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RAINER Peter Eurton can only hope that the Del Mar meet this summer can approach that of 2011.

Eurton elevated his stature from solid Southern California conditioner to Grade 1 winner through the accomplishments of Weemissfrankie, who captured the Del Mar Debutante for two-year-old fillies last September.

Eurton sensed something unusual in the air during that entire meet following the death of owner and close friend Frank Alesia, who died in Carlsbad in February, 2011, and after whom the filly was named.

"It was the meet of all meets," said Eurton from a mezzanine box seat recently at Hollywood Park. "Everybody felt throughout the meet that Frank was there in some way, carrying those horses.

"All the horses seemed to be running lengths better than they had," continued Eurton of divine help. "I think we won eight races. Weemissfrankie's maiden win on opening day and the Debutante were both very emotional. Jet Blue Girl ran a humongous race. Mega Heat won a couple. Hard to Resist won on closing day."

On the lighter side, Eurton also saddled Joker Face to win the much-ballyhooed Battle of the Exes match race under Mike Smith over a mount ridden by Chantal Sutherland. "That was a kick, about as much fun as winning a stakes race," said Eurton. "There was so much hype and attention before the race."

The momentum of the Del Mar meet carried on through 2011 and the present year. Weemissfrankie came back to win a second Grade 1 in the Oak Leaf Stakes at Santa Anita and proved she was one of the leaders of her division with a third-place finish in the Breeders' Cup Juvenile Fillies at Churchill Downs.

Eurton remained one of the leading percentage trainers on the circuit and went on a tear during the 2012 Santa Anita meet, setting what was believed to be an all-time



Peter Eurton is embraced by jockey Rafael Bejarano after Weemissfrankie wins the Del Mar Debutante last year

Momentum raises Eurton to Grade 1 stardom

record in the 75-year history of the track with eight consecutive wins.

Eurton's streak started with Belle Passe on April 5 and continued through April 15 with Chickie Charms. In between, Eurton recorded the first triple of his career on April 7, a feat overshadowed by I'll Have Another winning the Santa Anita Derby the same day.

"That was freakish," said the personable brown-haired trainer. "I wasn't really keeping track. But on the day I was in Kentucky

(sending out Miss Cheeky to a second-place finish in the Madison Stakes at Keeneland on April 12), I checked my iPad to find out that Itssultryinthecape had won, and they mentioned the streak."

More good luck followed at the Betfair Hollywood Park meet when My Gi Gi became his second graded stakes winner with a nose victory in the Grade 2 Honeymoon Handicap for three-year-old fillies on the turf on June 9.

Dennis Conner, a client with whom Eurton



Weemissfrankie storms clear to win the Del Mar Debutante in impressive style

enjoyed success last year with Miss Becca, bought a share of My Gi Gi with two other Montana residents while she was laid up at Rancho Paseana during the winter and recommended turning her over to Eurton upon her return this spring.

After finishing second by a nose in her debut for Eurton in the Grade 3 Seniorita Stakes, My Gi Gi got the benefit of the photo in the Honeymoon. “We were second best that day – and I’m not afraid to say that – but the best horse doesn’t always win, and we got a great ride from Rafael (Bejarano),” said Eurton after the filly got the jump on 1-2 favorite Lady of Shamrock, who just missed.

Eurton said that his stable has grown to 40 head and includes 16 two-year-olds, none of which he is more excited about for Del Mar than an unraced filly named Indygo FMA.

“Frank’s widow, Sharon, named her for his initials, Frank Michael Alesia,” explained Eurton of the filly he hopes carries the same good karma as Weemissfrankie.

“She’s by Indygo Shiner,” added Eurton. “We bought her for \$95,000 at the Keeneland September yearling sale for the same partnership that owns Weemissfrankie.” That group consists of Sharon Alesia, Mike Mellen’s Bran Jam Stables, Joe Ciaglia, Rob Dyrdek and Nick Cosato as well as one new member, Jimmy Porrello.

“We hope she turns out to be the new version of Weemissfrankie,” said Eurton,

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crossing his fingers that she will be able to make her first start at Del Mar. “She is not as far along in training as Weemissfrankie was, but as large as she is, she’s very athletic.”

Eurton also hopes to train Weemissfrankie at Del Mar on the comeback trail. The filly, who earned \$559,920 last year, suffered a condylar fracture of a cannon bone finishing fourth in the Hollywood Starlet in December and underwent surgery to insert one screw.

Weemissfrankie has been jogging since her recovery, and Eurton hopes she will be ready to breeze at Del Mar and race this autumn. “She’s half wild,” said Eurton of the filly’s morning anxiety for an anticipated return.

Eurton will cultivate fond memories of Alesia at Del Mar. He trained for him since 1989 and 15 horses in his current stable are owned by his widow in partnerships.

“When we started out together, all Frank

and I did was claim horses,” said Eurton. “We didn’t start buying young horses at sales until we got Euroglide as a two-year-old in 2006 and She’s Cheeky the following year. We started going to Ocala and hooked up with (bloodstock agent) Larry Zap.

“Nobody was more generous than Frank,” said Eurton of Alesia, a character actor during the beach party movies in the 1960’s and director of the television show ‘Captain Kangaroo.’”

“He would come to the stable and one day asked ‘How many guys work for you?’” recalled Eurton. “I said ‘seven,’ and he peeled off seven \$100 bills for each.

“He didn’t believe in tipping people after. He took care of them before. That’s just the way he was raised. He always made people feel comfortable, no matter who they were. He always treated them with respect.

“Frank always said, ‘If you win a Group race for me, I’m going to buy you a Carrera,’” said Eurton, who tried but settled for several ungraded stakes wins and graded placings for him during two decades. “After the Debutante, I asked Sharon, ‘Do I get the car now?’”

The dream 2011 Del Mar meet was in stark contrast to a nightmarish 2010 one. Eurton was hurtin’ after suffering serious injuries during opening week of the session.

“I was going to educate a two-year-old in the starting gate,” recalled Eurton. “I was on

my pony at the side. The bridle came over his head, he got out and came in my direction.

“He reared up on top of me, grabbed me in the back, pulled me up and dropped me to the ground,” said Eurton of the frightening incident. “I landed on my head, but was wearing my helmet. The guys at the gate said he was going to savage me and shooed him away.

“I felt like I had been hit by a truck and was out cold for a few seconds. I’m glad I don’t remember. Guys who saw it said they thought I was history.

“I literally had teeth marks in my lower back and a hematoma the size of a football,” said Eurton. “I went to the hospital (Scripps in Encinitas) and later had to have it drained with a three-inch incision. I also hurt my knee, which got better. The back is still tight.”

Eurton, who will turn 55 on August 12, saw the pain of 2010 outweighed by the joy of 2011, when the big meet propelled his stable to personal-high earnings of \$1,540,304. He is already well ahead of that pace this year, with earnings in excess of \$1.1-million at the halfway point.

For that, Eurton thanks an experienced and loyal stable crew. Alex Perez serves as foreman, with his brother, Guadalupe Perez, and uncle, Luis Martinez, as assistants. “They have been with me for 15 years,” said Eurton. “Most of my grooms have been with me for ten to 15 years, too. Most of them started as hot walkers and were promoted.”

In a testament to Eurton’s ability to keep horses around, Euroglide and She’s Cheeky are still going strong. Euroglide, an eight-year-old gelding stakes-placed four times, has won six of 31 starts, been in the money 18 times and earned more than \$275,000.

She’s Cheeky, a seven-year-old mare, has been in the money in 20 of 26 starts and gave Eurton a chance to see New York for the first time in June when she finished third in the Grade 3 Vagrancy Handicap at Belmont Park.

She’s Cheeky has been placed in graded stakes seven times, three of them Grade 1, in quest of her first added-money victory. “She’s very polite,” said Eurton of the perennial bridesmaid, who has passed the \$430,000 earnings mark with her steady paychecks.

Other Eurton standouts include Star Nicholas, who won two stakes and placed in four others from 2008-10; Masterpiece, upset winner of the Harry Brubaker Stakes at Del Mar in 2007; and Cee Dreams, a \$20,000 claim who climaxed a long career with a victory in the 2001 Cal Cup Matron Stakes and made such an impression on her trainer that his e-mail address begins with her name.

California native Eurton was born in Alhambra, but grew up in Chatsworth and Northridge in the San Fernando Valley. His parents divorced when he was three, and he was introduced to the track at ten by his



My Gi Gi and jockey Rafael Bejarano, right, hold off Lady of Shamrock (Alonso Quinonez) to win the Grade II \$150,000 Honeymoon Handicap at Hollywood Park

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father, Wayne, an avid fan who raised him.

The five-foot six-inch Eurton longed to be a jockey and recalled checking the sports page in high school during the 1970’s to see how many races his heroes Bill Shoemaker and Laffit Pincay, Jr., had won while his classmates focused on baseball, football, and basketball results.

At 16, Eurton – who had never been on a horse – enrolled at the Rex Ellsworth Jockey School in Chino and learned the basics. During that time, his mother, Shirley – who had married trainer Steve Ippolito after the divorce and moved to Illinois with him – relocated to Arcadia with her second husband.

“After I finished the jockey school, I got a job galloping horses for Steve,” explained Eurton of his introduction to the backside. “He hooked me up north at Bay Meadows with trainer John Ellul, a former assistant, and

later found an agent in Canada to launch my riding career.

“I was the leading bugboy in Alberta,” said Eurton of his apprentice year at Northlands and Stampede parks. “But I only rode from 19 to 21. I got hurt and fractured six vertebrae. And I had a weight problem. I finished in Mexico, at Agua Caliente.”

Eurton returned as an exercise rider for Ippolito and learned plenty. “Steve was really on top of their legs and very aggressive,” said Eurton. “He was on top of how they were moving, Johnny on the spot. If I worked a horse too slow, he’d bring him out the next morning and work again.

“Steve was old school: walk one day, gallop four and breeze,” continued Eurton of the late conditioner’s regimen. “Steve knew where horses fit and when to move on them. He was a great claiming trainer and a great good-horse trainer.”

Eurton met Alesia through Ippolito. “Steve trained for Frank’s father in Chicago,” said Eurton. “Frank kept his father’s colors and had horses with Steve here when I first met him in the barn as an exercise rider.” Eurton took out his trainer’s license in 1985, and four years later Alesia turned his horses over to him.

Eurton lives in La Verne with his wife of 27 years, Lisa. They have one daughter, Britney, a 24-year-old University of Southern California graduate and an aspiring actress. ■