

Too honest for his own good

EVERY Melbourne Cup has a hard luck story. This one's about a horse called Leica Falcon that did not even get to the post last year.

The unfashionable galloper and his battling Corowa trainer Richard Freyer are already eyeing a path that may finally get him another start in Australia's great race.

While EI devastated the racing industry in southeast Queensland and Sydney, the plight of Leica Falcon aroused national interest as Freyer fought bureaucracy to try to get the gelding to Flemington.

After the EI outbreak was discovered at Sydney's Eastern Creek in August, authorities banned all movement of horses into Victoria.

The highly-fancied Cup hope was stranded in Corowa, NSW, on the wrong side of the Murray River the Victorian border and the green zone that would have allowed him to move freely and be prepared for the Cup.

I was penalised for being too honest," Freyer said. When the call went out from Sydney to stop movement of horses, there was a lot of people running them across the river here. We didn't move a horse and we stayed that way for six or seven weeks, until given the okay to move around parts of NSW.

We have a 40-acre property on the Victorian side of the Murray. I could easily have taken Leica Falcon there and nobody would have known.

I was too honest for my own good and it turned around and bit me. A lot of times in racing they say the honest bloke runs last, this time I reckon the saying was right.

Racing Victoria Limited CEO Stephen Allanson and then Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran tried in vain to get Leica Falcon clearance to move the short distance and be quarantined in Victoria. Freyer remains bitter. At times it appeared bureaucracy was going to be overcome, but a decision in October by Victoria's Department of Primary Industries finally dashed their hopes.

Common sense should have prevailed. I mean from when they discovered the virus it took six weeks to get within 600km of us and touch wood we still haven't had it yet, Freyer said.

I'm bitter, the owners are bitter, but not on the racing officials or people like Peter McGauran, who bent over backwards to help. In the end it became political and egos got in the way of common sense.

Some people didn't like Peter telling them what should be done. One bloke, who I won't name, put every hurdle possible in front of us. He was the one that asked for 1500 vaccines for Victoria when they needed about 15,000.

That's the common sense this bloke had and the type of person we were dealing with.

If there is any good to come out of the saga it is that Leica Falcon has further developed and his dodgy tendon has strengthened.

After outstanding lead-up form, Leica Falcon was highly fancied in the 2005 Cup. He was widely drawn and finished a great fourth behind Makybe Diva but damaged his tendon.

The six-year-old had stem cell surgery in 2006 and missed that year's Cup.

He resumed at Caulfield in August last year and finished 13th in an unsuitable 1200m sprint – then the virus hit.

Freyer could not be happier with the son of Nothin' Leica Dane and intends setting him for the Sydney Cup and hopefully the Melbourne Cup.

At the moment the horse is fantastic. If there is something good to come out of all this, it is that all the work he had and extra time without racing might have made him completely sound.

I'll be looking to trial him next month and then we'll head to Sydney for a start and work towards the Cup and all going well we'll come back down for the (Melbourne) Cup.

I remember telling my nephew, after he ran so well behind Makybe Diva, not to think it's easy getting here, and told him it wouldn't be a piece of cake getting back next year.

How bloody true that was two cups have gone and he hasn't been part of it. Hopefully we can get there again because he deserves another go.