

This is an article from The Herald Sun

An eye for picking winners

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ASK trainer Leon Corstens how he's managed to have a leading AAMI Victoria Derby contender in Mr Martini just two years after he won the race with Helenus and he has a quick reply.

"Don't ask me how I've got horses as good as them. Go and ask Troy. It's all down to him. He gets all the horses for me," Corstens said.

Corstens' son Troy runs his own bloodstock agency and secures most of the horses for his stable. "All I worry about is what is in the stable. I let Troy go and find the new stable star," Corstens said.

The new stable star is undoubtedly Mr Martini, who has won the Group 2 Stutt Stakes (1600m) at Moonee Valley and at the weekend finished second in the AAMI Vase (2040m) at the Valley.

He is a \$10 chance for Saturday's Derby.

Troy doesn't know whether he has a special gift for finding the right types but said he had a great passion for selecting young horses.

Not only has he picked Helenus and Mr Martini, he has also found stakes winners Royale Exit, Bardego and Malagra Miss and Queensland Oaks runner-up Night Chaser.

"I love doing it which makes things easier," he said.

But Corstens has one slight problem with horses: he is allergic to them. He had to put on gloves to be photographed with Mr Martini yesterday.

"It's a hayfever-type reaction and used to be a big problem when I worked at the stable full-time," he said. The 30-year-old said he looked at type, confirmation and pedigree when making his selection. "I've always loved going to the sales and Dad is not a huge fan, so it works out well," Corstens said.

He said he had filled the buying role for five years and was thrilled with his results.

"Before I branched out I spent two years working alongside George Smith, who is one of the best judges of horseflesh in the land," he said.

Corstens makes his selections with his business partner Gary Mudgway, who has worked at leading New Zealand studs. "I've taken on board what Dad and George have taught me and then applied my own principles," Corstens said. As for finding Mr Martini, a son of American-bred stallion Bianconi, he said it had been a combination of pedigree, conformation and price.

"He was an awesome-looking yearling," Corstens said. "He was strong-boned with great legs although he was quite upright, but he was a lovely walker.

"Also I was very keen on the Bianconis. I was going to go to \$40,000 to \$45,000, so I was pleased to get him for \$32,000."

Corstens has shares in 17 horses but said at the time he hadn't been able to afford to stay in Mr Martini.

"There was one share I couldn't get rid of and Dad said he would take it and then he gave it to my brother Kevin," he said.

Leon Corstens said Mr Martini had pulled up well after Saturday and should run out a strong 2500m in the Derby. "It is a bit of trial and error, but the way he relaxes in his races he gives every indication he should be right," he said.