Gailo Chop's Continued Journey

Article: Anna Sharpley. Photos: Julie Wilson.

This month Horse Deals begins the latest move in the journey of a very well-travelled and successful horse. Like many journeys, we don't always know where they will end, but in both the horse, *Gailo Chop* and his chosen retrainer, Dale Plumb, we have not gone with outsiders. Dale is no stranger to the Australian equestrian community, as he has arguably produced more Champion show horses, and most of them off the track, than anyone else in the business. He even saw the talent and engineered the training of Australian Champion Showjumper, *DP Envy*.

Gailo Chop is not well-known to the broader community outside racing like *Winx* or *Black Caviar*, but the French gelding is not far behind in his racing success. Born in France and bred by Alain Chopard, he is by *Deportivo (GB)* that is by *Night Shift* by *Northern Dancer*. *Gailo*

Gailo Chop at Flemington, 2017. Photo: John Donegan.

Chop is out of *Grenoble (FR)* that has *Sadlers Wells* and therefore *Northern Dancer* on her dam line. Considered to be unfashionably bred, *Gailo Chop* demonstrated that racing is about the individual. In a recent interview, Champion trainer, Gai Waterhouse explained that what she looked for in a future Champion racehorse was, "an athletic individual", and *Gailo Chop* is certainly that. Foaled in 2011, he had his first race at Bordeaux in 2013 under trainer, Antoine de Watrigant. He impressed as a three-year-old and was declared "the highest rating three-year-old male in France". At this time the Australian Racing and Bloodstock syndication company OTI purchased a 50% share in the horse. A year later they secured 100% ownership, and what a good move that proved for his group of owners. *Gailo Chop* had 42 starts over seven and a half years for 13 wins and $4,485,148 in earnings. That included three Group 1 wins; the Mackinnon Stakes and the Caulfield Stakes in 2015 and the

Ranvet in 2018 and was second in the Australia Cup, the Queen Elizabeth Stakes (to *Winx*) and the Kingston Town Stakes. A true jetsetter, *Gailo Chop* raced in France, the UK, the USA, the UAE and Australia and proved that fashionable breeding is not worth the paper it is printed on.

"I had seen him on TV," remembers Dale "and thought, *gee, he's an impressive horse.* He was a beautiful mover and looked a sensible horse. At the time I saw him, Matthew Williams was training him at Warnambool. I knew Matt's wife, Ultra, as we have a horse from her that my daughter, Daizi will come out on soon. Six months before he was retired, I rang Ultra and asked what was going to happen to the horse when he retired. She said they would be looking for a good home. She contacted me a few days before his last race in Perth in early December, to ask if I was still interested. I said I was and she put a proposal forward to the syndication. The day after he raced, she rang again and said that Terry Henderson, CEO of OTI Management Pty Ltd would give me a call. I spoke to Terry and explained my experience with racehorses off the track, but that I had never had one as high profile as *Gailo Chop*. I explained that I did not know if he would do my job, because I had never seen him in the flesh. Terry said they would like to send him to me to assess as part of the OTI Equine Welfare Programme. *If you think he will do your job, he's yours,* he said, *and if not we will take him back and find another home for him*. Terry said to me that he was too good a horse, too athletic and too sound to be retired in a paddock. One of

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Dale Plumb and *Gailo Chop*, only weeks after his arrival.

To begin with Dale lunged, long reined and drove him, to see what his mouth, suppleness and flexibility was like.

the part-owners lives in France and they were prepared to fly him back there to retire him. Putting him out in the paddock would be such a waste of a horse and *Gailo Chop* gives me the impression that he could do anything, and I am taking on this project for me.

"*Gailo Chop* is not a commercial proposition, he is a project that I want to undertake because he certainly deserves a good life after racing, and I am lucky to be in the position to take him on. Also, he is a lovely, athletic type and a beautiful mover. And the fact that he is ten years old doesn't worry me, as one of my most successful hacks, *Cruise*, did not go to a show until he was ten. There is certainly life after racing, and even though he is ten, I don't see that as a handicap. If you look at the world's best showjumpers and dressage horses, they are not five and six-year-olds, they are more like 12, 13 and 14 years old.

"When he arrived, I wanted to assess what I had, how he moves, what he looks like tacked up and what his temperament was like. He was good on all accounts. Even though he had raced recently and had travelled from WA he was so light and athletic and I really love that and it is hard to find in a Thoroughbred, especially one that has raced a lot. I firstly just lunged him and then I long reined him and drove him, just to see what his mouth was like and how supple and flexible he is etc. I wanted to ascertain whether or not he would do the job. There was no point putting a lot of work into him if I thought at this stage he was not going to be what I wanted.

"Champions are special and although I have had many very successful show horses, I have never dealt with a champion racehorse and he certainly is that. It will be an interesting, and it is to be hoped a rewarding, exercise to see if what makes him a champion on the track will make him a special horse to train and produce for a new career.

"Now that I am satisfied he is well worth the time and effort, I will give him a spell in the paddock to let down from racing. Then I will slowly start his re-education. As I said, he is a lovely mover and I wouldn't mind giving the OTT Thoroughbred Dressage a go, perhaps during winter, and it is to be hoped he will be ready to join the show team next season.

"This is the beginning of what I hope to be an enjoyable and successful journey."

Horse Deals will be along for the ride and each month follow *Gailo Chop's* progress with Dale. 🐎

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