bring significant tourism to a region, as this will be the center for a new industry. It will be state of the art in everything. We are aiming, insisting, on the best track in the world."

For decades, horsemen in Australia have imported horses from the U.S. In recent years, breeding farms such as 6666 Ranch and Lazy E Ranch have been sending frozen semen to breeders in Australia. Breeders also have sent frozen embryos to Australia.

"We are selling speed here, and we need to have the best surfaces we can because the day one of our horses burns up the track and lays down a time that excites the industry in the U.S.A. is the day that the semen probably will start to flow back the other way. That will probably take a few years.

"The dreams of so many will then become a reality," Murnane said. "The Los Alamitos that the people in Australia know is now some 15 hours away, but we are going to have one here where they can race, and it will be just around the corner.

"Now, we need to be breeding horses here in Australia, and we need to buy horses that are currently in the USA."

Queensland, which is more than twice the size of Texas (668,204 square miles vs. 268,820 square miles), has a population of 4.6 million. It ranks second in size only to Western Australia among the nation's states and territories. It also is third in population. Nearly one-half of the Queensland population lives in the Brisbane metropolitan area.

It is expected that the AQHRD will locate a track in the popular tourist area north of Brisbane. The popular Sun Coast and Gold Coast areas of Queensland play host to tourists who come to the Great Barrier Reef.

On Monday, Hochen, Gibson and Dyne visited Lone Star Park in Texas before coming to Houston. On Tuesday, the trio was joined by Wise and Hudson for a tour of Sam Houston Race Park and an afternoon at the races.

"Ben Hudson said Quarter Horse racing has found a new frontier. It's much like Los Alamitos and California was in 1950 or Remington Park and Oklahoma was just a few years ago," said Murnane.

"This is an exciting time for Australia. And an exciting time for Quarter Horse racing."

"Our friend Steve Stevens really helped us at Houston. There is a lot of excitement in Australia about this deal. And announcing it before 75,000 people at the rodeo made it even more exciting. This is a red letter day for American Quarter Horses . . . both in the United States and in Australia."

