





It's September over the Darling Downs, and the stony road to Eureka Stud is dusty. There's been no rain, and either side of Cambooya Felton Road is bleached and thirsty. With only 28 days of rainfall since the year began, bringing just 204 millimetres, it's beyond reasonable drought. And yet the trucks and floats clatter up the long plains to the Eureka gates, because this is home to Queensland's top stallion.

The Holy Spirit

When Spirit Of Boom retired to Queensland's Darling Downs, few were expecting him to barnstorm the sire table as he has. In the face of big offers, his story has proved that, even in high-stakes horse breeding, there's no place like home.

At \$55,000, Spirit Of Boom heads the state's stallion ranks by service fee. It's a record figure. The closest any Queensland stallion has commanded is Show A Heart, who was \$33,000 a decade ago at Glenlogan Park. The fee is reflective of a first crop that hit the ground hard-running. Five individual stakes winners, 18 overall winners of 28 races from 52 runners. Earnings hovered at \$1.94 million, second only to Zoustar. And for season 2017/18, Spirit Of Boom was the leading first-season sire by winners in Australia.

Scott McAlpine, studmaster, casts his eye across Eureka and wonders if his ship has come in. Affable, knockabout, in loose blue jeans and beaten bush hat, he is third generation on his land. The paddocks, yards and fences all around him are products of his father and grandfather, but even they, Colin and Andrew McAlpine, never stood a debut stallion like this.

"I've probably never worked as hard for another horse as I have for this one," Scott says. "But then we've never had more horses here than we do today." He recalls stallions of old, in particular Semipalatinsk, and the marketing strategies he has used in the past, saying things aren't much different today. "I'm the little fella that lives in Queensland with this dual group one-winning horse who's got a pretty plain pedigree, but he was a good racehorse, so why won't he produce good racehorses?"





HARRY AND SCOTT MCALPINE

The story of Spirit Of Boom might be as simple as a stallion come good. But it might also be the story of the McAlpine family. Tucked into the folds of the Darling Downs since 1935, Eureka Stud is one of Queensland's oldest family breeding outfits, a farm that has ridden out war, drought, El and more drought. Scott, wife Grania and their three sons Harry, Angus and Charlie make four generations on the land, and they are horse breeders, but they also say they are simple Queensland farmers having a go.

When Spirit Of Boom was foaled on Eureka in October 2007, he was stout McAlpine stock. His dam, Temple Spirit, was a Eureka mare by the old Eureka favourite Semipalatinsk, and her dam, Temple Top, was foundation stock also. Temple Spirit raced in moderate company for the McAlpines, trained by Tony Gollan, and she won eight of her 16 starts. When she retired, she was sent to resident stallion Piccolo, dropping her first foal, Temple Of Boom, in 2006. Spirit Of Boom was her second the following year.

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Scott McAlpine



EUREKA STUD



BRIAN SIEMSEN

TEMPLE WON THE MAGIC MILLIONS 2YO PRELUDE BY FOUR LENGTHS AT HIS FIRST RACE START, WHILE SPIRIT WON THE SAME RACE THE FOLLOWING YEAR BY SEVEN. **BETWEEN 2010 AND 2014, THE BROTHERS RAN INTO A HALCYON ERA OF SPRINTERS...**

Both foals showed dramatic two-year-old speed. Temple won the Magic Millions 2YO Prelude by four lengths at his first race start, while Spirit won the same race the following year by seven. Between 2010 and 2014, the brothers ran into a halcyon era of sprinters... Black Caviar, Hay List, Buffering and Lankan Rupee. They remained tough, consistent and sound. In 2012, Temple landed the G1 Galaxy at Randwick, and in 2014 Spirit won the G1 William Reid at Moonee Valley, followed by the G1 Doomben 10,000 eight weeks later. From her first two foals, Eureka hen Temple Spirit had dual group one-winning sons.

Both horses had been farm-bred carefully, trained by Tony Gollan, raced in the Eureka silks, and shared a small band of owners that included breeder, trainer and Sydney businessman Brian Siemsen. Bred and born on the Darling Downs himself, Brian was a trade builder who moved to Sydney to play for the South Sydney Rabbitohs, and it was happenstance that Gollan, then a football mate, asked him into the fold with Temple Of Boom.

"Tony asked me to come in to this horse that he'd seen in a paddock," Brian says. "At that point I knew absolutely nothing about horses, but I was playing footy and I thought I could get some guys in from Sydney, so I took 35 per cent, and of course I ended up keeping 35 per cent of Temple outright."

When the nuggety gelding won his first start, the \$61,000 cheque paid for Brian's 20 per cent of Spirit Of Boom. "Temple paid for himself in his first start, and I used my share of the money to buy into Spirit. You couldn't script it!"

In business, Brian is a high roller. He's imposing but pleasant, heads a company ranked eighth in Australia for innovation, and wheels, deals, travels. Few things, however, make him stop and talk like the Boom brothers, and he admits that the horses are a Queensland story, just like he, Tony Gollan and the McAlpines. "Temple, Spirit... they've made a bunch of people," he says. "When it came to Scotty buying back the horse for stud, it was perfect that he'd go back to Eureka."



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There are no flies on Scott McAlpine. Before the William Reid in 2014, before Spirit had ever landed a group one, he made an offer to the syndicate to buy the horse out. It stood at \$400,000, with a bonus inbuilt should the horse win. "I had it all in writing before the race," he says. "The offer stood that day, but it would not stand after it, and I didn't know what he might be as a stallion. At one stage we nearly gelded him, but I knew he could be a really good stallion for the Queensland market, which is built on early speed, so I sat down and worked out the figures before the William Reid, and of course that was the night he won his first group one."

By the time Spirit Of Boom rattled up Cambooya Felton Road in retirement, he had added a second group one in Doomben. By all accounts, he was a respectable new kid on the Queensland breeding block – a proven two-year-old, a proven older horse, and a five-time black-type winner. He wasn't a big horse at 15 and some hands, but he was well conformed, athletic and powerful. As he let down, he was so tractable he was more child's pony than thoroughbred stallion.

Scott put a ticket of \$11,000 on him. It was a reasonable fee, and in his debut season, Spirit Of Boom covered 154 mares for 121 live foals. The following season he covered 147 mares, and 146 and 191 in subsequent seasons. And then, in the spring of 2017, as the first crop turned into Jonker, Kinky Boom, Ef Troop, Boomsara, Outback Barbie and Heaven's Deal, Scott's phone began to ring. "It was almost overnight," he recalls. "And it kept ringing."

Much of the original syndicate stayed in Spirit Of Boom's new career, including Brian. "In that first season, he didn't go to a lot. The mares he got, none of them were anything special, and it's fair to say he hasn't gone to anything reasonable until this season. But look at what he's done with that first crop, at what he's doing with fair horses. Look at Kinky Boom. Scotty loves that story. A \$600 mare (Kinka Rhode), and by rights nothing on her page, and now she's a listed winner."

In the spring of 2017, enormous offers began to arrive for Eureka's little stallion. They came from some of Australia's best breeding empires, and Scott says they were relentless. For the first time in his life, he and his boys had to weigh up the value of their horse against more than \$20 million. It was a figure they would likely never see again. Scott thought about it, but he didn't think so hard about it that he really considered it. "They kept telling me the horse was for sale," he says, "and I kept telling them he wasn't. And it went on like that. People were telling me I was all the way up here in Queensland, that no one would come. But they've all come, and they're still coming."

"If Spirit Of Boom keeps going this way, he'll be a farm maker for the McAlpines," Brian says. "The Arrowfields and Coolmores, they already have five or six farm-makers, but for a country stud like Eureka to get the opportunity to not only breed, but stand, what could potentially be a farm-making stallion, not Scott, Grania or the boys take it for granted. They know it's special, and it's genuine."

The choice to keep Spirit Of Boom at Eureka, and turn down life-changing dollars, came with a few changes. For season 2018-19, the horse would stand for \$55,000, five times his original fee, and his numbers would cap at 200. Handling the traffic through the farm, along with the publicity and phone calls, is a family effort, but the McAlpines are tipping money back into Eureka, making hay while the sun shines. In October, the rains began to fall, easing the farm away from vicious and distorting drought, and Scott McAlpine can hardly believe his dreams have fallen on such fertile soil.



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