

# ROBB'S SIZZLING

*win puts Western region on a pedestal*



Brett Robb and a mud-splattered Sam Clipperton with the Country Championships Final trophy

**DUBBO TRAINER BRETT ROBB SCORED THE MOST SIGNIFICANT WIN OF HIS CAREER WHEN OUTSIDER SIZZLE MINIZZLE STAGED THE BIGGEST UPSET IN THE NINE-YEAR HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS AT ROYAL RANDWICK** WORDS: RAY HICKSON IMAGES: GRANT GUY





Sizzle Minizzle (Sam Clipperton) powers home to win the Newhaven Park Country Championships Final at Royal Randwick



An emotional Brett Robb reflects on his epic triumph in the Country Championships Final

It was a risk to hand a rookie trainer a \$35,000 yearling – at least that’s what Brett Robb thought when a Sizzling yearling was sent his way early in 2021.

Greg McDonald and Paul Letton had owned horses with Rodney Robb, Brett’s father, in Nyngan and they hand-picked the horse that would be called Sizzle Minizzle for him.

Robb, or ‘Snow’ as most people know him, has been on quite the ride since he took out his trainer’s licence back in August 2020 but as much as Sizzle Minizzle’s upset win in the Newhaven Park Country Championships Final left him shocked, it gave him a sense of satisfaction.

That’s because Robb, who is 35 in May, has been a horseman as long as he can remember and therefore is a hands-on trainer who not only broke in Sizzle Minizzle but has spent plenty of time on the horse’s back.

“When you have a horse right from the start and you do everything with them, even if you win at Bourke picnics, it’s definitely a bigger thrill,” Robb said.

“When I got my licence, they rang me and said ‘we’ve bought you a yearling and paid \$35,000 for him’. I thought that was a lot of money for a horse out here.

“I broke him and when I rode him for the first time I thought ‘this is a good horse’.”

Sizzle Minizzle’s rise to Country Championships winner has been meteoric to say the least – that \$35,000 yearling has now won over \$500,000 from 11 starts.

He didn’t step out for his first barrier trial until April 17 last year – 11½ months later he won the second biggest prize in country racing.

He was beaten in his first two starts, in feature country two-year-old races, before posting his

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maiden win in late May at Dubbo and then headed for a spell.

What's exceptional, aside from his \$61 starting price, about his Country Championships win is that it came in just his second racing preparation and at his ninth run for the campaign with wins at Gilgandra and Orange along the way.

"I always knew he had a bit under the bonnet," Robb said.

"He's a little horse who always gave a good feel. Working him he never seemed like he was switched on and never knew what he was doing.

"When the pressure came on, you can see in his races, he would start laying in or out and he never knew how to put the pedal down. I think he learned it in the city."

Robb said the Country Championships win is a huge result for racing in the Western Districts which has been seen as one of the weaker regions in NSW.

But he had a sense going into the Western Districts Championships at Coonamble in March that there was some quality in the area and in a year that didn't contain a standout in anyone's eyes he thought if he could get a horse to Randwick they might have a chance.

Unfortunately, his 'big gun' Gallant Star didn't make it to Coonamble and at one point Robb thought he wouldn't have a runner as some of his contenders were battling in his view.

As it worked out Sizzle Minizzle managed to qualify for Randwick by finishing a game second to Listen To The Band at Coonamble – the winner didn't make it to Sydney due to injury.

What dulled Robb's confidence that Sizzle Minizzle could give some cheek was rain on the day that saw the track head south from good at around 10am to heavy by the time the Country Championships was run come 2.35pm.

A year earlier he'd won the Western Championships with Great Buy, at the time his biggest win as a trainer, but knew he was up against it on very heavy ground after months of rain left the track tired.

"I knew going down there last year that Great Buy couldn't handle the wet. It's a different wet down there," he said.

"I've taken a lot of wet trackers down to Sydney before and they didn't handle it and I was probably expecting the same thing but he ate it up.

"I still thought he'd struggle when they'd gone 300m because we expected to be in the first three or four.

"I was still trying to take it in a few days later, I got a lot of phone calls and people congratulating me which is good but it's a lot to take in because I wasn't expecting it.

"I just go with the flow, we're a bunch of battlers out here doing our best.

"If you get too confident you get disappointed when you lose. I know how the racing game works, it's full of kicks in the guts.

"I always wanted him to run well but I thought taking a young horse like that down there I couldn't expect him to run that well. I thought he was six months away.

"Going down there it was like the penny hadn't dropped and he was doing it all on raw ability. Since he came home he's turned into a real little racehorse."

When Robb went out on his own about three years ago he openly said he was just happy to train picnic winners.

A horse called On A Promise gave him his first winner when he scored at Coonabarabran in September 2020. It was a Benchmark 45 race and the gelding's next three wins came at picnic level.

After winning a picnic race at Coonamble in August 2021, On A Promise went on a five-start winning streak and it included the \$50,000 Picnic Championships. He was retired as a seven-year-old back in August last year.

"I came to Dubbo and I was happy getting picnic winners. It's been a wild ride," Robb said.

"We've had some luck. Two years ago we won the Picnic Championships with On A Promise and that was a highlight for me.

"Winning the heat at Coonamble with Great Buy was massive but going down and winning the Country Championships in Sydney was wild.

"I've spoken to a few people who have won it and they say it takes a week to sink in.

"We had to come back to Mudgee races the day after so I didn't get a chance to watch the race.

"I watched it six or seven times a couple of days later and the more you watch it the better he won.

"I must say I was very shocked. It'd be different if I went down there with a \$2 chance but I went there with a 100/1 shot and he won.

"My original plan was to hope he ran well then put him away and bring him back in a Highway."

If Sizzle Minizzle spells well, Robb would like to give him the opportunity to chase the biggest prize in country racing on Sydney's biggest stage – TAB Everest Day.

Could a Western Districts horse win the \$2m The Kosciuszko (1200m) – the richest race for country-trained horses.

If you've read this far you'll know Robb doesn't buy into unrealistic expectations.

So he'll just be happy for someone to have a bit of faith in Sizzle Minizzle, or something else from his stable, because as the gelding proved on Day 1 of The Star Championships you've got to be in it to win it.

"The Kosciuszko is the next on the list, I'd love to get one in it," he said.

"We were happy just to be there for the Country Championships. It'll be a bit like that in the Kosciuszko.

"But I know how much improvement is left in him and he's going to come back a way better horse there's no doubt about that." **RNSW**