

# A WAVE OF CHANGE AT THE GOLD COAST

WITH ALMOST \$1.8MILLION SPENT ON RENOVATIONS AND ENHANCEMENTS IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS, THE GOLD COAST TURF CLUB IS LOOKING TO THE FUTURE AS GRANT MORGAN REPORTS.

**T**HE turbulent economic times aren't dampening the enthusiasm of new Gold Coast Turf Club Chief Executive John Cameron.

The source of Cameron's optimism is perhaps his well rounded back ground which must surely rank him as one of the best qualified race club bosses in Australasia.

The forty seven year-old Cameron joined the Gold Coast Turf Club after four years at the helm of the progressive Moonee Valley Race Club, home of Cox Plate and Melbourne's only night racing venue.

Cameron's racing pedigree started in New Zealand, where he was born into a horse mad family headed by father Don Cameron, a former leading jockey and trainer.

Don Cameron rode in four Melbourne Cups as a jockey, whilst he has enjoyed significant success as a trainer on both sides of the Tasman.

As a youngster, John Cameron did his apprenticeship under father Don.

Cameron started out as one of the lightest ever apprentices in New Zealand tipping the scales at just 35kg.

He cut his teeth as an apprentice alongside the likes of Shane Dye, Brent Thomson and Grant Cooksley.

Cameron's most successful day in the

pigskin came at Hawera in the form of a treble.

He also rode winners at most of New Zealand's major tracks including Ellerslie on Auckland Cup day.

After hanging up the saddle, Cameron launched himself into the world of racing administration with the Waikato Racing Club.

"I had my last ride over the hurdles at Te Rapa on the Monday and started there in the racing office on the Tuesday," recalls John Cameron.

That followed with stints as secretary at Counties Race Club and the Wellington Race Club, completing a wonderful early grounding in the racing business.

He ventured away from racing for a period to head Athletics New Zealand, whilst he also obtained a Masters of Business from the highly regarded Massey University.

Enticed to Australia to head up South Australian Racing, Cameron spent five years in Adelaide before moving to Victoria and Moonee Valley.

Cameron won the race for the Gold Coast job heading a big list of candidates for one of the most prized positions in the game.

In doing so, Cameron arrives on the Gold Coast at a crucial point of the 'glamour strips' racing history.

During the past twelve months, a proposal to relocate to a 'Greenfields' site at Palm Meadows has often divided the Gold Coast racing community.

Whilst the Palm Meadows proposal continues to do laps around the bureaucratic bowels of Queensland, for Cameron, it's full steam ahead for the Gold Coast Turf Club at the current Bundall site.

"I have an open mind about Palm Meadows," says Cameron.

"If it were to prove financially sustainable business plan, we would have to evaluate if it were a good thing for the club."

"At this stage Palm Meadows is an interesting feasibility study."

"Most racing bodies and clubs are looking at how best to use their existing facilities and plan for the future, we should be no different."

Back at Bundall, Cameron has a focus on increasing the clubs ability to generate corporate revenue through hospitality and sponsorship.

Expenditure in the vicinity of \$1.75million has been outlaid in recent months on several enhancements to the existing facilities, most of which will be unveiled by Melbourne Cup day 2008.

These facilities will also provide welcome relief come Magic Millions time, as the club again hosts a raft of interstate and overseas visitors.

For trainers and owners, the well worn B Grass training track has been re-laid and cambered.

This provides upgraded training facilities for up to 750 horses which are worked at the busy Gold Coast track.

Members have been well rewarded with several new enhancements.

The well patronised Skyline Lounge has been extended, providing further capacity for Members and Guests who desire high class raceday dining, whilst enjoying panoramic views of the Surfers Paradise skyline.

The board room, located at the top level of the Hollindale Stand, has been renovated and extended.

But gone is the past. No more long lunches for board members and their entourage.

The Magic Millions' raceday in January, along with the Prime Minister's Cup, are the highlights of the Gold Coast's racing calendar



BRUNO CANNATELLI

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JOHN CAMERON, CEO



GOLD COAST BULLETIN

The Board Room is now an exclusive corporate area which will be sold on raceday, generating increased raceday revenue for the club. No more free feeds.

A new owners and sponsors bar has been constructed in the birdcage.

A large part of this area will also be sold to corporate sponsors wanting a taste and smell of the action within touching distance of the winning horses and their connections.

The ground floor Members bar has received a significant facelift after being completely gutted and refitted, providing a brighter and lighter atmosphere for members, owners and trainers.

State of the art plasma flat screen televisions have been scattered around the track in good numbers, whilst the outdated refrigeration units have been replaced to enhance catering and bar facilities.

Widely regarded as the leading provincial club in Australia, the Gold Coast Turf Club now faces the challenge of evolving towards metropolitan racing.

This evolution has often been frowned upon by traditionalists pointing to Brisbane as Queensland's rightful home to metropolitan racing.

But with the recent merger between the Queensland Turf Club and the Brisbane Turf Club, times are changing in Queensland.

Over the years, the Gold Coast Turf Club has clawed two stand alone Saturday Metropolitan meetings away from Brisbane.

The Magic Millions in January and the well established Prime Ministers Cup/Hollindale Stakes meeting are the highlights of the Gold Coast racing calendar.

Most other Saturdays, the Gold Coast conducts provincial standard meetings which attract large crowds of holiday makers and locals.

“We are one of the highest utilised and patronised racetracks in Australia.”

“This is a very, very good club, no matter how you look at it.”

“It's done an exceptional job at attracting people to racing for a long period of time.”

In a bid to gain further metropolitan market share, it would seem most likely that Night Racing might come back onto the radar of Cameron and the Gold Coast board, headed by Chairman Hoss Heinrich.

With his Moonee Valley experience behind him, Cameron believes that

successful night racing is built around premier meetings, and not run of the mill offerings for patrons and punters.

“Premier night meetings worked very well at Moonee Valley.”

“Lower level night meetings don't have the same impact on attendance levels and betting turnover.”

The Friday night time slot would look highly desirable at the Gold Coast, given its obvious crowd pulling power which plays to a swelling tourist and corporate market.

If night racing is to make a go of it in Queensland, it would seem the Gold Coast would be a much better bet than its counterparts at Toowoomba and Sunshine Coast.

As Cameron settles into his new role, he calmly assesses the challenges ahead by dividing his attention to the key segments of his market.

“My focus is on Industry, Members, Public & Corporate.”

“If we can get that four lane marketing highway going, this club can boom.”

With John Cameron in the driver's seat, you get the feeling that the Gold Coast Turf Club is now in safe, well qualified hands. 