



For immediate release

Cameron Ring claims top prize at Industry Excellence Awards

Cambridge Stud Bloodstock Manager Cameron Ring capped off a weekend to remember after taking away the supreme Entain Excellence Award at the inaugural Industry Excellence Awards in Auckland tonight (Sunday, 28 July).

Fresh off winning the Mary-Lynne Ryan Young Achiever Award at the National Breeding Awards on Saturday night, Mr Ring (29) was voted as the winner of the Leadership category before going on to be named the first-ever winner of the Entain Excellence Award, which was decided out of the nine individual category winners.

The awards were created by Entain Australia and New Zealand, the operators of TAB, to recognise the emerging leaders and rising stars under the age of 40 in the ranks across all three racing codes.

Mr Ring, who was nominated for the Awards by Cambridge Stud CEO Henry Plumptre, recently moved to the role of Bloodstock Manager at the Stud after previously working in sales and nominations. He now not only oversees the extremely valuable horse population at one of New Zealand's most famous breeding operations but is also responsible for much of the on-farm management of staff.

Each category winner received a \$10,000 cash prize, with finalists receiving \$2000 cash. Mr Ring also received an extra \$5000 on top of his \$10,000 category win, and a \$5000 educational package.

The Awards also received valued support from key industry organisations IRT, Waikato Stud, Windsor Park Stud and Breckon Farms.

"We've been absolutely thrilled by the response to our inaugural Industry Excellence Awards," Entain's General Manager – New Zealand and one of the judges, Jessica Meech, said.

"We had many deserving nominations from all codes, and selecting our finalists and winners has been challenging. We are delighted for Cameron and all of our category winners and look forward to building on the success of these Awards next year."

Popular North Island harness trainer and social media identity Jo Stevens claimed the Administrative and Ancillary Services Award, while Greyhound Racing New Zealand Chief Operating Officer Elizabeth Whelan was named National Racing Woman of the year.

Matia Grace, who has made a big impact since entering the racing industry as the track manager at Tauherenikau Racecourse in South Wairarapa, won the Newcomer Award, while the judges could not split two of the finalists in the Care and Welfare Award, with Chanelle Dickie and Anna Baigent both collecting \$10,000 prizes for their work in this space.

Other category winners were: Michaela Sobieska (Equine Handling (Stud or Stable)), Mikayla Clark (The Greyhound Excellence Award), Ryan Figgins (Dedication to Breeding) and Emma Smith (Dedication to Racing).

Note: Profiles on each of the category winners are available below.

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Industry Excellence Award winners

Administrative and Ancillary Services Award

Jo Stevens

Jo wears many hats. She is a Group 3-winning harness trainer, but she is also very well known for her Facebook page 'Track Chat' where she captures pre-and-post race thoughts from the North Island harness trainers and drivers. She has rehomed "a few hundred" horses over the years, and also set up the first ever Dorothy Cutts Challenge for trans-Tasman female drivers at this year's Night of Champions.

Newcomer Award

Matia Grace

Matia was appointed as Track Manager at Tauherenikau Racecourse two years ago, and has grown into the role impressively, culminating in being awarded the 2024 NZ Racecourse Managers' Rising Star Scholarship. Matia has overseen the installation of a new irrigation system at the track and has implemented a renovation programme that has majorly improved the Tauherenikau surface, all alongside gaining her New Zealand Certificate in Horticulture Level 3 for Sports Turf. She is considered a huge asset for the Wairarapa Racing Club and has a bright future ahead of her.

Equine Handling Award (Stud or Stable)

Michaela Sobieska

Michaela is the stable foreperson for Roger James and Robert Wellwood at Kingsclere Stables in Cambridge and goes above and beyond in everything she does – not only for the horses, but for staff as well. She's often found at the trials or races, helping other stables with loading or saddling horses. She became synonymous with the brilliant race fillies Prowess and Orchestral, who have been stars on both sides of the Tasman.

Care and Welfare Award – joint winners

Chanelle Dickie

Universally known as “the pink lady”, Chanelle Dickie has re-educated and re-homed dozens of standardbreds, and such is her expertise that she is currently an educator with Harness Racing New Zealand's Hero programme for re-education and re-homing. She has achieved success at the Horse Of The Year, is a barrel racer, and runs her own equestrian facility in Canterbury.

Anna Baigent

Anna returned to the family farm eight years ago to start her long recovery from a traumatic brain injury incurred while at work. Anna has channeled her energy into rehabilitating racehorses who retired with significant injury. Annarehab Equine Assisted Learning was set up five years ago, and Anna works with gateway vocational students to help them with their future goals, as well as bringing horses and her local Hauraki Plains community together.

Dedication to Breeding Award

Ryan Figgins

From no involvement in horses to internationally respected stallion handler, Ryan Figgins has made quite the impact at Waikato Stud. Ryan, who has been the Stallion Manager for the Stud for the past six seasons, ensures that champion stallion Savabeel is exceptionally well looked after, but his dedication to the breeding operation extends far and wide, from serving, foal education, handling and presenting the yearlings, as well as client relations for the Stud.

Dedication to Racing Award

Emma Smith

Joining the racing industry after finishing school a decade ago was a natural fit for Emma Smith. Starting out with Baker Racing, she rode six winners as an apprentice, before travelling with horses to the Hong Kong International Sale for Ascot Farm across six separate trips. Emma has been part of the Marsh Racing team for six years, riding work aboard Group 1 performers, managing the social media for Marsh Racing, and riding work for emerging trainer Sam Mynott. As Emma says, if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life.

The Greyhound Excellence Award

Mikayla Clark

Based in the relative greyhound racing outpost of Manaia in Taranaki, Mikayla is shooting up through the ranks of the trainers premierships, going from seven wins in 2021-22, and – as of last week – she was close to bringing up 50 wins for this racing season, while taking the likes of Three Shirt Day and Highview Amber through to open class. Her small team of greyhounds thrive in her kennel, and this is evidenced by her picking up doubles and trebles at Friday night racing.

National Racing Woman of the Year

Elizabeth Whelan

Liz has been a strong advocate for greyhound racing during some challenging times, but you couldn't find a better person to advocate for an industry she loves. As Chief Operating Officer for Greyhound Racing New Zealand, she has been a key face of the code in the media to outline just how amazing greyhounds are, and the love and care that is shown for them. She is comfortable engaging with the full range of stakeholders from handlers through to the Minister for Racing. Her enthusiasm is infectious and greyhound racing is all the luckier for having her on the team.

Leadership Award and overall Entain Excellence Award

Cameron Ring

Cameron has been a key player in sales and nominations at Cambridge Stud for five years. He has helped to underwrite the stud careers of Cambridge's stallions, engaging with both traditional Cambridge Stud supporters and new clients. and more recently, he has taken over the role of Bloodstock Manager, overseeing much of the on-farm management of staff, a pivotal role on a large commercial farm. He is one of the industry's brightest stars.