

That's the Spirit, as Don and Vicki join Group elite

By **DAVID BRASCH**

JOVIAL Don McKinnon reckons he's better bred for the greyhound industry than many greyhounds.

His dad Bruce was a trainer, his grandfather Don Battersby was a trainer and mum Margaret, now 75, prepared the great 1940s bitch Peg de Line. In fact, Donny can remember as a seven-year-old spending time at Jack Irwins home watching the maestro with his dogs.

"All the recent generations of my family have been in greyhound training," said the man affectionately known among his racing friends as "The Don".

"I've been handling dogs since I was 16. I remember taking Speed Hawk to the boxes in a heat of the Grafton Maiden which he won."

Don and his wife Vicki are natives of the Armidale area but have been in Queensland since 1975, three years after they were married. A bricklayer by trade, McKinnon bought his family north to the Gold Coast for work and decided to let his passion for greyhound racing sit on the sidelines until his children Sue-ann and Julie had grown up and left home.

Sue-ann is now 31 and Julie 28 and the McKinnons have been back in greyhound racing for a number of years now and in recent times have been taking it by storm.

Kelly's Spirit's recent Group 3 Queensland Cup victory at Albion Park was their biggest success. It followed only a few days after Royal Contender had finished second in the Group 2 Queensland Derby final.

Their only other dog, Royal Eclipse, was a finalist in the Queensland Cup. Three Group finalists in four days.

"We look on greyhound training as a 24 hour a day business and we were not prepared to undertake that sort of commitment until our family was grown up and had left home.

Don might have grown up around greyhound trainers, but he credits the late Gold Coast trainer Kevin Jackson as his mentor.



Don McKinnon "proud as punch" after Kelly's Spirit's Group 3 Qld Cup win at Albion Park.

"He had some great dogs like Tin Kettle and Mullion Bunyip and I learnt so much from Kevin," said Don. "He taught me his secret is getting dogs to back up. It's still a secret." Don and Vicki, despite only having a couple of dogs in their kennel at any one time, have handled some pretty smart gallopers.

"We initially had Cape Bobniak but sold him when we were offered \$20,000," said Don. "Fire And Speed and Black Tower were also sold and went on to have good careers.

"We were building a new house at the time so the \$20,000 from the sale of Cape Bobniak (an Australian Cup finalist) came in handy.

"I sold Cape Bobniak and two days later he was in at Albion Park and I had \$1000 on him at 10-1 and he won so he was a great dog to us."

The McKinnons claim the fastest dog they have

trained is Krystal's Girl a daughter of Black Shiraz.

"In her first race start at Toowoomba she was left 15 lengths and was beaten a nose. She did a wrist and never raced again," said Don. The McKinnons had bought the bitch from Vicki and John Broadrigg on the Northern Rivers. They get all their pups reared by them.

"We had to breed with Krystal's Girl and she is the dam of Kelly's Spirit," said "The Don".

"We had six in the litter and they could all run. Awesome Force won four of six but did a hock, Snolux is another and its won 10 races, while Ray Burman had one that was outstanding but got hurt."

The McKinnons reckon they have a secret to training their greyhounds.

"We treat them better than humans," said Donny.

A Group win in the Queensland Cup is a testament to that.



Don and Vicki with their star after the Cup presentation.

	Malawi's Prince	Malawi
		Duchess Marina
	Awesome McLaren	Amerigo Man
	True Temptation	Bay Supreme
KELLY'S SPIRIT		Ginger
	Black Shiraz	Dark Horizon
	Krystal's Girl	Amerigo Man
	Cayenne Bale	Red Fire Bale

Group 3 Qld Cup (600m)

Albion Park

1 **KELLY'S SPIRIT** \$10.50

(Awesome McLaren-Krystal's Girl)

Owner-trainer: Don McKinnon

2 **TIGER STRONG** \$1.60

(Southern Champ*-Lucky Penna)

3 **PAPER TAPE** \$8.70

(Major Fox-Taylah's Tip)

Others: 4 Downstream Key \$13,

5 Royal Eclipse \$12.30,

6 Makia \$9.70,

7 Haylee Louise \$25.30,

8 Puzzling \$19.80.

Time: 35.21.