

## From Longchamp to Ippy

By Peter Foley

Jockey Damien Boche left behind the majesty of Longchamp, the grandeur of Deauville and the charm of Chantilly to ride in Australia - and he couldn't be happier.

Damien Boche is from Nantes in western France, where his passion for horses began and his early career in horse racing fostered his professionalism and adaptability.

He developed his horse skills in France, riding for trainers in the western regions and working with trainers such as Xavier-Louis Le Stang and Ludovic Gadbin.

"I was 10 years in France," Damien said.

"After a while, I rode everywhere in France — Paris, Deauville, Longchamp, Chantilly."

Longchamp, with its sweeping home turn and expansive space was a good track to ride, he said, but very tactical.

He rode about 200 winners in France before relocating, first to Germany and then Australia.

"In France now, it's pretty hard to get rides. A lot of trainers have stopped training because of tax; it's not easy."

He arrived in Sydney in September 2024 and rode trackwork for training duo Gai Waterhouse and Adrian Bott.

"Gai wasn't there very often; I worked for Adrian and it was a very good stable," he said.

"He trusted me a lot in the mornings with the horses. I galloped some very good horses."

"When you come into a new country, it's pretty hard; you don't know many people."

He had to learn about the differences in rating horses.

"In Australia, we work with a beeper; in France, it's just feeling. Here, it's more like with times and in France, it's like with a feeling," he said.

"And the races are longer. We have more like 2400 metres or something like that."

Damien stayed in Sydney for a few months before moving to Queensland, where it was easier to get a jockey licence.

He joined trainer Jack Bruce at the Sunshine Coast and followed him to Eagle Farm as the trainer relocated.

It was difficult to compare tracks in France with those he had ridden on in Queensland, but one stood out.

"Ipswich is good and the metro tracks — Eagle Farm and Doomben — are good to ride."

"The country track wasn't easy - Kilcoy. It's really hard to know that track."

Knights Choice was beaten in a maiden at Kilcoy a month before winning the Winx Guineas at the Sunshine Coast, and five months before his Melbourne Cup victory.

"I tell you, even a champion can get beaten at Kilcoy," his co-trainer Sheila Laxon joked.

Damien is fairly tall for a jockey, so weight is always an issue - but one he takes as part of the job.

"I can ride 55. It's pretty hard," he said.

"Like, 57 is good. I can eat."

"It's not fun, but that's the game, you know? You have to do that to ride. It's just normal for me;



Damien Boche and Zia Maria (left) are well clear of their rivals close to the winning post in the Fertpro Handicap (800m) at Ipswichracetrack. (Trackside Photography)

I've done it for 10 years."

Damien hopes to stay in Australia long term but that may be determined by Visa requirements.

"I just want to stay for a long time and get the Visa, if I can," he said.

"If not, I can do one more year. I can do three years here and this is my second year."

"After my third year we have to try and get residency or sponsorship."

"But it's not easy when you get sponsorship because you have to ride for one trainer."

"The rules are not clear. It's not so easy when you're French."

"My plan is to stay here. Everything is good here, so I'm very happy here."

"I have a lot of friends who came to Australia."

"The dream of every jockey is the Group 1. That's the goal for the future."

"That's why I work hard with my manager Adam Brook. He's working very hard. And he's a very good manager."

At Ipswich racetrack last Thursday, Damien had a win for trainers Barry Lockwood and Emma-Jane Vincent on Zia Maria.

"She jumped very well; I just let her go where she was comfortable, next to the speed," he said.

"The blinkers first time made a difference. That was helpful today because she can be lost in her mind sometimes."

"She had a very big turn of foot today and, yeah, she'll do well."



Mister Selfie, ridden by Aidan Keeley, (left) wins the Living Turf Handicap (1350m) from Yes I'm Ugly (centre) with Ipswich galloper Bee Exact (right) third. (Peter Foley)

An advertisement for Ipswich Turf Club. It features a green background with a white silhouette of a horse and jockey. The text reads: "Ipswichturfclub", "IPSWICH RACING POWERED BY", "IPSWICH TRIBUNE TODAY", and "ipswichturfclub.com.au". On the right side, there is a photograph of a jockey in a green and white outfit riding a brown horse.