



Talkin' 'bout an evolution

Journalist Danny Power has worked for three newspapers that are no longer with us, he's put up fences, he found a Melbourne Cup winner for Lee Freedman, he won (and lost) drunks' money at the Moonee Valley trots and now he's written a book about the Melbourne Cup. Richo caught up with him to discuss his book and more.

PR: There have been a few books written about the Melbourne Cup, where did the idea come from for *The Modern Melbourne Cup*?

DP: I wrote a few chapters for *The Story of the Melbourne Cup* and helped with the production of that book, which was released to coincide with the 150th running of the race. I believe it's the best historical book on racing ever done. When Americain won the 150th running and then Dunaden the following year (2011) we wrote a couple of extra chapters and had another 50 printed especially for the owners. While we were doing that, we came up with the idea of writing a book on how the cup has changed.

How long did it take to write?

The original plan was that it was going to be a series of opinion-based essays from different writers. Then one day my boss, Geoff Slattery (Slattery Media), came up to me and said, "I want you to write a book." I said, "I don't want to write a book." He said, "Bad luck — I need you to write the book." I wrote about 4000 words of it in January then put it aside to do a lot of other work. Geoff came back to me and said, "We need it finished by August 1." I had five weeks to finish it off.

It's virtually a potted history not only of the cup but of Australian racing as well. Was that always the plan?

It wasn't, but as I got into it I felt we needed to go back into history to explain how the race has changed. How the New Zealand-breds have had periods of dominance, but that in the era straight after the greatest of them all, Phar Lap, there wasn't a rush on the Kiwis. That came a little later.

And how the Australian thoroughbred evolved into a type bred for speed?

Yes, and how there have been people worried about Australia breeding for speed as far back as 1914. I found some intriguing quotes from people warning that Australia was heading down a path of "speedy squibs" rather than the traditional English classic horse.

I really enjoyed the second half of the book, with your stories of how the internationals got interested in the race.

Some needed more convincing than others. The French don't really need to travel as their local racing is quite strong. Others like Luca Cumani and Godolphin keep coming but still haven't won.

Do racing books generally sell well?

Not really. However, I think they get passed around a lot. Probably like the Winning Post really. One person buys it but everyone in the house reads it. It is the way of racing, really — everything gets shared around.

I think this format could work. I knocked most of it over in a few hours.

Yes, it's a nice quick and easy read. It is only \$20 and 200 pages so the punters can read it between bets. We have a few ideas in the pipeline if this one sells well.

Do you think that's the way publishing is going — shortish books, paperback cover and touching on current issues?

It's the way overseas so yes, I think so.

How did you first get interested in the Melbourne Cup?

My first memory is of the 1960 Melbourne Cup and Tulloch getting beaten. My dad must have backed him because I remember him throwing things across the room. From there I remember running Melbourne Cup sweeps around the Pascoe Vale area. In 1972 I started working as a journalist on the *Truth* — with Geoff Slattery, actually. It was a big racing paper in those days. We sold 400,000 copies one week. I was writing about the trots and the races back then.

With all your research on the cup, would you be handy to have at trivia nights? Could you recite all the cup winners?

Well, I'm no Ross du Bourg, who also used to work on the *Truth* and could recite all the cup winners' names backwards. I thought that was an unnecessary skill. I could probably name them all, though I'm more likely to forget last year and know 1965.

Last year was Green Moon.

So it was. 1965 was Light Fingers.

Well done. Where did you go after the *Truth*?

I worked at the Sporting Globe then gave the writing away in 1984 and worked with my dad putting up fences, but still doing some trots work on a casual basis. Geoff Slattery then got involved with the old *Herald* so I went back and worked for him. I used to go to the track in the morning, out to Flemington, Caulfield or Epsom, and then file stories over the phone from there.

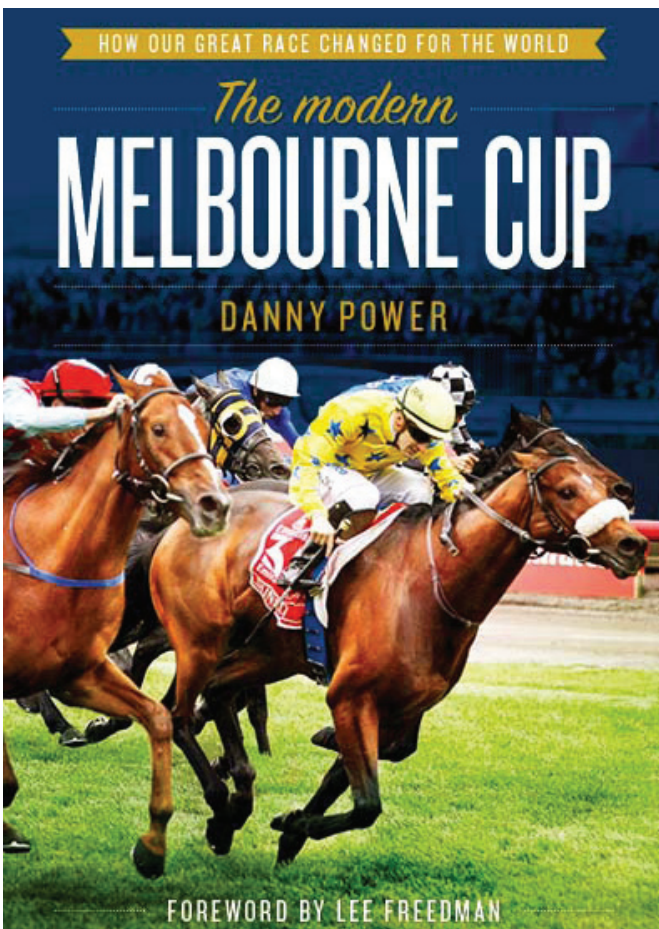
During the period I got to know all the trainers. In 1992 Lee Freedman asked me to take up a job as his racing manager, which I did for almost four years.

That was a good time to be there?

Oh yeah, I remember one day up at his stables on the hill at Leonard Crescent overlooking Flemington he had 14 horses in the back yard and they were all group winners.

As you touch on in the book, you can claim to have found one of his Melbourne Cup winners.

I was friends with Terry Henderson, now of OTI fame, and we used to get



videos of New Zealand harness and throughbred races sent over. I saw this one horse in particular and after a bit of talking I managed to convince Lee to have a look at it. He was pretty sceptical about sitting down and watch "another slow Kiwi horse" but he liked what he saw and we bought Doriemus off a video viewing.

What was it that appealed so much about Doriemus?

It was his ability to quicken. In one video he weaved his way through the field from an impossible position to win going away. When he changed stride in the final 100 metres he found another gear. In another video he ran into a dead end but would have won easily. He was due to run again, so we paid a \$900 non-refundable deposit to owner-trainer Jim Gibbs and let him run. He won and we bought him.

When did you finish up with Lee Freedman?

In 1996 I started doing some bloodstock work for his Asian clients, buying and selling horses to race there and here. When the Asian financial crisis hit in 1998 I just did some local bloodstock work, then moved to Mark Read, who was setting up Read Rating and Expertform on the internet.

I moved to Slattery Media in 1996 and have been there since.

You also used to run the punters' clubs in the old Inner Circle at the Moonee Valley trots?

Yes — \$30 for all you could eat and drink. There used to be some willing nights in there. I remember one night there were two football clubs who didn't like each other so after a few beers it was on.

Most of the time it was good fun and we had some nice returns. There were a few nights when you went back in after the last and had to explain they were getting nothing for their \$20. Those weren't as much fun.

How do you see the Melbourne Cup now?

It's now a quality handicap. The days of a topweight of 60kg and a bottomweight of 50kg are gone. The overseas horses probably get weighted a bit better to guarantee them a start. There should be a few local races that provide exemption for the cup. I feel for a horse like Kelinni, who won the Lexus to get into last year's Melbourne Cup then ran fourth but is still unlikely to get a run. He probably needs to win another Lexus just to get into the race, which is just unheard of. It's changing though. The quality of those Group 3s and listed races in England that used to guarantee a start weren't as strong this year because most of their stayers are here now.

Will we ever see another Australian-bred horse win the Melbourne Cup?

Possibly. Our breeding scene is such an eclectic mix now with so many different sires around. It's less likely but you never know.

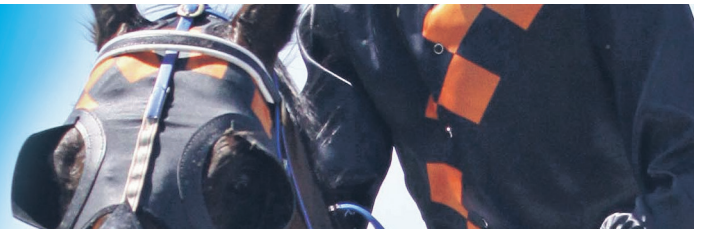
Win a copy

We have three copies of *The Modern Melbourne Cup* to give away. Readers just need to tell me which future Melbourne Cup winner Danny spotted on a New Zealand video. Send an email to prichards@winningpost.com.au or a letter to:

Winning Post Melbourne Cup competition
400 Epsom Road,
Flemington, Vic 3031

Entries must arrive by 1pm on Wednesday, October 9. All entries will go into a hat, with the first three correct ones drawn out winning a copy.

If you're not one of the lucky trio, *The Modern Melbourne Cup* is available at all good bookstores and via www.slatterymedia.com/store



Richo's system of the week

Second up and ready to improve

With Richo taking some time off last week, he wasn't around to tell us whether this system was any good. We'll try it again. As the better horses start to return for the spring we're looking for a consistent type who's likely to improve on a solid first-up run.

Step 1: Look at races where every horse has had at least five starts.

Step 2: Look only at horses that have had one run this time in and finished within three lengths of the winner.

Step 3: Eliminate any horse with a winning strike rate (W%) under 20.

Step 4: Eliminate unless the selection has won second up.

Step 5: Eliminate unless it has won at least two different track conditions.

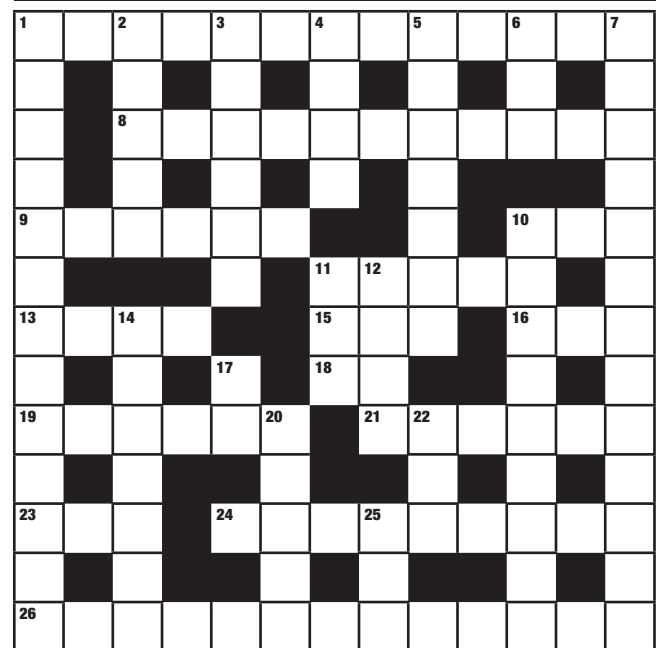
Step 6: If there is more than one qualifier, back the one with the better winning strike rate.

Step 7: If still equal, back the one in the better barrier.

Last time

No system last week. System picks and Eye Catchers will be up from 2pm Thursday at winningpost.com.au.

RACING CROSSWORD



ACROSS:

- Gai Waterhouse-trained winner of last Friday night's Stutt Stakes (6,7)
- Kris Lees-trained winner of last Saturday's Golden Pendant (7,4)
- Malcolm Bailey-trained Sunshine Coast sprint winner by Antonius Pius (2,4)
- Neil Walsh-trained Flemington 1800m winner by Rock of Gibraltar: Zuma --- (3)
- First name of Flemington trainer Richards (5)
- NZ trainer who got a Caulfield Cup placing with Na Botto and has a Melbourne Cup entry this year in Sierra Nevada (surname) (4)
- Peter Snowden-trained three-year-old by Street Cry from Downhill Racer, with the same name as a Tirol gelding who won the 2002 Hareeba Stakes and 2003 Gold Topaz (6)
- Craig Martin-trained winner of the Black Nugget at Mudgee last month: Brave --- (3)
- John O'Shea-trained winner of the first at Warwick Farm last Sunday (5,4)
- Leon Macdonald and Andrew Gluyas-trained 2012 Makybe Diva Stakes winner (8,5)

DOWN:

- Gerald Ryan-trained second in this year's Queensland Guineas (6,2,5)
- Trained Elvstroem (surname) (5)
- Sire of Nearctic, Nasrullah and Royal Charger (6)
- Brett Bellamy-trained three-time NSW winner by Hidden Dragon: --- Find Him (4)
- Leon Corstens-trained Zabeel mare second to 11 Down in the 1999 Caulfield Cup (7)
- 1980 Doncaster Handicap winner (3)
- Gai Waterhouse-trained 2012 Metropolitan winner (9,4)
- Gary Portelli-trained winner of last week's Sir Rupert Clarke Stakes (5,4)
- Colin Alderson-trained 1999 Caulfield Cup winner: --- Heights (3)
- Joe Pride-trained 2012 Concorde Stakes winner: Tiger ---- (4)
- Son of Cenchire who won the 1995 Queensland Guineas, Queensland Derby and George Main (7)
- Wendy Kelly-trained Caulfield winner from Jest Dreamin': Don't Wake -- (2)
- Sire of True Jewels and Diatribe: Brief ---- (5)
- To bet against (3)
- First name of Morphettville trainer Sweeney (3)

SOLUTION IS ON PAGE 38

Eye Catchers



SHOREHAM (Melbourne): Should have finished closer.
CHARLIE BOY (Melbourne): Held up behind Fast 'n' Rocking. Hit the line strongly once clear.
MULAQEN (Sydney): No room in the straight.
HEART TESTA (Sydney): Strong second-up win. Usually holds form.
KIRRAMOSIA (Sydney): Best of the backmarkers when a close fourth.
HOOKEED (Sydney): Crowded from 400m to 200m. Solid once out.

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