

SHOP

EDITED BY CLARE MACLEAN

Blooming MARVELLOUS

Celebrating 50 years of fashion at Flemington;
and the best spring racing looks

Giambattista Valli
haute couture
A/W 12-13.

JASON LLOYD-EVANS

Field DAYS

As Myer Fashions on the Field celebrates 50 years of iconic outfits, celebrities and fancy hats, CLARE MACLEAN gets the inside track on an Oz institution

Fifty years ago, an 18-year-old model from North Essendon in Melbourne by the name of Margaret Wood popped on a white linen coat and a La Rene pink tulle hat and set out to Flemington racetrack to enter the first Fashions on the Field contest. "I borrowed that hat, I borrowed the money for the outfit, went to the races [and] won," she recalled later. It was 1962 and the Victorian Racing Club promotions subcommittee was looking for new ways to boost attendance at the track. "Off-course betting had just been legalised so they wanted to encourage people to continue to attend the Melbourne Cup Carnival," says Emily Power, editor of new book *Fashion & Flemington*, "and most importantly, for men to bring their partners." A £7000 prize pool including holidays, chocolates, hosiery, cigarettes and — the ultimate — a Ford Falcon Futura were up for grabs. But, as Power points out, the prizes and the event itself simply formalised a competition that had been happening unofficially since the Cup started in 1861.

"From the first running of the race, Flemington has always been the place to see and be seen," says Power. "The newspapers of the time would document what the men and women were wearing in painstaking detail right down to the trimmings, the silhouette and the type of fabric. While researching the book, I discovered that one year during the late 1800s dressmakers ran out of yellow fabric because that was deemed to be the on-trend colour for the racing season."



Jean Shrimpton at the Flemington Races in Melbourne, 1965.

"Mary Quant had invented the miniskirt, but the moment Jean Shrimpton debuted the look at Flemington it became a trend."

COURTESY OF FAIRFAX SYNDICATION; VICTORIA RACING CLUB COLLECTION; THE HERALD & WEEKLY TIMES



Derby Day Fashions on the Field winners show '60s flair, with British model Maudie James (centre).



Margaret Wood takes home a Ford Falcon as the 1962 Fashions on the Field overall winner.

THE TRENDS NOW

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The other aspect of the Cup carnival that hasn't changed is the beautiful high-profile women who flock to the event. Think international-best-dressed-list regular and 1960s icon Baroness Fiona von Thyssen, whose wardrobe of Givenchy and Yves Saint Laurent captured the imagination of the glossies at the time, and Princess Diana, who made an appearance at the Cup in 1985 wearing Bruce Oldfield and a Frederick Fox hat.

And then there were the models. One that sticks in Power's mind is Christine Borge. "She was brought out by the International Wool Secretariat of Paris to model the latest French collections at Flemington in 1965," says Power, "and one of the outfits she wore over the four-day carnival was an Yves Saint Laurent dress with cut-out sides. The newspapers of the day credited her with bringing new fashions to the track." Alas, she was to be upstaged by fellow model and rival Jean Shrimpton, who was also brought out that year by fabric company DuPont. "They provided Jean with fabric for her racewear but they didn't give enough for her dressmaker, Colin Rolfe, to work with. That was why the now very famous little white dress sat 12 centimetres above her knee. It was an absolute scandal at the time," says Power. "Mary Quant had invented the miniskirt, but the moment Jean debuted the look at Flemington it became a trend."

The judging panel for Fashions on the Field has always attracted world-class fashion heavyweights, too. "Over the years the VRC [Victorian Racing Club] have hosted Madame Carven, Carolina Herrera, Philip

Treacy and Stephen Jones" says Power. So it's no wonder most contestants find the whole experience nerve-racking. Take *BAZAAR* Australia's first editor, Karin Upton Baker, who won the event in 1984 thanks to judge Hardy Amies and a black and white Yves Saint Laurent coatdress. "I was a bit embarrassed, when I realised I had to walk up on a podium," she tells Kathleen Cuthbertson in *Fashion & Flemington*. Lawyer Alex Foxcroft, a Myer Fashions on the Field regular, who won on Crown Oaks Day in 2011, agrees, but says it's all part of the fun. "I entered because I ran into a girlfriend who was in line and I shyly stood next to her," she recalls. "I remember thinking at the time, 'Oh, this is actually great, being in the same space as all the women who are crazy about fashion and love their millinery.'" Her top

tip for winning the event is to create a cohesive outfit and find a milliner you trust. "I'll go high-end and high street for my fashion, but the one thing I'm loyal to is my milliner, Bonnie Evelyn, because she can do anything. If you find a good one, hold onto them."

As for the trends Foxcroft thinks will be big this year? "I'd say pastels or peplums for Oaks Day, brights for the Cup and for Derby Day, perhaps a contemporary take on the '20s, which is big at the moment thanks to Baz Luhrmann's remake of *The Great Gatsby*."

So, will she be entering Myer Fashions on the Field this year? "I wasn't sure, but I always have fun. I'll at least go and watch ... and let's face it, I'll probably line up." ■

Fashion & Flemington: A Carnival of Creativity, Culture, Class and Celebrity edited by Emily Power (Slattery Media Group), \$60.