

A photograph of two jockeys in a stable. The jockey on the left is wearing a blue helmet and a blue jacket with yellow and green stripes. The jockey on the right is wearing a black helmet with a blue pom-pom and a blue jacket with black and white checkered sleeves. They are standing in a stable with green pillars and white railings. A brown horse is visible in the foreground on the left.

debut.

*a film by **peta lee hitchens***

# debut.

*year of production* 2023  
*country of production* australia  
*running time* 20 minutes  
*genre* documentary  
*shoot gauge* xdcam  
*finish gauge* prores  
*aspect ratio* 16:9  
*sound* stereo  
*language* english  
*production company* vca film and television  
faculty of fine arts and music  
the university of melbourne



logline.

Three apprentices begin their journey as jockeys in one of the most dangerous sports in the world.



# synopsis.

They're the new recruits. Three apprentices embarking on their first year as jockeys in one of the most dangerous sports in the world. Each month they'll train together at jockey school residentials. While they're not training with the group, they're out at training tracks around Victoria, Australia. Mucking out boxes, saddling up, and riding trackwork. They'll progress from riding in 'jump outs', where they learn to jump out of the starting gates, then to official trials; both steps on the path to being cleared to ride in races as fully-fledged jockeys. The pressure on the young riders to stay safe and succeed is immense. *Debut* takes us on a ride as they prepare for their first race.





## thomas spillane | 24

Thomas used to work at a top accounting firm in Melbourne. He first sat on a horse at 21. Already in two separate falls he's sustained serious injuries that he is still recovering from. Though not yet fit enough to ride in races, with the help of his favourite horses and supportive trainers, he remains undeterred.



## lauren burke | 21

Lauren is the only one in her family that loves horses. Off the horse she comes across as happy-go-lucky but with a dark sense of humour. In the saddle she is fiercely competitive and hyper-focussed. The coaches have high expectations of her abilities. And her expectations of herself are even higher.



## luke cartwright | 17

Having already tasted success as a junior champion motocross rider, he's chasing that same thrill for speed, replacing one type of horsepower for another. For Luke, racing is also a family affair. Following in the footsteps of his jockey brother and father, he hopes for a fairytale start to his career.

# director's statement.



My first pony was a fast little thing. So as a keen Pony Clubber, I aspired to ride in races. But my parents encouraged me to go to university instead of undergoing a jockey apprenticeship.

Still dabbling with the thought of race riding, when I was 26, Ray Silburn, a jockey that rode my family's first winner, fell from his horse. Caza Ladron had suffered a bleeding attack, collapsed, and died. Ray is now a quadriplegic. Just a month later, two jockeys, Gavin Lisk and Adrian Ledger, died on the track. After witnessing these traumatic incidents in quick succession, to both racehorses and their riders, I came to the realisation that becoming a jockey was not for me.

Instead, I was driven to try and prevent these incidents. In 2011, I completed my PhD on the epidemiology of jockey injuries and fatalities. And for the last six years I have worked alongside Racing Victoria to improve safety and welfare for both horses and their riders. This has provided me with unique access to the apprentice jockey cohort to make this documentary. I want to understand why I was driven away from a career as a jockey where others are driven towards it. And *Debut* has allowed me to live vicariously through Thomas, Lauren, and Luke's journeys.

## writer/director/editor

peta lee hitchens



Peta is an emerging documentary filmmaker with an academic background in veterinary and medical epidemiology. Her films have the same intention as her research, to examine the risks and rewards of human-animal relationships, and particularly to improve the safety and welfare of those involved in sports and entertainment.

Peta's first documentary, *Filming Dogs*, followed her grapple with ensuring the welfare of her dog Ra as she sought on-screen fame. It was a 2023 Official Selection at six national and international film festivals and has been incorporated into animal welfare and ethics breadth subjects at the Melbourne Veterinary School. Peta is in her graduate year of the Masters in Film & TV (Documentary) at the Victorian College of the Arts. Her graduate documentary *Debut* is a grateful recipient of the 2023 Harry Hains Memorial Film Bursary.

## director of photography

natasha brock



Born in Sydney, Australia, Natasha developed an interest in film from a young age after discovering her Dad's family video camera. After completing high school, Natasha made the move down to Melbourne to study media and communications at RMIT University, it was through these years she developed a passion and love for documentary filmmaking.

She continued her studies and completed a Masters' degree at the Victorian College of the Arts majoring in documentary. Throughout her studies Natasha has worked on various music videos, short films, and commercial projects building skills in a variety of roles. In addition to this she has also completed an internship at Good Thing Productions where she was involved in a variety of long-form documentary projects.

# credits.

*written, directed & edited by*

*director of photography*

*composer*

*featuring*

*alongside their peers*

*sound recordists*

peta lee hitchens

natasha brock

paul raine

thomas spillane

lauren burke

luke cartwright

sarah field

logan bates

jordyn weatherly

caitlin hollowood

beau treloar

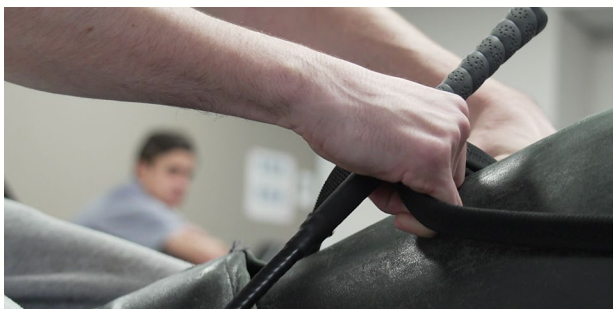
susannah thomas

lauren hunter

madison murphy



# credits. cont'd



*safety*

*colourist*

*sound mixer*

*archival material courtesy of*

*supervising producer*

*production coordinator (screen)*

*post-production producer*

*post-production coordinator*

*post-production assistant*

jimmy petropoulos

candice mars williamson

lincoln sharpe

racing victoria/  
digital media creations  
trp archive dept.

shannon owen

katie bradley

natalie cunningham

grayton hevern

madison murphy



thank you.

racing victoria

tracey glen

lisa dunn

physio4athletes

dr matt mcgregor

victorian institute of sport

lindsay park racing

shane nichols racing

lyn tolson and leonie proctor

cranbourne turf club

werribee racing club

victoria racing club

pakenham racing club

melbourne racing club (morningside)

balnarring beach foreshore

liz burke

poh lin lee

steve thomas

elizabeth drake

# contact.

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Faculty of Fine Arts and Music  
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**WARNING**  
BOAT RAMP  
TRACTORS OPERATING