

The odds on t

By SEBASTIAN SMEE

Once again they're off and running in Australia's best-known, most controversial prize — the Archibald. With the curly weather making track conditions hard to predict, it's likely the pack will stay closely bunched.

It's not a strong field. Few contenders look to have the goods to break away. Although if it's to be anyone, it could be last year's runner-up, Adam Cullen, who has slapped onto canvas a likable likeness of actor David Wenham.

After Cullen, the best chances belong to the veteran stayers: Garry Shead, Elizabeth Cummings and Ann Thomson. On the other hand, if the track turns out to be quick and the judges go hard on the breakfast champagne, there's a good chance that horses like Michael Bell (ridden by The Sandman), Keith Looby (ridden by Anne Summers) or Jenny Sages (ridden by someone resembling her mother) will get up in the final stages.

The betting is fierce, and in the absence of much talent — not to mention the inclusion of some genuine roughies — the bookies are rubbing their hands.

Adam Cullen, portrait of actor David Wenham

The one to beat. Pipped at the post in a photo-finish last year. Popular with the punters and with the stewards. But what about the judges? Not carrying much weight. Jockey has speed, local knowledge and television on his side. The favourite at 3-1.

Elizabeth Cummings, portrait of sculptor May Barrie

Unsensational starter, but should be a sentimental favourite with the judges. Not used to this distance but form good after a freshening trip to Broome. Aging jockey shouldn't hamper. Dull-coloured silks might inconvenience caller, but in a photo-finish expect the judges to favour. 7-2.

Garry Shead, portrait of art writer Sasha Grishin

Another veteran with top chance. Leprechaun-like jockey, very savvy in the final stages, may lead them a merry chase. Respected and a little feared by fellow jockeys. Worth more than a flutter at reasonable odds. 6-1.

Ann Thomson, self-portrait

Seasoned campaigner. Jockey knows not to get caught on the rails but better on a wet track with the going slow. Could get up if others afraid to push the pace. 6-1.

Michael Bell, portrait of comedian The Sandman

Sure to be crowd favourite. Jockey



may have overplayed hand — or some other unnamable appendage — in pre-race publicity stakes but quick on the uptake. This popular horse likely to finish strongly in weak field. Prefers a fast track. 9-1.

Keith Looby, portrait of journalist Anne Summers

Occasionally cranky old stallion from same stable as Ian Smith. Too much riding with Paddy McGuinness (Mulholland's jockey) might have worn him out. Needs pacifiers but looks in good shape. Has lost weight, but will be carrying a great deal in the handicapping. Unlikely jockey makes for surprisingly good match. 11-1.

Jenny Sages, self-portrait

Veteran mare in fine fettle. Distance not a problem. Weight a worry. Best on a heavy track, so praying for rain. 12-1.

Ian Smith, portrait of gallery owner Ray Hughes

A slim chance but on a mucky track with the mud flying, hard to rule out. Jockey carrying prodigious weight, looking decidedly dissolute (likes to use the whip). But has presence and is something of a stayer. 14-1.

Peter Wegner, portrait of Professor Graeme Clark

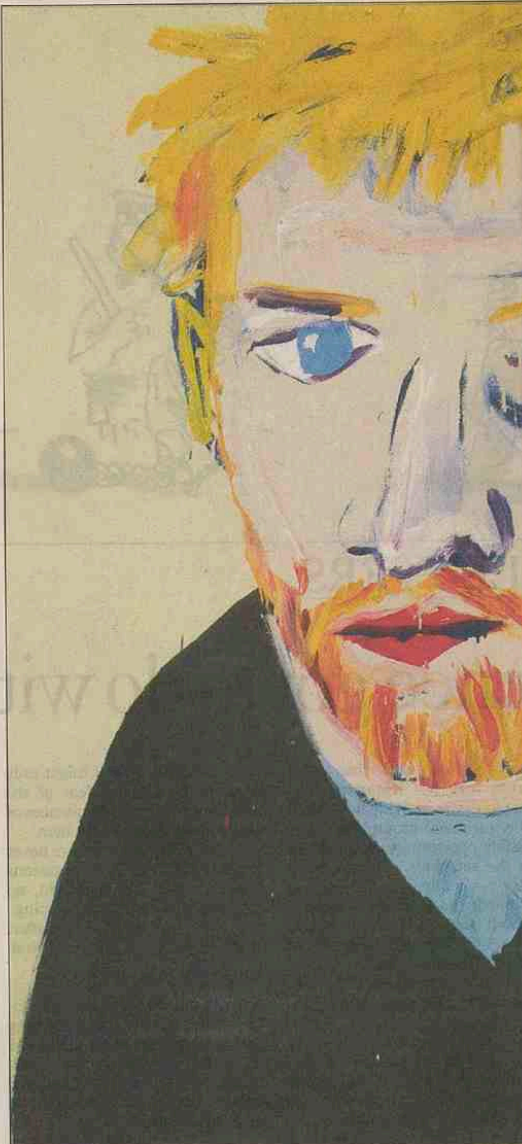
Only an outside chance, but best of the traditional stayers. Jockey "the bionic man", so could come up with anything. Good bet for a place. 15-1.

Barbara Licha, portrait of art critic Bruce James

A wild card. But looks in decent form. Surprise jockey used to being on other side of the rails. Should arouse curiosity of the judges. Worth a flutter. 16-1.

John Walker, portrait of gallery director Bill Wright

Gutsy, galumphing, long-haul type unlikely to gobble turf on the day. Bon vivant jockey looking a tad pasty, but watch for cunning sleight of hand in final stages. A wily veteran. 16-1.



Bill Leak, portrait of diplomat Sir Les Patterson

A real trier. Brings tears to your eyes. Popular with the crowd. Jockey loves the the mud flying. Could surprise on a groggy, slushy track. A perennial outside chance, but sadly, a perennial loser too. 20-1.

Branca Uzur, portrait of film critic Paul Byrnes

Trim, attractive looking horse, sharp-looking jockey with aerodynamic helmet. Hypnotic silks could put caller off his game; may even bedazzle the judges. Not likely to go the distance but has to be considered. Outside chance for a place. 25-1.

Geoffrey Dyer, portrait of writer Christopher Koch

Plodding stayer. In mudbath could do well. Talented, underrated rider. Will struggle from start. 30-1.

David Fairbairn, portrait of performer Victoria Hahn

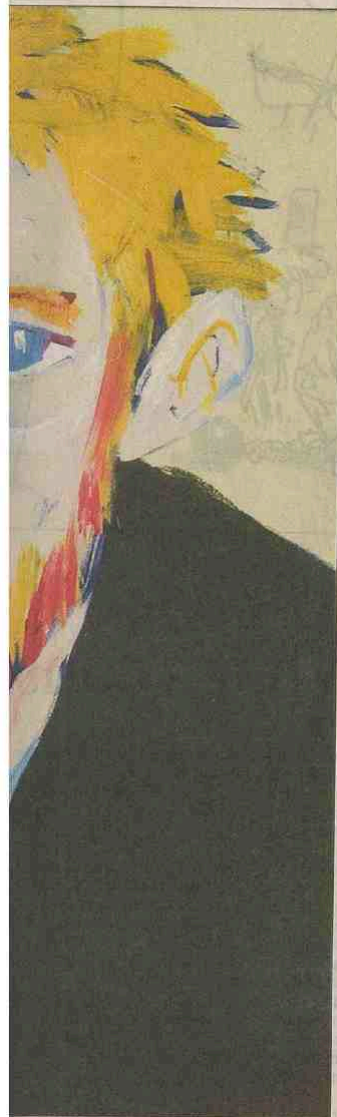
Honest horse, lacking in glitz. Got up by a nose in Dobell 1 year — better suited to the distance. Hard to have. 30-1.

Julie Fragar, portrait of herself, artist Chuck Close as a security guard

On the flashy side. Likely to start strongly and fade away. The jockeys tactic likely to work.

ARTS

The Archibald



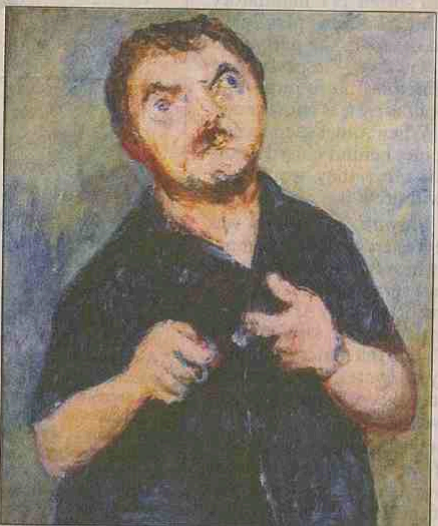
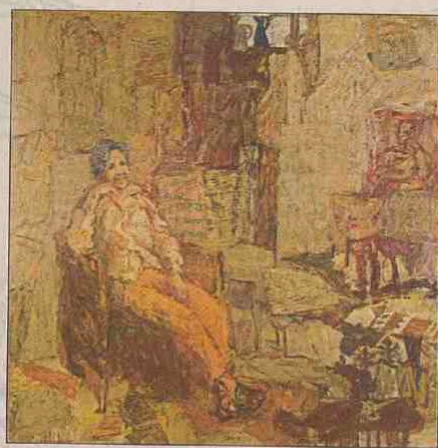
edges. Risks late scratching or en — shame! ignominy! — st-race disqualification. Back own risk. 30-1.

Nicholas Harding, portrait of actor John Bell

ways a strong contender. Does hard yards but this one not best entry. Estimable jockey could get up, but unlikely less others fall on final hurdle. rrying too much weight? 30-1.

Ernst Erlich, portrait of artist and cartoonist Bill Leak

od fun but a sentimental-looking entry. Jockey looking awkward in unaccustomed role. A bit gle-eyed and long in the nose. don't rule out on the day. 35-1.



The front runner is . . . Adam Cullen's portrait of actor David Wenham (left); other Archibald contenders include Elisabeth Cummings's portrait of sculptor May Barrie (above top), Garry Shead's portrait of art writer Sasha Grishin (above) and Ann Thomson's self-portrait (top right). And the truth is out there (top left) . . . Paul Byrnes needs to update his byline picture (see facing page). Portrait by Branca Uzur.

Michael Snape, portrait of gallery owner Stephen Mori

The joker in the pack. Jockey up to all sorts of funny business and likely to throw inexperienced riders off their stride at the start. Judges harder to beguile. Veteran horse only recently returned to racing. Who can tell, but will likely struggle in the final stretch. 35-1.

Melissa Beowulf, portrait of artist Ken Done

An earnest, straightforward type with reasonably good form. Ridden by luckless jockey in this race — runs his own race with surer hand. Others have better prospects in this. 40-1.

Tom Carment, self-portrait

Size, Tom, size! A lovable pony with simply no prospects in this thoroughbred race. Sad, because a worthy little Shetland. But this entry is sure to be outclassed. Not here, Tom, not here. Tom. Tom? Can you hear me? 50-1.

Max Cullen, portrait of actor Geoffrey Rush

Has got plenty of form in other staged and televised races. But is less assured in new role here as horse. Looks hopelessly skittish. Despite an internationally revered (and over-worked?) jockey, it will be better to catch on another day. 50-1.



Henry Mulholland, portrait of columnist and editor Paddy McGuinness

Good recent form but not his best foot forward, this one. It's the horse that needs blinkers, not the jockey — eye on the game, son! 60-1.

Anne Spudvilas, portrait of illustrator Leigh Hobbs

Likable horse and rider, better suited to the little league. Will be outclassed in this field. Not for mine. 60-1.

Lewis Miller, self portrait

Got up in 1998, but eye not in. Current form poor. Popular jockey, but horse anaemic and fretful. Needs fresh pasture. 80-1.

Colin Husband, portrait of designer Paul Bennett

Another dark horse used to different forms of racing. Not likely to trouble the favourites. 100-1.

Robin Lawrence, portrait of activist Andrea Durbach

Worthy contender, but worthiness not a good strategy on the day. This race likes sensation. 100-1.

Matthew Lynn, portrait of Dr John Yu

A curly one for the judges. This much-admired jockey (and recent Australian of the Year) is on the Art Gallery of NSW Board of Trustees. What's the protocol? Will the jockey leave the room? Too complicated to rate much of a chance. Besides, a little too airbrushed. Will struggle in the rough and tumble. 100-1.

Kim Spooner, portrait of current affairs host Kerry O'Brien

This dark horse likely to frighten the kids. Pity the scurried jockey and pass the greens. A longer-than-long shot on any kind of day. 200-1.