



STRONG CRUSH

Tim Habel

IT'S 25 years tomorrow since the epic Bonecrusher-Our Waverley Star Cox Plate battle.

On the silver anniversary of the great race, trainer Frank Ritchie and the champion's rider Gary Stewart are this week reliving the moment as special guests of the Moonee Valley Racing Club.

Yesterday Ritchie and Stewart walked the Moonee Valley track with sponsors to relive the race and then enjoy a private lunch.

Today Stewart will speak to 800 guests at Atlantic, Docklands, for the 20/40 Club.

Tomorrow Ritchie and Stewart will be part of a motorcade before the race and hand over the Cox Plate trophy to MVRC chairman Bob Scarborough and Tatts Group chairman Harry Boon.

Minutes later another equine hero will join the Cox Plate honour roll.

Ritchie is in Melbourne campaigning Showcause, who ran fourth in Wednesday's Geelong Cup and is striving to earn a Melbourne Cup start.

Stewart, who rode Bonecrusher to 17 of his



Racing Into Immortality: Bonecrusher pips Our Waverley Star in the 1986 Cox Plate at Moonee Valley.

18 wins, trained on the Gold Coast after retiring as a jockey and now rides trackwork in Melbourne.

The 1986 Cox Plate was the signature moment of revered racecaller Bill Collins' career and billed as the race of the century: Bonecrusher v Our Waverley Star.

Even 25 years later replays evoke that spine-tingling feeling experienced by those lucky enough to see the race live.

At the 800m mark, the New

Zealand stars made their swooping runs together for a two-horse war.

"Here come the New Zealanders... have they gone too early?" Collins called.

They squared off like prizefighters all the way down the straight, first one, then the other, edging ahead.

Collins' voice was strained to the limit as they hit the line: "And Bonecrusher races into equine immortality."

Bonecrusher, now 29, is see-

ing out his final days at owner Peter Mitchell's Takanini property.

Recently Mitchell dusted off the Cox Plate trophy for a photograph with Shaun Ritchie, son of Bonecrusher's trainer Frank.

Ritchie Sr this week took the chance to end what he says is a myth that the epic clash gutted both horses. "Both horses were super fit for that Cox Plate. Bonecrusher was so fit he could have gone another lap," he said.

After his Cox Plate win, Bonecrusher developed a lung infection while preparing for the Japan Cup.

"He was that sick we thought we were going to lose him," Frank Ritchie said.

"That might have had a bearing on his form later, but I think the race that bottomed him was the Australian Cup win the next autumn. He went into the race with a minimal preparation and had to dig deep to beat At Talaq."

Next spring Bonecrusher ran third in the Cox Plate, and after failing in his next seven starts bowed out of racing in December 1989 the winner of \$2.17 million, a gilt-edged investment on a \$NZ3250 buy.



Happy anniversary: Bonecrusher at the New Zealand property of owner Peter Mitchell (left) and Shaun Ritchie, son of trainer Frank Ritchie. Picture: MV RACING CLUB