Passion for horses

GROOMING:
MEC galloping towards producing quality graduates

MORE than a decade ago, Australia’s first woman jockey turned racehorse trainer and breeder, Gaye Gauci-Marchant, would not have been so keen to sell her horses to Malaysian buyers.

However, she said the country now has earned her nod, thanks to the efforts of the Malaysian Equine Council (MEC), which has over the years, showed its dedication to the development of the sport.

“There was no proper system in the past. I cannot sell my horses, which I love so dearly, to people who cannot tell me what will happen to race horses after their prime or race horses which do not make the grade.

“But now I can see that the MEC is very systematic in the way it organises equine activities. I can now see that the country is grooming people with passion for horses to work in the industry, such as the introduction of the equine studies programme in two vocational institutes in Malaysia,” said the 48-year-old.

Gaye, who is the director of Equine Goals and Dreams, a non-governmental organisation set up to help children achieve their equine goals and dreams, said she would welcome graduates of the equine studies programme to work for her in Australia.

Married to jockey Ernie Marchant, Gaye became the first woman jockey in Australia in 1979.

MEC executive secretary Datuk Malek Jeremiah said the country is poised to produce its first batch of students under the National Occupational Skills Standard in Equine Studies programme from two vocational institutes in 2013.

The pilot project was launched last year in two institutes located in Kajang and Sungai Buloh.

Gaye will be at the five-day Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) International Johor Horse Show 2012 here, which kicked-off yesterday.

She came with an entourage of seven riders age 12 to 17, along with the riders’ family.

“Initially, I only wanted to bring the children but we managed to raise A$26,000 (RM82,000) so we brought along the riders’ family members.

“The riders are all from rural areas in Australia such as Tocumwal, Myrtleford and Jerilderie, among others, and none of them have ever had a passport before the trip.

“I decided to bring the children so that they can have a chance to participate in such events. The accommodation is provided by UTM and the entire trip is funded by sponsors.”

Meanwhile, Equine Centre director Associate Professor Dr Abd Rahman Mohd Sam said UTM will open an academy for equine studies under the Sports Science Faculty in the middle of next year.

“UTM will be the first university in the country to offer equine studies,” Abd Rahman said.

The UTM International Johor Horse Show 2012 will feature a total of 136 riders from 24 equestrian clubs from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Australia.
Gaye Gauci-Marchant (right) and rider Brooke Sweeney at the equestrian centre at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia yesterday. Picture courtesy of UTM