

Divine Madonna right on track

MARK Kavanagh has never worn a morning suit but the training giant-killer has ordered one for Royal Ascot this winter.

Kavanagh's partnership with Melbourne Cup-winning jockey Michael Rodd has seen them develop into the most lethal big-race combination in Australia.

Rodd will ride Divine Madonna in the Queen Anne Stakes (1600m) and who knows where that might take him after having ridden successfully in Hong Kong?

Kavanagh is excited about his first overseas attempt but before he leaves will cement the title of champion Group 1 Australian trainer.

Names like John Hawkes, Gai Waterhouse, Lee Freedman and David Hayes are common on that list and Kavanagh is modest about his feat.

I have just had a lot of luck. I never thought I would have a team of horses like this, Kavanagh said.

Kavanagh has won four Group 1 races this season the same as Rodd and they lead the trainer-jockey categories.

Before this season Kavanagh had won four Group 1 races and from a 22-box stable at Flemington has humbled some of the biggest names in the game.

Kavanagh's team is headed by Maldivian, who resumes with stablemate Tipungwuti in the \$175,000 Carlyon Stakes (1200m) at Moonee Valley next Friday. The plan to run Divine Madonna at Royal Ascot in June means she won't resume for another seven weeks and that will be against Takeover Target in the TJ Smith Stakes (1200m) at Randwick.

Bold front-runner Devil Moon looks set to clean up in the mares' races and Rodd should have a picnic in Sydney.

Kavanagh is a former jumps jockey who started his training career at Mt Gambier 16 years ago and has since made the transition to Adelaide and Melbourne.

Kavanagh, 51, is too old to apply for a training licence in Hong Kong but is more than happy with his lot in life.

I never thought I would be training at Flemington, Kavanagh said frankly.

He enjoys the finer things in life and these days drives a black Mercedes, and his quirky ways make a refreshing change from the usual suspects for big-race glory.

The way Kavanagh handled the disappointment of Maldivian missing a start in the Caulfield Cup last spring when he was injured in the stalls impressed everyone.

Even staff at his stable admired the way he accepted the cruel hand of fate but Kavanagh has a touch of poker player in him.

This is a ruthless game. Everyone was treating the Caulfield Cup like we were going to have it handed to us on a paper plate, Kavanagh said.

I knew it was going to be tougher than that.

Maldivian has recovered from the scarring on his neck and in two jumps-outs the latest last Friday did not present any problems at the barrier. "He is unbeaten at Moonee Valley but he has never won first-up, was how Kavanagh assessed Maldivian's resumption.

Maldivian is being prepared as a stayer while stablemate Tipungwuti is getting ready for the \$1.8 million Doncaster (1600m) at Randwick.

Tipungwuti's form last autumn was outstanding and he strung three wins together, including the Tulloch Stakes (2000m) at Rosehill," Kavanagh said. We missed the spring with him because he had a virus he could not shake.

Tipungwuti's main autumn mission in Melbourne will be the \$300,000 Group 2 Blamey Stakes (1600m) at Flemington on March 15.

Devil Moon resumes racing in about three weeks and Kavanagh will set her for the Queen Of The Turf (1500m) and Coolmore Classic (1500m) – both Group 1 races for fillies and mares run at Rosehill.

Maldivian will run in Group 1s like the Orr (1400m), Futurity (1600m), Australian Cup (2000m), Ranvet (2000m) and BMW (2400m), but Kavanagh said it was doubtful he would line up in the Sydney Cup (3200m).