

HEATHCOTE & BUFFERING

the Stradbroke Handicap won by Linton.

It looked like more of the same last spring when he returned to Melbourne and was second – again as favourite – to Samaready in the maiden renewal of the Moir Stakes at Group 1 level.

He came out of that race with bruising to a near-side hoof, which only added to the unexpected nature of the Group 1 spree on which he was about to embark.

remaining doubters to become believers as Buffering powered up the famous Flemington straight for a three-quarters-of-a-length win over Shamexpress.

Proving that when you're hot you're hot, he then travelled to Perth where he got the nod by the barest of margins over Moment of Change in the 1200m Winterbottom Stakes.

many that would begrudge him the title of best sprinter now."

But Heathcote is not resting on his laurels with Buffering. He is looking to enhance his reputation during 2014. He won't be back in Melbourne for the sprint features early in 2014, but will embark on a three-state, all-weight-for-age campaign before potentially showcasing his talent overseas in the Hong Kong International Sprint in December.

His first run of the year will be in Sydney in the \$400,000 Group 2 Challenge Stakes (1000m) at Randwick on March 15 before attacking the world's richest sprint race – the \$2.5 million Group 1 T.J. Smith Stakes (1200m) at Randwick on April 12.

It will then be back to Queensland for the \$400,000 Group 1 BTC Cup (1200m) and \$650,000 Group 1 Doomben 10,000 (1350m) during May. A spell will then beckon before returning to Melbourne for a fifth Spring Racing Carnival, where he will attempt to go one better in the Moir Stakes before defending his Manikato Stakes and VRC Sprint Classic titles.

"I'm taking a leaf out of Peter's (Moody) book with Black Caviar, and to a lesser degree Joe Janiak with Takeover Target, from, now," Heathcote said.

"When you have horses of this quality, you have to be very selective of where you go and what races you put them in and he'll pretty much just race in weight-for-age races now. Hopefully we can have a bit more fun in 2014.

The difference this year, though, is Buffering will be the hunted, not the hunter. **R**



Photos by Darren McNamara, courtesy Racing Victoria



Trainer Robert Heathcote and jockey Damian Browne after The Buff's second Group 1 win

His return to Moonee Valley for the Manikato Stakes had much happier memories for the Buffering camp when he held off visiting Hong Kong star Lucky Nine to score his breakthrough Group 1 win.

That several of the beaten brigade that were unlucky in that event, in particular Lucky Nine, meant that on VRC Sprint Classic day there were still come Buffering doubters and the son of Mossman went around an \$11 chance.

It took only 70 seconds for the

"As Aussies, we tend to support the underdog – the little Aussie battler who keeps doing his best but can't quite climb to the pinnacle – and when they do it makes it so much more rewarding and fulfilling," Heathcote said. "That pretty much sums up what Buffering's been able to do. He's been a thorough little gentleman from day one, he's never really put a hoof wrong the entire time, and it's great he's receiving a lot of adulation from the Aussie racing public. I don't think there's too