

Off the track but down the straight to win by a long life

By FRANCES THOMPSON

FAME is fleeting for a thoroughbred racehorse.

Despite the fans and money lavished on a thoroughbred, its career might not last much longer than three years before its future becomes uncertain.

Racing NSW has begun a thoroughbred retraining and rehabilitation program in conjunction with Corrective Services NSW at the St Heliers Correctional Centre near Muswellbrook.

Retraining team leader is former NSW mounted police officer Scott Brodie, who says the program stemmed from Racing NSW's strategic plan of management for animal welfare.

Mr Brodie said thoroughbreds lived until their mid-20s but once off the track

they might be left in a paddock with none of the comforts they were used to.

"They have all the toughness bred out of them so they need to be mollycoddled," he said.

Originally the program went to St Heliers for the space, but the relationship has worked out well for the horses and the inmates.

Former St Heliers inmate Barry Digger moved directly from the centre to work for the program.

Mr Brodie said the program had softened hard men, including Mr Digger.

"I have seen people change," Mr Brodie said.

"[The inmates] can try to be rough but you will just get hurt," he said.

As for the horses, they learned how to communicate with their riders and different ways of moving backwards and sideways - not just heading for a finish line.

Racing NSW chief executive officer Peter V'Landys said the organisation believed all people and animals deserved a second chance.

Mr V'Landys said the organisation wanted all racehorses retired permanently and not euthanased.

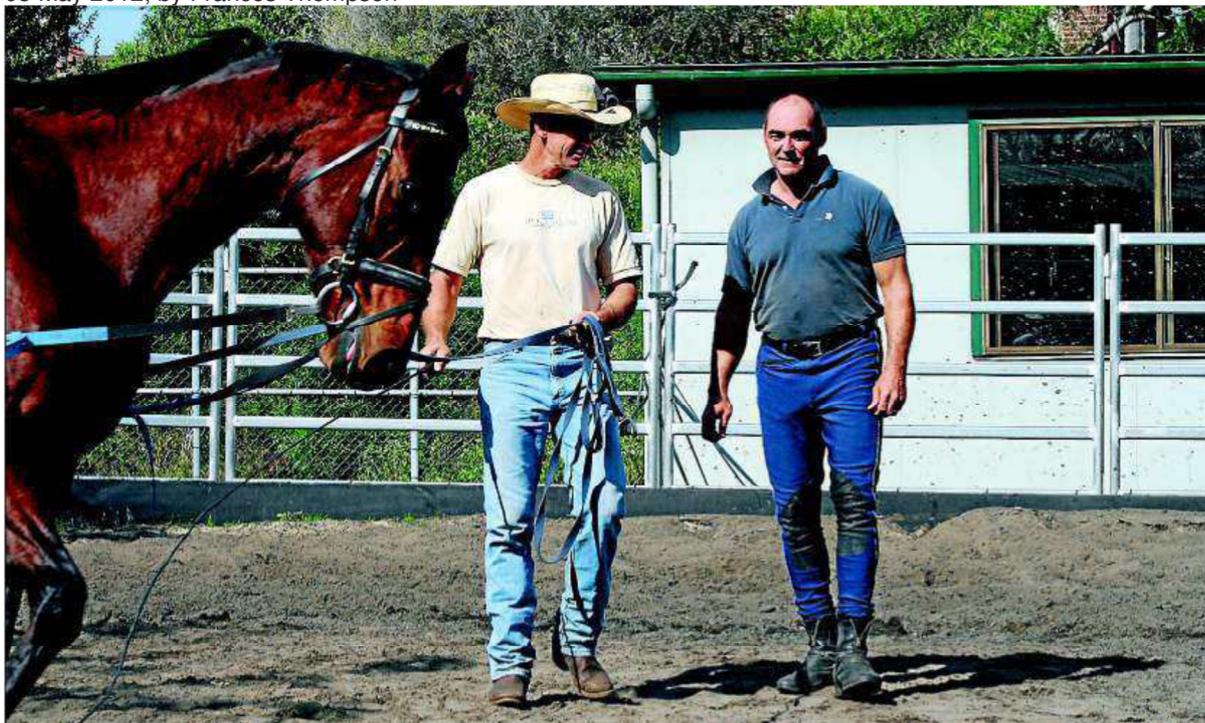
Retraining can take as little as a month to six weeks

Once complete, the horse is ready for sale and can often go on to compete at elite levels in eventing.

One of the retrained thoroughbreds was bought for \$750,000 at the yearling sales but had never raced.

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CAREER CHANGE: Barry Digger, left, and Scott Brodie retraining thoroughbred racehorses for a new change.

Picture: Tina Brodie