

SPORT | RACING

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With a Caulfield Cup finally under her belt, Gai Waterhouse has her sights set on the big one. She talks to **ADRIAN DUNN**

AD: Is Melbourne the Mecca of Australian racing?

GW: It certainly is. It runs rings around the other states. The other states have the things we love about racing, but Melbourne does it so brilliantly. They advertise their racing. No one could come to Melbourne at this time of year and not know all the great racing is on. If you arrived in Melbourne from Afghanistan, you would have to say "Wow, this race, the Melbourne Cup is on, that sounds like fun".

What's wrong with Sydney racing?

It starts at the top. If you are going to criticise anything that's not working, then you have to look at the people running it. It's the same with the racetrack or the stable, racing organisers or anyone in general. A lot can be learned from Racing Victoria and I think it's sad not more is taken from Racing Victoria.

Why is it so important for you to win significant races during the Melbourne spring carnival?

It would be a wonderful, wonderful thing to win the running of the 150th Melbourne Cup and this year I've got three chances. I've never had three good chances in the race, never. It's been a desert for me the past five years, nothing has happened. I haven't had any stayers at all and now I've got a couple of real live chances. I'm delighted, very excited.

What would winning the Melbourne Cup mean to you?

For any trainer — even Bart, who has won it 12 times — winning the Melbourne Cup is everything. Even if you've won it as often as Bart you want to keep winning it. One, the prizemoney is so phenomenal, two, the glory and recognition throughout Australia for winning the greatest race we produce, and it's the best known race we have anywhere in the world. I know when I won the Derby (Nothin' Leica Dane) and to have 100,000 people on that stage, you just can't describe the feeling. It's like you are some sort of mega-star for those few moments or hours, you are transported to another world. It's quite remarkable.

What makes Bart Cummings such an icon?

He has an amazing knack of setting horses for this marvellous race and winning it on 12 occasions. It's really remarkable. He does what no other trainer does — he sets a horse for the race as much as a year before and puts his mind to winning it. He's such a stalwart in doing it and he's a chance of doing it again this year.

Why can you beat Bart this year and win the Cup?

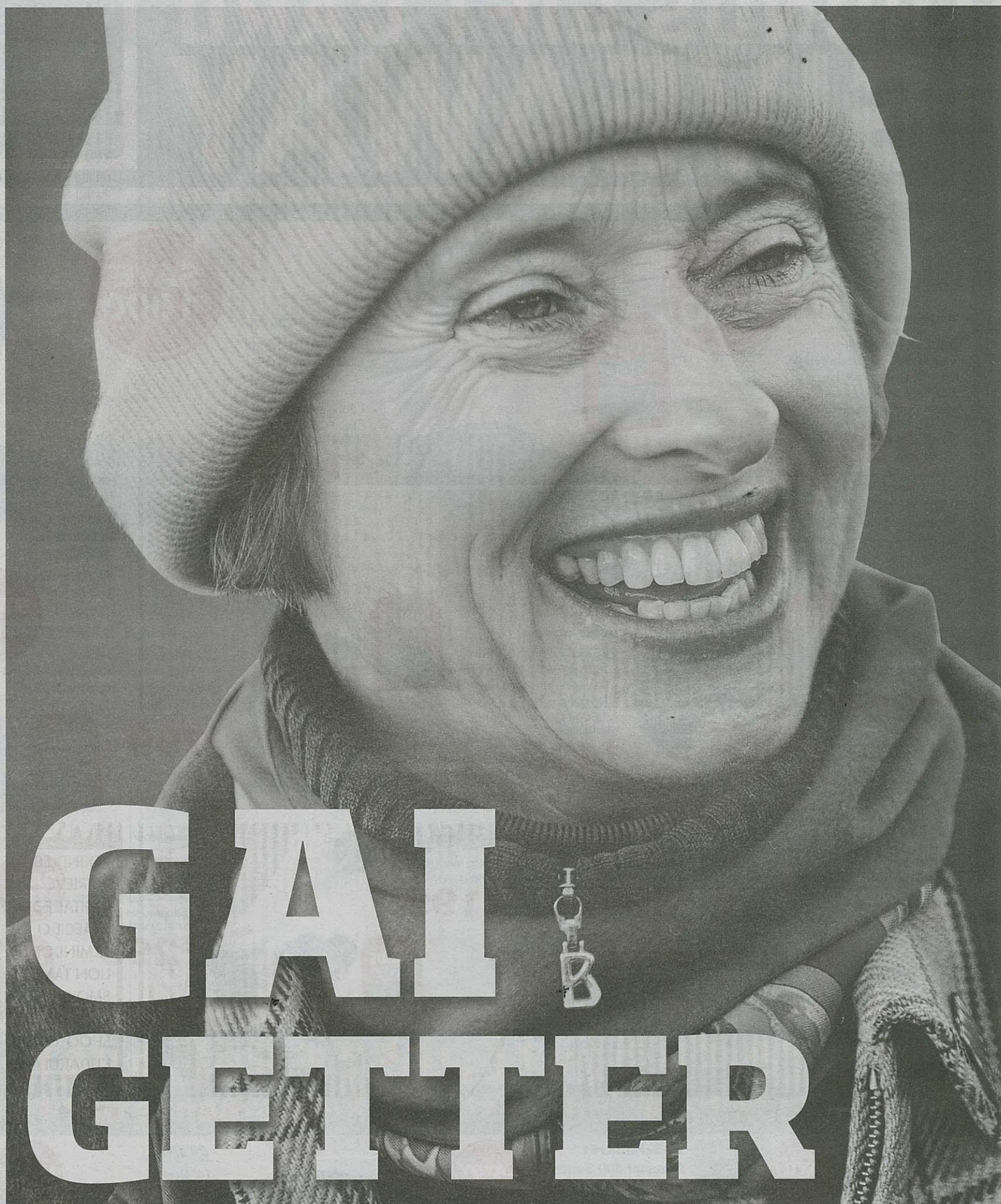
I've got well-credentialed horses and they're handicapped well. I don't have the track record, so that's pulling me back. What is in my favour is that I have the right horses.

Is Descarado your No. 1 chance?

He'd have to be. He's the Caulfield Cup winner, he was drawing clear of his rivals over the last 100 metres and he handles the conditions, if it rains as expected, perfectly. Herculan Prince didn't handle the conditions in the Caulfield Cup, but he's a good horse. And, I've got an Oaks winner. I don't know how she'll go if it's wet, but she's got a light-weight.

In such a character-building, roller-coaster industry, how do you keep so positive, so upbeat?

I love racing, I love the sport



full stop. It's much easier to be positive, happy and smiling. As my husband says, "I love being married to a successful trainer". It's an infectious sport, it's a sport that anyone and everyone can partake from having a \$1 bet to owning a piece of a racehorse. Unlike a lot of other sports where you are locked into being a bystander, racing allows you to partake, and that's what make me so positive.

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

I was lucky to have very positive parents and I was an only child. All the astronauts they put up in space are only children, so we have something in common.

How much of your father is in Gai?

I think a lot of Dad's in me, but there's also a lot of my mother. Dad was such a wonderful, positive thinking person. If there was a problem, Dad would say, "Come on, let's go and have a drink and move on to the next one". Dad never

dwelt on negative stuff. He

wasn't worried about the past, always looking to the future. I was always impressed with the way Dad handled situations if things weren't going well. He just had a wonderful attitude to life and of course some of it had to rub off.

You've never been afraid to speak your mind, break down barriers. Has it helped?

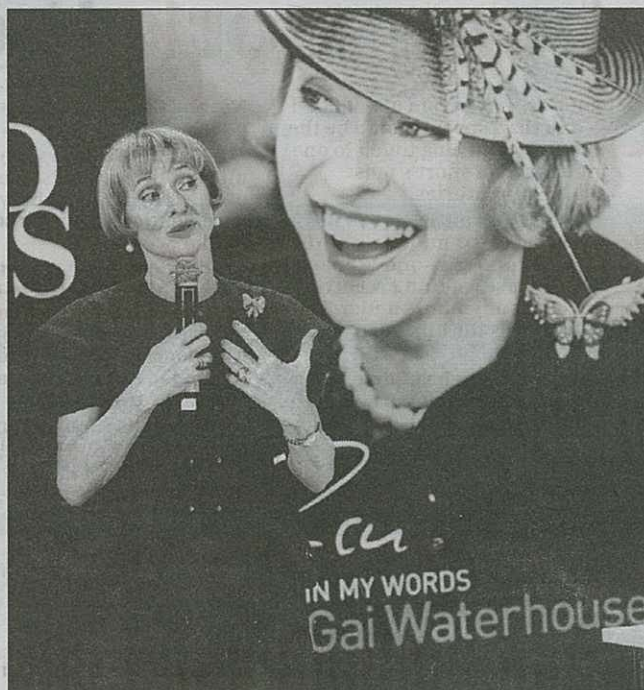
It's not always easy to get heard. Sometimes you do have to jump up and down for people to take notice.

With a husband and a son who are bookies, how energetic is the discussion around the chances of your horses?

We've always keenly discussed racing, it's our passion. It's Robbie's passion, it's Tom's passion, it's my passion. Call me one-eyed and loyal, but I've got the utmost faith in the horses I train.

How do you describe Gai Waterhouse?

Very dedicated, loyal, very loving and very determined.



Captivating: Waterhouse at her book launch yesterday.

The old

GAI Waterhouse is back in the thick of the Melbourne Cup for the first time in five years. Just in time, perhaps.

As usual, the flamboyant trainer wasn't hard to find yesterday — if you couldn't see her you could certainly hear her.

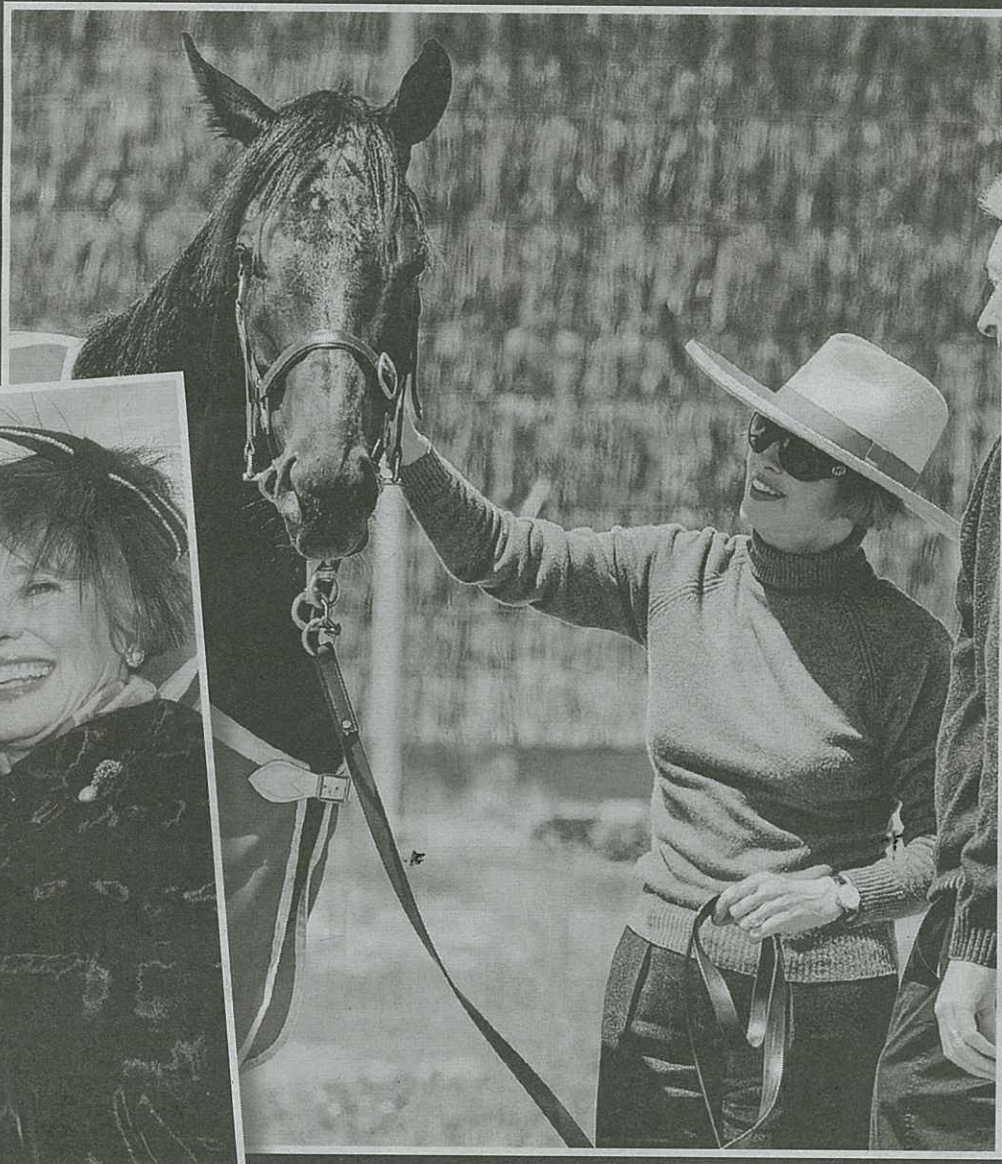
She was flogging her book, *In My Words*, in an upmarket city shop, and while radio identity Peter Maher was on hand to interview her, for the first minute or so he found himself answering the questions as she took immediate charge like the big-time stable boss she most certainly is.

The old showgirl — an actress before she started working with horses — certainly knows how to work a crowd, and the books were soon moving as fast as the hats and handbags a few metres away.



Dedicated and determined: Gai Waterhouse at Flemington trackwork this week, directing traffic at a pre-dawn session, and (right) attending to one of her charges later that afternoon. The rewards came when the stable's Descarado won the Caulfield Cup (below) a fortnight ago.

Pictures: DARREN TINDALE, CHRIS SCOTT



showgirl can work the crowd



GAME ON
with RON REED

It wouldn't be a spring carnival without Gai, of course, but her presence has suddenly become just that little bit more welcome for the VRC.

As she was talking up a storm, Bart Cummings was laid up in a hospital bed.

This was more proof that racing, more than any other sport, gives you wings with which to fly and brings you back to earth with a heavy thud.

If the legendary Cups King cannot be at Flemington to pursue, in person, a fairytale 13th victory it would leave a hole the size of the grandstand in the fabric of the occasion.

On the other hand, it presents the distinct possibility that he

could triumph from his sickbed — and that, surely, would be the ultimate crowning touch to one of Australian sport's most astonishing stories.

Unless and until Bart resurfaces a stand-in face of the race is required — and While Waterhouse wouldn't regard herself as anybody's understudy, nobody fills the bill more fittingly.

Fortunately she's come prepared — and not just with the diamond jewellery that was adding to the aura.

She hasn't had a starter since Mr Celebrity finished second last in 2005, but will have two this time — Caulfield Cup winner Descarado and Once Were Wild, with Herculean Prince still trying to find a way into the field.

Nor has she ever won the great race, settling for two seconds with Te Akau Nick, her first really good horse, in 1993 and

Notin' Leica Dane two years later.

Bart might be the story most uncommitted sports fans are barracking for, but she would be a tremendous addition to the folklore too.

Her old man, T. J. Smith, won it twice with Toporoa in 1955 and Just A Dash in 1981 and most believe he would have got a third if Tulloch's owner had not refused to start the champion as a three-year-old in 1957.

Waterhouse and her family contribute on many levels — she is a major employer, her husband Robbie and son Tom are bookmakers and daughter Kate has been involved in race-day fashion.

She doesn't merely rock up and make sure the right jockey is on the right horse, she is part of the entertainment — a drawcard, loud and proud.

And perhaps just as

importantly as any of that, she is ... well, a she.

Years ago she was a campaigner and a pioneer for the rights of women in racing and while they are still very much in the minority the Cup has now been won by a female trainer — Sheila Laxon with Ethereal in 2001 — and women jockeys are no longer unusual.

Waterhouse can take a lot of credit for that.

There's even a female Prime Minister now and Waterhouse was asked yesterday what she would do if she had that job, too.

Having already spoken about her habitual 2.30am starts and how much she enjoys the job, her reply was instantaneous: "Get rid of the dole. It's rubbish. People should get out and go to work."

Consider it her version of tipping a winner.



COUCH POTATO

TV SPORTS PROGRAM GUIDE

INTERNATIONAL RULES

Ireland v Australia, Dublin Channel 7, Sunday, 10am (five-hour delay)

HORSE RACING

AAMI Victoria Derby Channel 7, tomorrow, coverage starts 11am

SOCCER

A-LEAGUE Melbourne Victory v Adelaide Fox Sports 1, today, 8pm

Sydney v Brisbane Fox Sports 1, tomorrow, 5.15pm

Central Coast v Perth Fox Sports 1, tomorrow, 7.30pm

Newcastle v Melbourne Heart Fox Sports 1, Sunday, 4pm

Nth Queensland v Gold Coast Fox Sports 1, Sunday, 6pm

BASKETBALL

NBL Gold Coast v Cairns One HD, today, 8pm

Adelaide v Wollongong One HD, Sunday, 5pm

MOTORSPORT

MOTOGP Round 17, Portugal One HD, Sunday, 11.30pm

SUPER X, Round 3, Hobart Fox Sports 3, tomorrow, 7.30pm

NASCAR Truck Series Fox Sports 1, Sunday, 6.30am

FIA World Touring Car Championships Eurosport, Sunday, 4.15pm

RUGBY LEAGUE

FOUR NATIONS Australia v England, Melbourne Fox Sports 3, Sunday, 8.30pm

CRICKET

FIRST ONE-DAY INTERNATIONAL Pakistan v South Africa Fox Sports 3, today, 10pm

NATIONAL ONE-DAY CUP Victoria v Tasmania Fox Sports 2, tomorrow, 11am

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