

## KIWI RAIDER OUT TO SHED POOR TRAVELLER TAG

NEW Zealander Irish Rover has given some positive signs he may be able to shed his reputation as a poor traveller when he opens his Queensland campaign at Eagle Farm on Saturday.

Irish Rover will run in the weight-for-age Sir Byrne Hart Stakes (1400m) on his way to the Doomben Cup (2200m) on May 28.

The Kenfair seven-year-old comes with a good career record of 16 wins from 38 starts and

stake earnings of more than \$470,000. But his performances in two trips to Australia — to Sydney in the spring of 2002 and Melbourne in the winter of 2003 — were lengths below his best.

Irish Rover's New Zealand form also is a contrast. All his wins have come in the lower North Island area close to his home base at Wellington.

"I don't think the theory he is a bad traveller is true at all but that is how he has been painted

by a lot of people in New Zealand," said Eddie Carson, 72, who bred, part-owns and trains Irish Rover.

"He came over last Thursday and I have a fantastic set-up near the Sunshine Coast track. He has settled in perfectly.

"In a lot of his beaten runs he just hasn't had any luck. They talk about the luck of the Irish but a lot of times it's the bad luck of the Irish."

—Bart Sinclair

(Byrne) work on Succeeding before I handed up the lead.

"But when she was slipping I had to take hold and get her balanced. In the end it was a strong win. But she will be a lot better on a firm track."

Ponte Piccolo is a lovely filly by Volksraad. She already is proven at the Oaks distance having run well for fifth in the AJC Oaks also on a wet track.

She is part-owned by suspended rider Chris Munce's wife

Cathy. Munce will be back for the Queensland Oaks mount.

Ponte Piccolo, who has her first race on January 28, is likely to start in the Doomben Roses (2020m) on May 21 on her way through to the Oaks.

Sydney hoop Bobby El-Issa had some good luck and some bad with his pick-up mount on Top Marc in the Doomben Dash (1030m).

El-Issa gained a late ride when Mike Pelling stood down with a recurrence of a back injury,

which is likely to rule him out of the Ipswich meeting tomorrow. However, he should ride at Eagle Farm on Saturday.

From a wide draw, El-Issa did remarkably well to get Top Marc over to the fence midfield and then the grey steamed home to take his wet-track record to six wins from seven starts.

But El-Issa then had to front stewards over an incident at the 450m where Stathi Katsidis had to ease his mount Enthusiast.

El-Issa pleaded guilty to a careless riding charge and was suspended for seven meetings.

"I'm trying to get established and make my mark in Queensland and a suspension won't help at this stage," he said.

Top Marc completed an amazing double for his dam Prime Page who had another of her progeny, Finder Page, win earlier in the day over 2240m.

"I don't think you would find many mares have foals win in the city on the same day over 1030m and 2240m," said Kelly Schweida, who trains both horses.

Schweida has Top Marc entered for all the major winter events but said he was chasing wet tracks.

"He's probably three or four lengths off the top horses on a dry track," Schweida said.

Stewards questioned trainer Pat Duff on the poor performance of Star Of Florida who raced outside leader Levante to the home turn but weakened in the straight to finish 10th.

"I don't think his form in Sydney was quite up to his best. He might have lost what it takes to win with 61kg," Duff said.