

# Strata Lady able to do it again for owners

By Wally O'Hearn

Auckland owners Alan and Christine Abel will be enjoying their world cruise when the J Swap Matamata Breeders Stakes meeting is run on Saturday week, but they know their hopes of success are in good hands.

The Abels race Strata Lady from the local Wexford Stables and will be attempting to win the Group Two fillies feature for the second time. The couple celebrated success in the Matamata feature in 2003 with Katana, who was ridden by local jockey Michael Coleman.

Katana was prepared by Mike Moroney in partnership with Andrew Scott, who is now a training partner with Lance O'Sullivan at Wexford Stables and is therefore looking to once again be part of a Matamata Breeders Stakes win for the Abels. "I've known Alan and Christine for many years and it would be great if we could win the Breeders Stakes again for them," said Scott. "They've had a lot of success and we had some good horses for

them when I was with Mike. Penny Gem, Galroof, Kapiston and Katana were top horses."

Penny Gem won the 2003 Group 1 Captain Cook Stakes then finished first equal with Leica Guv in the Group 2 Eagle Technology Counties Cup. Her Group One placings included seconds in the Zabeel Classic and Whakanui Stud International Stakes and a third in the NZ Bloodstock Breeders Stakes at Te Aroha. She was also runner-up in the 2002 Group 2 Eight Carat Classic at Ellerslie and later provided Coleman with his 1000th win of his career when beating O'Sullivan (on Pomp And Glory) at Ellerslie in April 2003.

Galroof won the Group 3 Doomben Classic for the Abels and was runner-up in the Group 1 Queensland Derby, Group 1 Doomben Cup and Group 2 Queensland Guineas, while another topliner was Kapiston, who credited the Abels with Group One glory when following up a third in the Manawatu Sires' Produce

Stakes with success in the 2001 Ellerslie Sires' Produce Stakes.

Katana was having her third start when she defeated Tracktalk in the 2003 Matamata Breeders' Stakes, having been runner-up on debut at Tauranga and an easy winner at Avondale. She then went on to finish second to Maroofity in the Group 1 Ford Manawatu Sires' Produce Stakes.

Strata Lady will also be third-up when she contests Matamata's feature and has shown ability from the outset. She was third in her first trial at Te Awamutu last October behind two smart two-year-

olds Rocanto and Windborne, then won at the Rotorua trials the following month before making an impressive winning debut at Awapuni on December 20.

On the strength of that Awapuni win over subsequent stylish winner Bella Court, Strata Lady went straight into the Karaka Million and she performed creditably for sixth, three lengths from the Queensland winner Hardline.

The Abels were already on their world cruise when it was confirmed Strata Lady would run in the \$1 million two-year-old feature at Ellerslie, but with the cruise ship docked in Rarotonga the couple made a fleeting trip back to Auckland to watch the big race. "She might have lacked a bit of ring craft when she ran in the Karaka Million but she's done well since," said Scott. "She's a good chance in the Breeders, but its unlikely Alan and Christine will be back for it."

Strata Lady was ridden in the Karaka Million by James McDonald, but her regular rider, Craig Grylls, will be back in the saddle on Saturday week. Grylls will be chasing his first win in the Breeders Stakes and Strata Lady presents him with his best opportunity of success.

Grylls has ridden in the race five times, but always on lesser-fancied runners and his best result has been a fourth on Elle Tresor in 2010, the same year he won the other two-year-old feature on the card, the Listed Reid & Harrison Slipper Trial, on Nacho Man.

Strata Lady was originally bought by Wexford Stables for \$40,000 at the NZ Bloodstock's National Yearling Sales at Karaka last year and the Abels snapped up the chance to race her. "She was a delicate filly but very athletic and with good scope and length," described O'Sullivan. "We liked that she had a good running Australian pedigree."

Strata Lady is by Stratum, who won the Golden Slipper Stakes and is the sire of Golden Slipper winner Crystal Lily. Strata Lady's third dam is Midnight Fever, winner of the 1987 Group 1 VATC Blue Diamond Stakes, and three Group Two events and was runner-up in the Group 1 VATC 1000 Guineas.

The Abels originally lived in the Bay of Plenty and Alan was recognised in the 2010 Queen's Honours' list with an ONZM (Officer of the Order) for services to business and the community in Tauranga and the wider Bay of Plenty for more than 40 years. That was obviously a huge thrill for the Abels, but so would a second win in the J Swap Contractors Matamata Breeders Stakes. And they have the record book on their side through Wexford Stable and O'Sullivan and Scott.

Wexford Stables has won the Breeders Stakes on six occasions, the first five wins being when O'Sullivan's father, Dave, and brother, Paul, were doing the training. Ma Chiquita started the ball rolling in 1985, then Morar won in 1990, Our Tristralight in 1992, Our Tristalove in 1993 and Lodore Magic in 1996. Lance O'Sullivan and Scott then chimed in with a Wexford win in 2007 with Satinka.

As well as the Satinka and Katana wins, Scott also won the event in 2000 with Conquistar, when in partnership with Moroney. And for good measure O'Sullivan won the feature five times as a jockey – Ma Chiquita, Phillipa Rush, Morar, Our Tristalove and Flying Babe.

Matamata stables are certainly due another Breeders Stakes celebration, having not taken the local event since the John Sargent-trained Banchee in 2010. Banchee was the fifth Matamata filly in succession to win the race, following on from Naturo, Satinka, Te Akau Coup and Te Akau Rose.



Strata Lady stands proud with Lance O'Sullivan and Debbie O'Hearn in readiness for the J Swap Contractors Matamata Breeders Stakes.