



MELBOURNE CUP winners from New Zealand over the past decade: From left: Hiraji (1947), Foxzami (1949), Dalray (1952), Rising Fast (1954), Toporoo (1955)

# Stopwork Meeting

IN a sad moment-of-truth an Australian writer once admitted that Australia's two greatest racehorses were both New Zealanders. He created a minor sensation. For years his countrymen had been quietly double-talking about Carbine and Phar Lap as those great "Australasian" champions. This side of the Tasman, of course, the truth has been modestly acknowledged all along.

The quaint conflict of nationalisms revives again this year about the same time firecrackers begin to celebrate more explosive causes of strife. On November the Fifth, around 5.0 p.m. (N.Z. time), both nations will stop work utterly, the better to hear which thoroughbred wins the Melbourne Cup. Punters will have studied the complexities of weather and form, but pure patriots (like ourselves) will found their hopes on statistics. After all, five of the last ten winners—Hiraji, Foxzami, Dalray, Rising Fast and Toporoo—hailed from New Zealand. Australia's greatest classic might easily go once more to little brother.

For the nation which gave the world the totalisator, such a loss would mean deep humiliation. But on matters of true importance, Australia and New Zealand remain as one. They share the same unostentatious idolatry; sometimes the same relics. Phar Lap's heart, for instance, is at the Institute of Anatomy, Canberra; his stuffed hide is in Melbourne's museum; while his skeleton stands in the Dominion Museum, Wellington. The mighty Carbine's body perchance may rest in Australia, but his head and tail are at the Auckland Museum, and he is known also to have one foot on British soil. A hoof does duty as an inkstand at the home of the Duke of Portland.

All homage to Carbine, though. Not only did he beat the biggest field (39) in the Cup's 97-year history, but also one of the best. Not only did he set a record time that stood for many years; he did so while carrying the highest weight (10.5) ever borne by a Cup win-

ner. The son of Musket and near-kin of Martini-Henry, Carbine came, of course, from a strong military family. Even Phar Lap, a hand taller and with a 27 ft. stride, carried seven pounds less when he led a field of fifteen to the tapes in 1930. In the following year, it is true, he carried an all-time record of 10.10, but he set no records, and he came in eighth.

Not all the Cup furore has surrounded these two greats. Another New Zealander, named Wotan, slipped home at a fast clip in 1936. A "major upset" the newspapers called this win. Translated, it means the bookies had bet more than a hundred to one Wotan wouldn't. In 1881 a dog crossed the course in front of the field and brought down two horses, Wheat Ear and Su Warrow. Wheat Ear's jockey dying later from his injuries. In 1939 Ortel's Star was first past the post, but its backers were unlucky on account of the jockey having been left at the seven furlongs. But the Cup has never been marred by the kind of thing which disqualified the first and third horses in the Doncaster Handicap of 1869. On that occasion the jockeys were found guilty of engaging in hand and crop combat during the running.

Flemington course, named for Bob Flemington, a butcher and publican of the locality, saw its first impromptu race meeting in 1837, the Melbourne Race Club being formed over pewters of ale at John Fawcner's Inn the following year. The club's meetings filled an aching gap in the hamlet's social life. With a population of 186 males and 38 females, Melbourne had trouble even in running a successful barn-dance.

The first Melbourne Cup was run on November 7, 1861, and the conditions were: sweepstakes of 20 sovereigns, 10 sovereigns forfeit or five sovereigns if declared, with 200 sovereigns added by the Victoria Turf Club, the race to be



NEW ZEALAND'S successes on the Australian turf of course go back far beyond the past decade, as this vintage cartoon (by Lionel Lindsay) indicates

of two miles. E. De Mestre's bay horse Archer won from a field of 17 in the good time for those days (before jockeys crouched well forward) of 3 min. 52 sec. Today the ante is up to £15,000, with £10,500 and a £500 trophy to the winner—and the time is down to 3.19½. Comic Court set this Cup, track and "Australasian" two-mile record in 1950.

It has been said that Sydney simply moves to Melbourne for Cup day, a statement not fully supported by the 100,000-plus attendance figure at Flemington. But the estimate of £5,000,000 exchanged in bets is probably accurate. Ten shillings for every living human in Australia may even be on the conservative side.

Of the ninety-six winners up to last year, a significant number have borne martial names. Archer began the trend by winning the race twice running back in 1861-62, but the list also includes

The Barb, Glencoe, Warrior, Zulu, The Assyrian, Martini-Henry, Arsenal, Carbine, The Victory, Lord Cardigan, Night Watch, Artilleryman, Nightmarch, Wotan and Rimfire. It's only fair to add that the honours have more frequently gone to such homely civilians at Statesman and Windbag, Graftier, Banker and The Quack. By and large the list bears out the saying that a good horse has a good name, and no commentator has yet had to pronounce a beast like Poolparracoortharramirra (a Queensland horse) as the winner of the Cup.

(Melbourne Cup Commentary: ZBs, ZAs, 1YZ, 2YZ, 1XH, 2ZC, Tuesday, November 5, about 5.0 p.m. The exact starting time is not known till the day of the race. Delayed Commentary: YAs, YZs, 6.49 p.m. Preview: ZBs, ZAs, 1XH, 2ZC, Monday, November 4, at 9.31 p.m.)

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