

OBITUARY: FREDDY LEE THIAM YEW

The man with a passion for horse racing

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IT ALL started in 1948, when it happened that his next-door neighbour was none other than top jockey Garnet Bougoure, who later became a successful trainer.

The Australia-born Briton was instrumental in igniting the flame to the life-long passion for the Sport of Kings for former stockbroking firm chairman Freddy Lee, who died of cancer at his home on Thursday afternoon. He was 65.

He leaves behind his wife Eleanor and four children - Edmund, Tina, Jeffrey and Selena.

His funeral is on Monday.

Lee, a younger brother of former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, naturally turned to Bougoure when he owned his first horse, Spectacular Win. The horse won four times in 1965 and 1966.

The horse enthusiast loved racing so much that he watched trackwork frequently until his mid-60s.

He started Raffles Farm in Cambridge, New Zealand, to breed horses but sold it about two years ago when Graeme Stubbings, his good friend who looked after his property, died.

Lee enjoyed watching his horses race, even when he knew they could not win.

He said of his romance with the turf in a 1992 interview: "It's the thrill. It's a challenge to bring up a horse to Cup level and backing it when the odds of winning are in your favour."

"It's a sideline hobby, which must be economically attractive and within my capacity. There's a lot of satisfaction when my horse wins."

The best horse he owned was Hard Rock, who won many races, including three Malayan Racing Association (MRA) classics. They were the Penang Governor's Gold Cup in 1991 and the Tunku Gold Cup and the Raffles Cup in 1992.

Hard Rock was selected to represent the MRA in the 1992 Hong Kong Invitation Cup but finished unplaced.

The champion was trained by Dr Yeoh Kheng Chye, who labelled the horse as one of the best he has trained.

"The horse gave Freddy a lot of success and happiness," said Dr Yeoh, 70, who will be retiring at the end of the year.

"He enjoyed racing. He was one of the kindest persons I know - no airs, he helped everyone, he was a simple man, and he was a very good story-teller. He knew what was life. From syces to jockeys, they all like him."

Good mentor

Lee's current trainer, Leticia Dragon, said she has lost a good mentor who had been instrumental in shaping her life.

She said: "It's very sad, his demise. I will miss him. He had the wisdom, perseverance and determination."

"I was very happy to win for him with Rapid Rewards a few weeks ago. I saw him the weekend before the horse won. He was sick but looked much better, and we were hoping to catch up but unfortunately..."

Dragon said that both Lee's horses, Rapid Rewards (Race 1) and four-time winner Rapido

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