

Yearling manager earns top honours in Australian Stud and Stable Staff Awards

Wendy Smith has been crowned the Thoroughbred Excellence Award winner in the Australian Stud and Stable Staff Awards 2020.

At a virtual ceremony, Smith, the yearling manager at Victorian stud Blue Gum Farm, was praised for her 'unlimited determination, thorough reliability and unsurpassed knowledge and skill'.

Smith took the top award of the night, together with the Horsemanship category of the SSSA, staged by Thoroughbred Breeders Australia and Racing Australia and supported worldwide by Godolphin.

She is one of seven winners of the awards, which recognise the vital, but often behind-the-scenes work in one of the country's largest industries.

A veterinary nurse and all-round horsewoman, Smith has overseen the post-natal care of the farm's foals for the past eight years. During that time Blue Gum has become one of Victoria's most successful consignors of yearlings to Australian sales.

"I would never have thought I would be in line for anything like this," said Smith. "I really believe I was born to work with horses. I am shocked and I'm so grateful to Blue Gum's owners Phil and Patti Campbell for nominating me. There are so many people who work in the background who never get recognition. These awards offer something to all of them."

Smith, who also gives her time to local Riding for the Disabled groups, puts her relationship with horses down to admiration and love.

"You do the work for the love of the horses," Smith said.

There is another vital aspect to her work with horses that Smith believes makes all the difference. "I'm not in a bad mood very often. I think they like that."

As winner of the Horsemanship category, Smith receives a cash prize of \$10,000, a trophy with a further \$3,000 to share among workplace colleagues. She receives an additional \$5,000 as the Thoroughbred Excellence award winner.

The winners in all seven categories of the SSSA were announced in an online ceremony streamed around the world on Wednesday night, with six categories carrying a cash prize of \$10,000 and a trophy, while the top Newcomer received \$5,000.

The Dedication to Breeding section, sponsored by Magic Millions, went to Chris Cooper who has been at Godolphin's Woodlands Stud in the Hunter Valley for most of the past 25 years. Cooper worked at Woodlands when it was part of the Ingham brothers' breeding empire and regards himself as being "inherited" by Godolphin when it acquired the business.

"This place is in my soul, so it's fantastic to be recognised in this way," Cooper said.

The Dedication to Racing winner Mick Hurry began his life in racing at the age of five, wandering around Flemington racecourse with his father, and has continued for more than half a century since. Hurry was nominated for the award, sponsored by the Australian Turf Club, by his sister Suzie who has a lifetime knowledge of her brother's "get in, can-do attitude to everything he does".

In the Leadership category, the winner - Godolphin's Simon Johnson - spoke for every entrant in the SSSA, saying "You do it because you love it."

The assistant stud manager at Woodlands Stud regards leadership as an obligation.

"We are obliged to give everyone who comes into the industry and who shows a willingness to learn the opportunity to advance themselves," Johnson said.

Thoroughbred Care and Welfare is an area that is vital to the industry and one to which Godolphin is committed – as is the 2020 winner, Liz Andriske. With her husband Gary, Andriske has funded and built a comprehensive complex in western Victoria where she provides a temporary home for her horses until new owners are found.

"It means so much to be recognised by an organisation like Godolphin and to know that all the organisers and sponsors support what everyone in this business is doing," Andriske said.

Sarah Moran's success in the Administration and Ancillary category, sponsored by the Melbourne Racing Club Foundation, came after a testing year in which she went above and beyond her role as personal assistant to Victorian trainer Robbie Griffiths after he was diagnosed with a brain aneurism.

"I'm humbled and excited. Like most people, I do what I can in my job and for that to be recognised is an absolute honour," Moran said.

Newcomer Award winner Kelly Colledge confronted similar circumstances soon after she joined Grafton trainer Brenden Mackay. And she responded in similar style when Mackay was found to have a brain tumour and it was left to his brand-new employee to keep his business running.

"We got through it and now the horses are my life, my passion," Colledge said.

Greg Nichols, Chairman of Racing Australia, and Tom Reilly, Chief Executive Officer of Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, said: "A record 168 nominations were received from the widest-ever range of training establishments, studs and other organisations that support and maintain an industry that is one of Australia's largest."

"The hard work and commitment of staff is the cornerstone of our industry. Without that, Australia would not be regarded as a global leader in thoroughbred racing and breeding."

Vin Cox, Managing Director of Godolphin Australia said: "These Awards honour the behind-the-scenes stars of our industry and bring deserved recognition and reward to the people who make an extraordinary commitment to our horses and this sport."

"We are delighted to be the world sponsor of such an important event."