



## **BALLINA JOCKEY CLUB LIMITED**

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### **Ballina Jockey Club PRESS RELEASE**

**Coolmore Iris Nielsen Day  
24 January 2010**

## **PRIZE MONEY INCREASED TO \$50,000**

**Ballina Jockey Club is pleased to announce that it has increased the prize money for the Coolmore Iris Nielsen Ladies Invitation to \$50,000 making this race one of the richest feature races on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.**

The Ballina Jockey Club announced last year that it had ambitions to make this race a major feature on the national racing calendar. This will be the third running of the race. Prize money last year was \$27,000. The race is for invited lady riders only and jockeys are balloted their rides. The Club is in the process of inviting lady riders to take part and already Tracy O'Hara (NSW), Kristy Banks (QLD), Libby Hopwood (SA), Samantha Spratt (NZ) and Natasha Collett (NZ) have indicated that they would like to take part.

This race was originally established as a celebration of a life cut tragically short when the well known and universally liked Iris Nielsen died in a race fall at Lismore in 1988. Iris was the first lady rider to die in a racing accident in Australia.

Since the first running of 'Iris's race' the event has grown to become a celebration of the achievements of all pioneering lady riders throughout Australia and New Zealand who have provided such a positive example to the many young lady riders who perform as top class athletes today in one of the most exciting and demanding sports in Australia.

Coolmore Stud is again sponsoring the feature race on the day. Ms Wills said “we are again very excited that Coolmore, a global thoroughbred operation, continues to support this race and the tribute to lady riders past and present. They have sponsored this race from its inception and are as enthusiastic as us about its future. The Coolmore Iris Nielsen Day at Ballina is also supported by the Naval Association who will be sponsoring the majority of the other races”.

Development of the ladies invitation race has been championed by the Vice Chairman of the Ballina Jockey Club, Mr Stan Hayes. Mr Hayes said today “the Directors of the Club are right behind promotion of this race and intend to further develop it into a major feature race on the national racing calendar.” Mr Hayes added, “With such a substantial amount of prize money we are expecting a high standard of nominations not only for the feature race but also for the supporting races in what should be a very exciting days racing. Last year the meeting proved so popular that the number of nominations resulted in ten races on the day.”

The official story of lady riders in Australia is rich in history. A tradition of amateur ‘ladies only’ picnic races existed in Victoria from the 1850’s. However ladies were excluded from full professional competition until 1979. The first ‘ladies only’ race was held in Brisbane in 1973. It was only after a long campaign that ladies were allowed to hold official licenses to compete against male riders in open competition. Pam O’Neill and Linda Jones were the first ladies to obtain licenses. Linda became the first lady rider to win a race on a metropolitan track, at Doomben in 1979. In the same year, Pam rode a treble on her first day’s performance at the Gold Coast Turf Club. Many subsequent lady riders have proven themselves in open company and become well known names such as Cheryl Neale, Bev Buckingham, the Wehr sisters, Therese and Maree Payne, Clare Lindop, Kathy and Tracy O’Hara, Rachel Mason and Sheree Drake. Linda Jones, a retired lady jockey who achieved many “firsts” in her career, has accepted an invitation to attend the 2010 running of the Ladies Invitation.

The unofficial history of lady riders is even more colourful. The first professional lady jockey may well have been Wilhemena, or Bill, Smith. Wilhemena rode as a ‘man’ on Queensland country race tracks during the 1940’s and 1950’s. Only by living under a false identity as a man and leading a reclusive single life was she able to keep her secret hidden for a lifetime and live her dream.

Ballina Jockey Club CEO, Sarah Wills said “This race has fast developed into a celebration of female involvement in the racing industry which was resisted for so long. Last year’s lady riders were all very enthusiastic about their experience at Ballina and I am sure most of the ladies will want to return for next year’s event. Lady riders, both past and present are keen to assist in the further development of this exciting day.”

**The following persons can be contacted for comment:**

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