

Smart three-year-old Ever Loyal broke maiden ranks in fine style at Te Aroha on Wednesday after running into some well above average rivals at his first two starts.

The son of Sebring finished fourth on debut behind current Gr.1 Al Basti Equiworld New Zealand 2000 Guineas (1600m) favourite Te Akau Shark. The strapping gelding was then second at Ruakaka to another highly-credentialed Te Akau Racing galloper in Embellish.

“It was a reasonably soft win in the end,” said winning trainer Tony Pike. “Based on his form you’d expect that third-up today. He’s a work in progress and he’s only going to get better with racing. He settled nicely today.

“Once he works it all out he’s definitely progressive enough to head through to Group class as a three-year-old.”

Despite having a strong team of three-year-olds on the path south to the 2000 Guineas, Pike has not ruled out adding Ever Loyal to the travelling party.

“We’ll probably find out a lot more after the Sartan on Monday to see where the better three-year-olds are at. But a big roomy track at Riccarton and a mile is probably going to suit him.

“Whether it comes up a touch quick, we’re not quite sure but we’ll just see how he comes through the run. He’s always been well above average.”

Winning rider Jason Waddell was delighted with the performance in defeating the Stephen Autridge and Jamie Richards-trained Bak da Master by a comfortable length and a-half.

“He’s been beaten by the two favourites for the 2000 Guineas, but he turned the tables on the tangerine [of Te Akau Racing] for once,” Waddell said.

Waddell said removing the blinkers in preference to a norton bit was vital to the improved performance.

“He was a bit aggressive in the blinkers last start and the norton just gave me a lot more control today and he relaxed beautifully.”