

State's best and brightest innovators spurred on by awards honour

Riding high in the saddle

Alex Tilbury

ONE makes groovy safety stirrups that allow horse riders to free themselves and not get dragged to their death.

This ingenious invention is now used by every mounted police officer in New York.

Another had a brainwave to create a website that allowed people to organise holiday tours in one simple location.

Another was a bunch of plaintiff lawyers and a young married couple who are on a mission to offer unbiased, no-commission, fee-for-service financial planning advice.

These are just some of the brilliant entrepreneurs who were showcased during the Queensland Telstra Business Awards last week, sponsored by News Ltd's Business Owner pages.

SmartRider

Its founder Peter Zillmer says his breakaway stirrups will not stop you from falling off the horse, but you won't get dragged and injured.

His clever design was featured on the ABC television program *New Inventors* last year, showing his unique mechanism to prevent horse-riding dragging accidents.

"The device is almost fool-

proof, able to open either way, and has a footplate that drops out, eliminating the risk of being installed incorrectly by novices or careless riders," he says.

SmartRider, with its factory in Browns Plains in Brisbane's south, has filled orders from mounted police forces around the world including Canada, New York, Czechoslovakia, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, and from the newly formed Australian Federal Mounted Police.

In fact, the federal police have the stirrups but no horses as yet.

"Our stirrups are so good, they are sold by reputation," says Mr Zillmer, who only took up riding after he got interested in the design of the stirrups.

"It is every rider's fear - falling off the horse and being dragged."

Brisbane-based SmartRider was founded in 2005, and it took Mr Zillmer just two years to go from his principal idea to production.

"That was considered very quick," he said.

"And we now make thousands a year and sell them to the US, and have patents pending for Europe - plus we've exported to Japan and Korea."

"I got a hook-up to the New



SADDLED UP: Peter Zillmer, CEO of SmartRider, with his internationally successful safe-riding stirrup. Picture: Glenn Barnes

York City mounted police and we sold them 130 sets in one hit - that was fantastic.

"Our stirrup has international certification - it's the only one in the world."

"On my next trip to the US I am going to see the LA police again and the Chicago police."

SmartRider was a finalist in the micro business category,

pipped at the post by Cairns-based tourstogo.com.

Tourstogo.com

THIS company is run by Elise Warring and her dynamic son Phil.

"You know why there are no other sites like ours? Because it is so difficult to build a website

that sells tours. Hotels are easy - you make your own way there but with tours there's pick-up and drop off spots and so much more complication," she says.

"I had actually given up about six months after starting the business but my son came to me and he has ended up being the best business partner. "So never underestimate a

young person who is so switched-on and driven.

"I started this but Phil has taken over, and he only just turned 27 the other day.

"He has grown a lot with the business.

"Everything he's learned is through trial and error and I think if you've got passion you will make it and he has that."

Ms Warring says she has started 101 businesses in her life - everything from night market stalls, to manufacturing swimwear, online hotel booking sites and even jumping out of an aeroplane taking photos.

"Now we are white-labelling this site so anyone can sell tours through us and get paid a commission. We are looking at New Zealand next for tours, and then Phil's talking about the UK."

Trifby Misso

The personal injuries legal practice has become the first Queensland law firm to win a prestigious Telstra Queensland Business Award.

Trifby Misso chief Graeme McFadyen called the win "a tremendous recognition of the achievements of the firm's hardworking staff".

"We are extremely proud to become the first Queensland law firm to win a Telstra business award and the honour has come in the same year that our esteemed founder, Trifby Misso, passed away at the age of 92," Mr McFadyen said.

Aspire Retire Financial Services

Co-founded by husband and wife duo Stephen Degiovanni and "Olivia" Maragna, the Woolongabba company won the small business category of the Telstra awards.

"This significant award win further confirms Aspire Retire's key point of difference, which has always been to provide more than just financial planning," Ms Maragna says.

"We constantly strive to educate our clients.

"Matched with our fee-for-service approach, our clients have the financial freedom to make decisions that best suit their circumstances and goals given the current economy, rather than being spoon-fed pigeon-holed strategies."

The Queensland category winners will be judged against those from other states in the lead-up to the national Telstra Business Awards in Sydney on August 20.