

# HEATHCOTE & BUFFERING

by Brad Bishop

Prior to heading to Melbourne last spring, Robert Heathcote was not game to dream he would head home to Queensland celebrating a Group 1 hat-trick with Buffering.

It had nothing to do with the trainer having any doubts over the six-year-old's ability, more so the disappointment he'd experienced on more occasions than he would have preferred in the past.

Buffering arrived in Melbourne a Group 1 maiden from 16 attempts, but in nine of those he had filled a minor placing.

That became 10 from 17 when he resumed with a second placing behind Samaready in the Moir Stakes at Moonee Valley.

So you can imagine the Buffering team's delight when he not only broke through in the Manikato Stakes, but followed up with further Group 1 wins in the VRC Sprint Classic and Winterbottom Stakes.

And they preferred not to play favourites.

"We just took them all as they came because they were all immensely fulfilling," Heathcote said.



Photo by Darren McNamara, courtesy Racing Victoria

Buffering (D Browne) wins the 2013 \$1million Gr 1 Manikato Stakes (1200m) at Moonee Valley

"It's just great that he's got the runs on the board now and what he has achieved is what I've always believed he could do.

"Is a horse a Group 1 horse until they've won a Group 1? It's a fair question, but I think he's achieved his rightful status as being acclaimed as a genuine Group 1 sprinter and can hang his hat on being the nation's number one sprinter."

The Winterbottom Stakes success was Buffering's 15th victory at his 38th trip to the races. Add to that 14 minor placings and he has banked \$4,129,400 in stakes.

That's a fair return for a banged-up

yearling that Heathcote snared for just \$22,000 at the 2009 Magic Millions Yearling Sale.

"The very first time I laid eyes on him he had a hind leg bandage on from his elbow right down to his hoof," Heathcote said.

"Generally that would be the first sign that you'd just turn your head and walk away.

"But Paul Willetts, who was with me and helped me purchase him, and I took the bandage off and when we did that we weren't concerned with the abrasion that was there.

"So I won the bid at \$22,000. It's crazy stuff when you consider he's now won over \$4 million."

Heathcote and Buffering's owners didn't have to wait long to recoup their purchase price. After winning over 1110 metres at Doomben on debut – on March 27, 2010 – Buffering won his ensuing three starts, culminating with a \$150,000 juvenile feature at Ipswich.

That earned him a crack at the Group 2 Champagne Stakes (1200m) on Doomben 10,000 day and although he tasted defeat for the first time, he was far from disgraced when third behind subsequent Group 1 winner Pressday and Spirit of Boom.

Photos by Darren McNamara, courtesy Racing Victoria



Rob Heathcote & Team Buffering finally get to celebrate 'The Buffs' first Group 1 victory