

MARJORIE CHARLESON

Statement by Member for South Perth

MR J.E. McGRATH (South Perth) [12.49 pm]: Marjorie Charleson came to Australia from New Zealand in 1965 to pursue an acting career, but her influence on Western Australian horseracing is where she left an indelible mark. A racing trailblazer, Marjorie was the first female public relations officer of any thoroughbred club in Australia when employed by the Western Australian Turf Club. During the 1970s and 1980s, Marjorie was known for her persuasive talents in luring Australia's best horses, trainers and jockeys to the Ascot Racing Carnival. Her efforts also saw international jockeys Lester Piggott, Gianfranco Dettori, Willie Carson and Steve Cauthen ride at Ascot Racecourse, while visiting celebrities spotted on the lawns included Gina Lollobrigida, Spike Milligan, Harry Secombe, the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Margaret. In Marjorie's time, it seemed anyone of any note who was in town was invited to the races. Marjorie was a fierce and passionate advocate of female participation in racing. She initiated the Powder Puff Derby for amateur female riders, which became the forerunner to women becoming jockeys. Marjorie was able to entice top eastern states trainers Bart Cummings, Tommy Smith, Colin Hayes, George Hanlon and Geoff Murphy to bring their star gallopers to Perth. Arguably, Marjorie's greatest accomplishment was attracting Smith's great champion Kingston Town to Perth for the Western Mail Classic in 1982, which he won at what was to be his final racetrack appearance. In 2019, Marjorie's selfless dedication to racing was recognised when a race was named in her honour, the Marjorie Charleson Classic. Sadly, Marjorie Charleson passed away on 8 August. May she rest in peace.