

As the end of the first decade of the current century comes to a close, it marks the passing of almost 150 years of harness racing in Australia.

As noted in my book *Stallions – Australian and New Zealand Foundation Standardbred Sires 1860-1960* (www.stallionbook.com.au) - the first stallions imported for their trotting capabilities began to appear in this country soon after 1860.

These horses came from the United States in the main and represented the beginnings of the sport in this country.

Harness racing had roots in North America that went back earlier than this time, and in fact other breeds of trotters were bred in the UK and in other parts of the world in the centuries before that.

A smooth and fast going trotter being the best way to get around in a one or two-seater sulky in the period before the motor car was invented.

But before we can examine the history of the sport in Australia, or even prior to that in other parts of the world, we need to go back even further and examine the history of the horse itself.

In what is part one of a four part series on the history of the sport, lets look at equine history and see how horse has played its role over the centuries.

There have been more than 4,000 species of mammals. The horse is one of less than a dozen that have been successfully domesticated. Various civilisations have tried to domesticate hyenas, antelope, gazelles, raccoons, bears and moose, with our own aborigines trying to domesticate kangaroos.

Those species that were successfully domesticated did not originally exist in that state of course. This took a combination of a certain type of animal that was prepared to submit to domestication, and then over long periods of time, the modification of the animal to suit the needs of the human population. Whilst any individual wild horse would have played 'hard to get' when initially caught, those that proved the most malleable were bred from, further accentuating the submissive relationship with man.

The development and survival of the horse over a long period of time is an evolutionary fluke. It is rare for species this large, which produce only one progeny per year, to survive.

History is littered with many large mammals that have not survived to the modern day. For an animal without physical protection (i.e. horns, antlers or some other body armour), the horse can probably thank its digestive system for its survival. Horses generally eat the poorest quality forage and have a

digestive system that allows them to eat and run.

With running being a horse's main means for defence, one could be excused for thinking that the horse has evolved to this size as its optimum running speed.

Whilst larger animals do generally run faster than smaller animals, the difference is minor. Earlier breeds of horse, one tenth of the size of the modern horse, would have only had a top speed 30% lower – hardly a reason for it to evolve ten times in size.

According to scientists, the horse has evolved to this size as a result of their low quality diets. Smaller animals actually need more energy per kilo to survive than larger animals do. Given a horse's diet is generally the lowest quality available (and therefore has low energy output), the generally evolved size of the modern horse is the optimum when one combines forage quality, energy needs and ability to eat a given amount during any given day.

But being bigger means more energy is required to survive. To counter that, the horse developed a locking mechanism in its legs that allow it to stand and use very little energy. Whilst this fact will surprise few people, what is less known is that a horse that is standing uses 10% less energy than when it is lying down!

Origins of Horse Racing

Ancient Beginnings

Origins of Horse racing
... First of a four part series

by Nick Hooper



But for all of this evolution, environmental changes, which began 10,000 years ago, almost wiped out the horse. The end of the Ice Age led to the extinction of the horse from North America, and changing conditions in Europe forced horses further eastward.

This got to the extent that the only horses that survived were on the grassland steppes of Ukraine and Central Asia. This is where the first horses were domesticated about 6000 years ago. Fossil records from this time began to see the horse return westward and by 4000 years ago, the horse was back again in the British Isles.

The horse's remarkable recovery is only matched by other domesticated animals such as cows, sheep and pigs that 'attached themselves' to man at about the same time. The joint need to survive meant humans and these species survived together.

It is commonly held that the ridden horse pre-dates the driven horse. It does, but only by about 500 years, as records suggest that horses were first ridden about 6,000 years ago. The wheel was invented about 5,500 years ago - but with it came the development of chariots and other forms of transportation.

It is also commonly held that horses ridden for racing purposes pre-date horses driven for racing. This is not true. It is fact that the first trotting horses, bred for the purpose of racing, date back to 1,350BC, in a country known as Cappadocia, generally in the area that we currently know as Turkey. A series of tablets, unearthed by archaeologists in the 1930s, outlined the training and breeding regime of the King's trainer.

These tablets set out training methods to racehorses at the trot. This information pre-dates any known horse racing, ridden at the gallop.

The use of the chariot developed as the key means of warfare about 2,000BC. Whilst Hollywood might over dramatise things somewhat, the speed of one or two horses pulling a chariot provided opportunities that transformed war in these times. The chariots had very little in the way of control via the reins in these times.

The reins acted only as a brake and had little impact on steering. It was the sixth century BC Greeks that developed a level of steering control that was unknown to that time. Their love of chariot racing was well known and is the forerunner, in some ways to the modern sport of harness racing. The Olympic Games famously involved chariot racing as far back as 600BC, some two hundred years prior to ridden horse races being included on the programs.

The difference, of course, between the trotters of Cappadocia and the horses that raced at the gallop, pulling a

chariot, is quite obvious. Is harness racing more about the pulling of a wheeled vehicle, or is it more about the gait of the animal concerned?

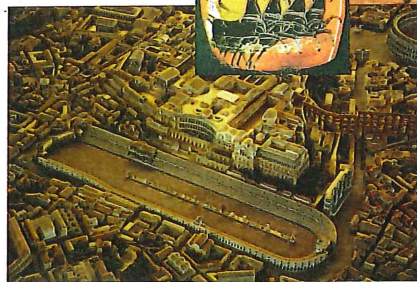
Clearly, in the ancient world, if pure speed was what was required, then the gallop would have been favoured, no matter how uncomfortable it may have been.

In those times, even though the Romans might have eventually improved the quality of the roads, a smooth ride was rarely possible on uneven ground. The smooth nature of the trot, when compared to the gallop, would be lost on uneven ground.

The use of the chariot became particularly widespread in all of these ancient civilisations. However, the cost of maintaining horses was as high then as it is now! Consequently it was only the wealthiest people, along with those of royalty and the like, that were in a position to own horses, and provide the upkeep that was required. The nobility of the horse was set in stone. When major displays of pomp and ceremony, or power, were required, the horse and its chariot were never far away.

But the trotter disappears from the ancient landscape for nearly 2,000 years until the advent of the Norfolk trotter in the UK and then the standardbred in North America. Certainly horses pulled wheeled vehicles through these times, that is not in debate. But there is no evidence of horses developed to trot at high speeds until the last few hundred years.

The Norfolk trotter was the first recognised breed developed specifically for the trotting gait in more modern times, but it was not a racing animal.



Bred to transport the upper classes of the United Kingdom in speed and comfort on ever improving roads, this animal was much smaller and finer than the standardbred. Whilst the Norfolk Trotter played a role in the development of the breed (for example, Bellfounder, a Norfolk Trotter, was the sire of the dam of the great breed founder, Hambletonian 10), they lost out to the bigger and stronger standardbreds.

I will provide more on that in the next edition of the *Gazette*.

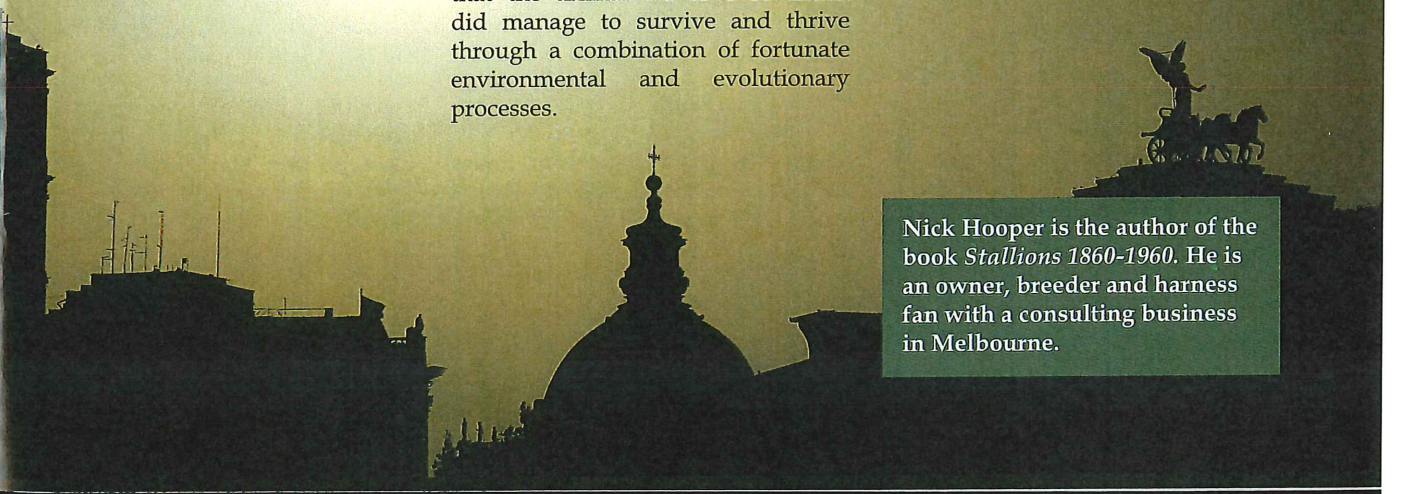
For now, we can take satisfaction that the animal we love so much did manage to survive and thrive through a combination of fortunate environmental and evolutionary processes.

Over periods of thousands of years, the horse developed from the tiny Eohippus, who was the size of a fox through to the equine athlete we know and love. With a combination of Darwinian evolution and a little intervention from a small group of Eurasians about 6,000 years ago, the horse has managed to survive.

It was now time for Hambletonian 10 and a little more human intervention to shape our beloved standardbred.

(Sources: *The Nature of Horses*, Stephen Budiansky (1999); *The American Trotter*, John Hervey, 1947)

Nick Hooper is the author of the book *Stallions 1860-1960*. He is an owner, breeder and harness fan with a consulting business in Melbourne.



In the last edition of the *Gazette*, we examined the history of the horse and the ancient history of harness racing. Let's move forward now to more modern times.

What is the history of the sport leading to the modern sport we love? Simply put, the sport evolved in the United States just over 200 years ago.

But what is the detailed history of the standardbred? In reality, it began the day a thoroughbred stallion named Messenger stepped off the boat from England in Philadelphia in 1788. The best place to get a detailed assessment is the wonderful work by John Hervey, *The American Trotter* (1947) which was produced in the last year of his life, dying aged 78.

Given his birth in 1869, he saw the birth, adolescence and maturity of this great sport, with the latter perhaps marked by the day that Titan Hanover became the first two-year-old trotter to run a two minute mile in 1944.

Where did the trotter come from?

Whilst the story of the standardbred starts with Messenger, whose great grandson Hambletonian was the subsequent fountainhead of this sport, one must travel back a few generations before that in the analysis of where the ability to trot quickly came from.

In simple terms, the desire to find a horse that could trot quickly in the 1700 and 1800s was simply the same desire we have today to own a car that can go faster and faster.

For those that could afford to, the trotting horse was the fastest, smooth form of transportation. Wealthy gentlemen wanted to ride in style and comfort and as such, in England and later the United States, good money was paid for fast reliable trotters.

Where there is money, there are people who will work to get their share, and in this instance, that meant breeding horses that could trot and trot quickly, by pre-Messenger standards anyway. In any event, the desire to own horses that could trot quickly was around well before Messenger took his first breath.

Historically, the trotter dominated the early racing in the U.S. and Hambletonian and Messenger were the key trotting influences, but the pacing influence was only a generation or two away as Hambletonian's sons either favoured the pace or their progeny did.

Messenger

If we accept that horses that could trot were bred for many years before Messenger was born, it is obvious that somewhere in his pedigree that propensity to trot and trot quickly must exist. Messenger was a thoroughbred, who had the propensity to sire horses

with a strong trotting gait. John Hervey states that: The most explanatory feature of Messenger's heredity comes from a line of progenitors in which the trotting propensity had been present for four generations preceding. As the tabulation shows, this line in tail male reads: Mambrino-Engineer-Sampson-Blaze-Flying Childers-Darley Arabian. (p35)

He continues at page 36: (Blaze's) maternal pedigree remains in dispute, there being two different versions. He may or may not have had a maternal inheritance of trotting blood. At any rate, aside from siring Sampson, ... , he also sired Shales, the great foundation sire, according to the *English Hackney Stud Book*, of the breed of Norfolk Trotters that took its rise in that country of England about 1750, and from which all the best trotters and hackneys seen in England subsequently for two centuries descend.

Mambrino (sire of Messenger) was noted by Hervey to be a horse who could trot – Lord Grosvenor, owner of Mambrino, once offered to wager 1000 pounds that the stallion could trot 14 miles in an hour. There were no takers. (p36). Hervey therefore concludes that: ... Messenger's capacity to beget trotters and found a breed of them that became unequalled was inherited from his sire – which is emphasised by the fact that individually he bore a strong resemblance to him...

Origins of Horse Racing

Ancient Beginnings

by Nick Hooper

Origins of Horse racing
... Second part of a four part series



Hervey states that: Messenger stood 15 ¾ hands high...his head was large with a Roman nose... (Remarkable size and facial characteristics that continue to this day) ...in repose Messenger was not a strikingly attractive stallion. He lacked refinement and was stoutly rather than elegantly made. But in action he was an entirely different horse...No attempt was made to cultivate any trotting propensity he possessed, all that is known of it is that he would often drop into a trot when being shown and stride off with a most impressive, high reaching stroke and fine knee action. (p37)

Messenger's Influence

Messenger's son Mambrino (just to make things confusing with Messenger's sire of the same name) is the grandsire of Hambletonian 10, via his son Abdallah 1. It is also worth noting that Mambrino left another grandson, Mambrino Chief, who along with Hambletonian 10, Hervey claims did more to produce the modern standard breed than all others combined. (p39) Hervey describes Mambrino's trotting action as being magnificent and quotes David W. Jones as saying Mambrino was the best natural trotter I ever threw a leg over. (p41)

Abdallah 1, the son of Mambrino, grandson of Messenger, is the sire of Hambletonian 10. His gait is described as being long, low and sweeping. Some would say that he lacked knee action, and that his hind legs were too straight to become a sire of great trotters (p51)...but what he was able to show was considered great speed at the trot.(p52)

Mambrino Chief (son of Mambrino Paymaster, he by Mambrino, son of

Messenger) formed the other great paternal family in competition with Hambletonian 10, eventually going down to the great father in the race for sire line dominance. The gaits of Mambrino Chief and Mambrino Patchen, the key son of Mambrino Chief were described as lacking knee action, which was thought to be the chief reason why (their progeny) paused in the 2:20s and failed to drop down into the teens. (p205) As I have discussed in other articles, I believe the strength of this family was on the maternal side of the pedigrees of the day, adding x-factor strength to the dominant gait of the Hambletonian breed.

Hambletonian

Hambletonian was described by Hervey as a very long horse, standing over a tremendous amount of ground; whilst his stride at speed was of the space devouring Messenger sweep, grand and powerful...there was nothing 'flashy or dashy' about him (p62). Hervey also states that Hambletonian may have had a long, sweeping stride, but he had complete control of it, with a fine roll of the knee forward and immense propulsive power behind, where he went very wide...the impression he gave both the man behind him and the onlooker, when at speed, was above all that of power. (p70)

Hambletonian was recorded as being two inches higher at the rump than the withers, a trait that he transferred to many of his most famous sons, including George Wilkes and Electioneer, and was in turn disseminated by them so widely that it originated the once familiar catch phrase of 'the trotting pitch' and caused him to be stigmatised as

of 'freak conformation', (but) was in reality in no sense freakish. It had been noted and recorded among thoroughbreds as far back as Eclipse, the greatest of all the founding fathers of that breed...(and) it was accepted as a point associated with extreme speed. In the time of Hambletonian, however, it excited much comment because the pacers of that day, all pacing bred, with few exceptions were much higher over the withers than the (rump) – 'downhill all the way'... making a contrast between horses of the two gaits a striking one. (p80)

In this paragraph I think we have the essence of why the Hambletonian sire line took over and dominated pacing even though it was essentially a trotting line. When pacing blood was bred gradually into the trotting fabric the (apparently) more superior set up of being higher in the rump than the withers dominated over the traditional pacer of the day and eventually killed out these male lines.

I think we can therefore 'conclude' that this change in conformation created by Eclipse and then Messenger is one of the key reasons for the explosion of speed in the standardbred. This, in my opinion, is a significant fact. Without it, the breed may never have taken off. With it, it formed the basis for the standardbred breed and provided its strength and domination over other horses that had some propensity to trot or pace.

Racing Development

With this combination of genetic influence, combined with the need and desire to produce horses that could trot quickly, the whole landscape was changed forever in North America. Similar to the way



that car aficionados are often true to one brand of car another, horse owners of the time showed similar reverence to Hambletonian and his sons. As the generations passed, that reverence would pass to individual sons over others, with owning a son or daughter of some particular stallion who descended from Hambletonian being a manner of social standing and privilege.

This influenced the development of the sport on the racetrack, as the general public, who bought horses for roadway purposes, made their choices often based on the ability of the best horses on the track. If sons of George Wilkes were producing the winners of the major races, over say, the sons of Electioneer, then the fashion of the day was to own and potentially race a horse from the George Wilkes

clan. This level of competition, whilst being far from perfect, fuelled the improvement in the breed every generation.

Race times came down as horses got faster and faster, as generation after generation of high quality trotting blood bred on top of itself. Horses that could pace infiltrated the ranks, and whilst despised at first, soon took their place at the top of the sport. But at all times through these early periods, the trotter reigned supreme.

The sport had gained a very strong foothold through the mid 1800s. In a young country such as America at the time, the sport of trotting was part of the American psyche. It was a sport they had invented, and given their dislike of the British, anything that was American was to be lauded and

supported. Harness Racing was one of these sports, with many champions who were household names.

Another young country was also finding its way, a long way away, in the southern hemisphere. Australia also developed a love with the sport, beginning in the 1850s. In the next edition of the *Gazette* we examine the early history of the sport in Australia.

Source: *The American Trotter*, John Hervey, 1947

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In the last edition of the *Gazette*, we examined the history and development of the standardbred in North America. As the sport was developing in the United States, a young country in the southern hemisphere also started to develop an affinity with the sport. In the 1850s and 1860s, Australia was introduced to the sport of trotting and it soon became an intrinsic part of life in the latter part of the 1800s.

The development of the standardbred has largely been a North American phenomenon, with some influence being exerted in Europe.

Australia and New Zealand have largely been comparative minnows when it has come to the development of the breed, both in terms of the origins, development and modern outcomes of decades of breeding. The need for quality horse stock in the burgeoning colonies of Australia and New Zealand meant that horses were sourced from a wide variety of sources, but predominantly the USA.

Horses were the pre-dominant form of transport in this pre-motor vehicle era, and their importation for the purposes of road transport of varying types led to the need for horses that could transport people in comfort at the highest speeds possible. This need was the driving force in the development of the trotter in North America.

It was with Hambletonian 10 that the breed had its dominant figure that would provide the male line for (ultimately) every standardbred to race in this part of the world. As a foal of 1849, Hambletonian 10 produced many sons who spread throughout the USA developing his family, at this time in competition with others, but that opposition was soon to dissolve.

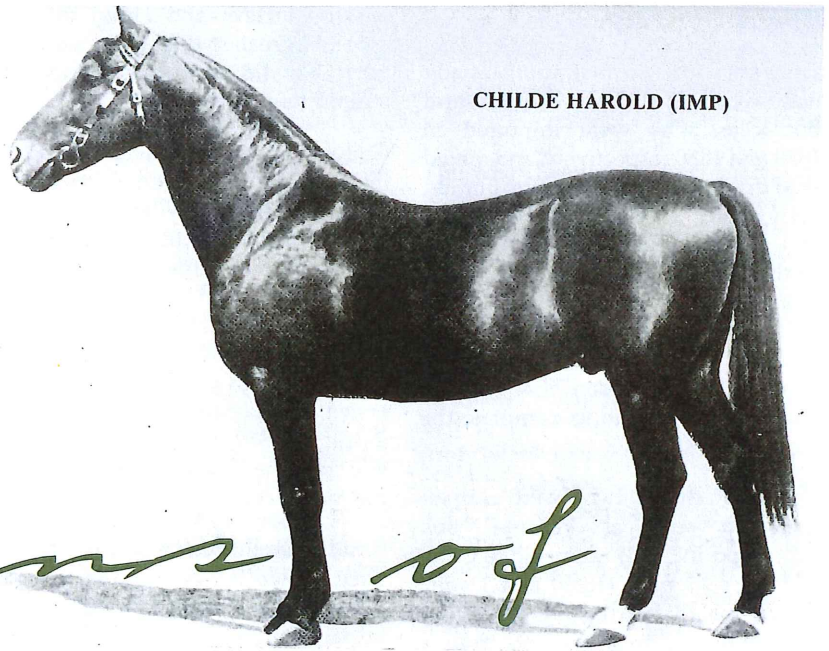
As the sport of harness racing began to develop and thrive in the USA, horses weren't just bred for their capabilities on the road, but also on the racetrack. Where commercial opportunity is available, things will develop, and as handsome purses were offered for the fastest trotters on the track, so did people breed these horses in ever growing numbers to satisfy the demand.

Australian visitors to the USA around the mid to late 1800's became aware

of the sport, and with the obvious similarities in the circumstances in the US and Australia at the time, it is no wonder that races for trotters developed in our major centres and then into the country areas. As the sport developed, so did the need for stallions and mares to breed the stock that would become the racehorses of the future.

In my book, *Stallions: Australian and NZ and Foundation Sires 1860-1960* (www.stallionbook.com.au), I have examined in detail the sires that were either imported, or bred here, that have permeated the pedigrees of the Australian branch of the breed.

The formation of the standardbred in this country is effectively based in the importation of stallions and mares from the United States in the period from the 1850s through to the



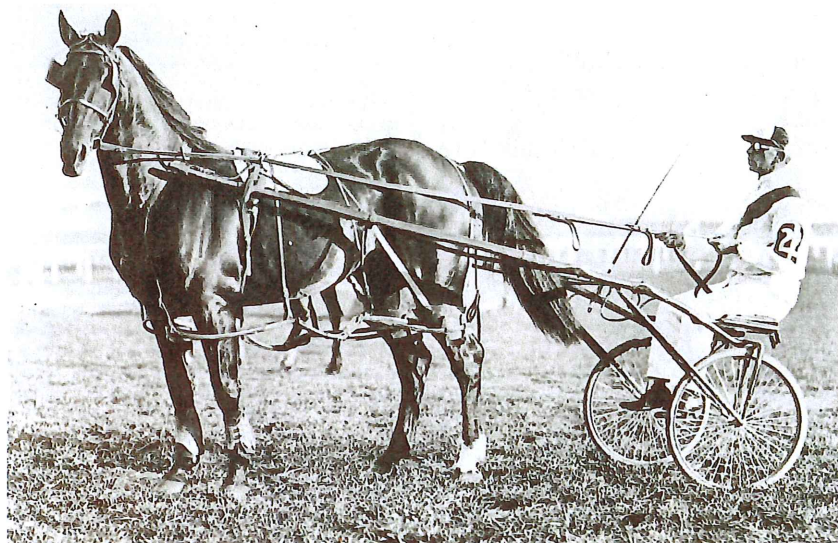
CHILDE HAROLD (IMP)

Origins of Horse Racing

The development of trotting in Australia

by Nick Hooper

A History of Harness Racing...
Part three



above: The legendary pacer and sire *Globe Derby*.

commencement of World War 1. The horses that existed in Australia to this time had little developed trotting ability and it was the importation of sires initially and then mares of top quality that led to the development of the Australian branch of the breed.

The very earliest importations of any note were Von Moltke Junior and Boccaccio, who were imported in 1879 and 1880 respectively, and mixed stud duties with racing opportunities. They both sired limited numbers of winners (16 and 14), mainly due to the fact that there were few races around in those times, but also because subsequent sires of better breeding (both these sires had obscure breeding at best) soon after entered Australia and began to dominate the landscape.

Prior to those two were horses imported such as Vermont Boy (imported in 1863), Cambridge Chief & Flying Morgan (1865) and Daniel Boon (foaled in the late 1850s, by Alexander's Edwin Forrest, from a mare by Sir Henry from a mare by Messenger, he was imported in 1869 and sired 10 winners). Others imported around that time include Startle (1870, imported 1882, 9 winners), Len Rose (1877, imported 1882, 6 winners) and Premier (1875, imported 1878, 1 winner), amongst others.

From 1879, however, the importation of Von Moltke Junior, Ajax and Boccaccio led the way with an ever increasing number of sires of ever increasing quality, with names such as

Childe Harold, Honesty and Vanclave (1882), and five years later, Huon, entering the country.

It is with the names of Childe Harold (after whom Harold Park is named after), Vanclave and Huon that we owe the greatest debt to in terms of what they did to develop the sport at a rapid rate.

Childe Harold was a champion of his time, having been exported to Scotland as a two year old in 1873. He did not race until 1878, but raced in top quality events all over Europe, winning most of these events. In 1882, he was purchased for the princely sum of around three thousand pounds, an extremely high price for the time. He lasted seven years in Australia before dying in 1889, but was a successful sire from the first time his progeny hit the racetrack.

Childe Harold was a son of Harold. Greg Brown (One Hundred Years of Trotting, 1981) suggests that it can be said with all justification that the very genesis of the Australian trotting breed began with the offspring of Harold as Childe Harold, Vanclave and Tuxedo were sons of his and truly our foundation sires. There were other important connections with Harold through his daughters. In fact one could be forgiven for believing that Harold Park Raceway was named after Harold instead of Childe Harold. Harold is a product of inbreeding in that both his sire and dam were by Abdallah 1 out of a Bellfounder mare. Brown (1981) notes that he was yet

another early sire whose inbreeding did not affect his stud performance.

Brown also notes that with the exception of Tuxedo, these early importations of note were exclusively trotters. Childe Harold was a beautifully gaited trotter, a trait he passed on to the vast majority of his off spring. Unlike most of the pioneer stallions, Childe Harold never raced in Australia but nonetheless, he had a fine racing record in the best of company elsewhere in the world.

In regards to Huon, he wasn't the most successful of the sires in terms of number of winners, but it was what he was able to produce in terms of sons who begat sons who begat sons, who could sire winners of quality that is of importance. It may sound incredulous in today's market that locally bred sires had the distinct ability to create sire lines that were dominant in their day. With Huon, his lived on for decades and decades.

Vanclave, however, was the complete antithesis. He sired 101 winners (70 in Australia), being the first sire to reach that mark in Australia. But for a long while it looked like Vanclave would not reach ten winners, let alone 100, as Andrew Town, his original owner had come to dislike this son of Harold... when other breeders discovered how Town had come to dislike this son of Harold, they too steered well clear of patronising the four-year-old. (Agnew, Silks and Sulkies 1986).

In years to come, the horse was to transfer to the ownership of JA Buckland, who, whilst waiting for Vanclave's first foals under his care, put Vanclave back into work. In 1889 when taken to the Dubbo show, Vanclave trotted a mile in 2:28 to establish a new Australian record. From there he became a success as a sire.

But unfortunately most of Vanclave's sons were gelded according to Agnew (1986) and because of the remarkable influence this progenitor was to have through his daughters as wonderful producers, it is a real tragedy that few sons were spared the knife, thus preventing Vanclave establish a sire line comparable to the maternal families founded by so many of his daughters.

Many other sires were imported in the period prior to World War One, but it was the birth of an unlikely looking prospect in 1910 in New South Wales that was to change the face of the breed in this country in such a way that his sire line still exists to the extent that his great-great-grandson, Tealsby Karita won a recent WA Pacing Cup.

The horse I speak of is Globe Derby. A wonderful racehorse, often raced by people to whom winning wasn't everything (except when the money was on), he proved to be a fantastic sire even before he finished racing, and in fact on 4 July, 1921, not only did Globe Derby win, but so did two of his sons on the same program. The die was cast.

Space prevents me from expanding upon all of Globe Derby's achievements (and those of his progeny), but my book *Stallions* and books such as *Globe Trotters* and *Globe Derby's Greatness*, provide detailed accounts of this historic sire.

The dominance of the Globe Derby sire line through the middle part of the last century was really only countered by one other stallion, that being Raider. The imported, dual gaited, champion racehorse, was also stood by the great Edgar Tatlow, who had been looking for a replacement for Globe Derby after his death.

The 370 winners that Raider achieved provided the major outcross for those seeking for something other than the Globe Derby sire line, and Tatlow's eye for pedigree and confirmation proved adept, as the two lines mixed very well.

The Globe Derby dominance continued until the pacing speed explosion occurred in the USA in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

The arrival of Adios and Meadow Skipper, both Hal Dale line stallions from the line of Hambletonian 10 son, Electioneer, changed the landscape. Until this time, the pacer in America had been grossly inferior to the trotter. Whilst making ground over time, the despised pacer, with its 'Indiana Pants', was very much the poor cousin in the home of the trotter.

Whilst this was not the case in Australia, where the pacer was and is still dominant, it took the arrival of Adios and Meadow Skipper to change things around in the United States. (More on the pacing speed explosion in the final instalment in the next *Gazette*.)

The racing side of things started off in an informal manner with trotting races often being added to galloping race cards as a way to break up the afternoon's entertainment. In January, 1860, what was probably the first trotting meeting was held under the banner of 'American Trotting Races' at Flemington. Terribly hot weather greeted the crowd that day, but not to be discouraged, a further meeting was held the following January, and then a third and final meeting in January, 1862.

It took some time before formal trotting tracks were established, with the Elsternwick Park track opening in Melbourne in 1882. Shortly afterwards Sydney had its first track with the Sydney Driving Park at Moore Park.

MELBOURNE TROTTING CLUB

Richmond Racecourse,
Monday, 18th June, 1917



Official Programme

PRICE - - ONE SHILLING

J. WREN, Manager.

The first meeting in 1885 made the front page of *The Illustrated Sydney News*. Whilst enduring a tumultuous early period, the sport in Sydney soon had the NSW Trotting Club (1902), even though it was not recognised as the controlling body until 1911.

The sport began to slowly flourish in Sydney at Harold Park. In Victoria, proprietary racing under the control of the infamous John Wren was dominant. Tracks such as those at Richmond were very popular in the early parts of last century. The sport was popping up all over the country, with tracks such as Gloucester Park in Perth and Wayville in Adelaide gaining popularity.

The sport was well and truly on its way. In the next edition of the *Gazette*, we will examine the development of the sport over the last fifty years through to the modern day.

Nick Hooper is the author of the book *Stallions 1860-1960*. He is an owner, breeder and harness fan with a consulting business in Melbourne.

The last three editions of the *Gazette* have taken us through the ancient history of the horse, the development of the standardbred breed and the advent of trotting in Australia.

The picture is completed with the move into modern times in this the last of four instalments.

Up until World War Two, the sport had largely relied upon a few key importations and a large number of sons and grandsons of locally bred stallions, most notably from the Globe Derby line. The sport had struggled in many ways through the 1930s with the effect of the depression having a

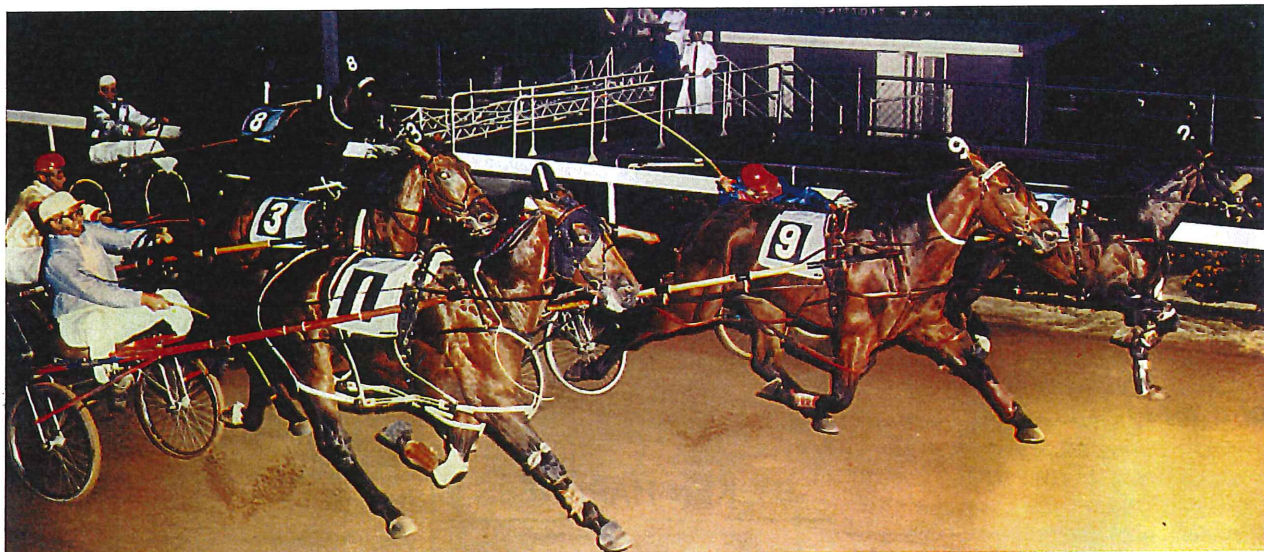
detrimental impact on the sport. Just as it was getting going again with the advent of night racing in a number of capital cities, World War Two broke out.

The end of the War in 1945 heralded a major change in the fortunes of this country and most of the rest of the world. And Harness Racing was no different as the pacing speed explosion was about to hit. As things began to look up economically, imported stallions became more cost effective. Very quickly the landscape changed on the breeding and racing scene as we followed the trend led by North America.

It all changed, in a genetic sense, with Hal Dale, whose maternal pedigree was devoid of the usual trotting influences, but full of the pacing families of the 'Hal Dynasty'. The merger of this blood with the Hambletonian male line (of which Hal Dale came from the Electioneer sireline) led to the extinction of the pacing families in a paternal sense, as the Hambletonian family broadened its horizons beyond that of just trotting.

The influence of his son Adios and grandson Meadow Skipper manifested itself in the complete changing of the breeding landscape in this country.

below: The legendary Hondo Grattan demonstrated his renowned tenacity in winning the 1973 Inter-Dominion Grand Final at Harold Park.



Origins of Harness Racing

The modernisation of harness racing

by Nick Hooper

A History of Harness Racing...
Last part of a four part series

Local sires found themselves over run by imported sons and grandsons of Adios and Meadow Skipper over the next few decades. The Globe Derby line failed to cope and was diminished either by merit or fashion (or both) to being little more than a bit player.

The local stallions, and even locally bred sons of the imported sires, could not compete with an overall demand for more and more imported blood, some of it of very dubious quality. As long as it has USA tacked on the end of the name and either Adios or Meadow Skipper close up, it was good enough for a lot of people.

Horses such as Thor Hanover, Deep Adios, Meadow Vance, Golden Adios and Morris Eden represented the more successful Adios sons who found their way to Australia. Later on, sons and grandsons of Meadow Skipper such as Windshield Wiper, Vestalba Rainbow, Torado Hanover, Paulsboro and Keystone Scotch all arrived in huge numbers and recorded plenty of winners. For a review of the earliest horses of influence, have a look at www.stallionbook.com.au which has detailed reviews of many of these emerging stallions.

The emergence of the Adios and Meadow Skipper line horses was mirrored by one of the boom periods for the sport. The advent of night racing and a comparative lack of entertainment options meant that harness racing at places like Harold Park, Wayville and the Showgrounds attracted booming crowds, and in some cases, direct TV coverage into prime time. However, from those boom times 30-40 years ago, the sport has somewhat lost its way amid an ever increasing number of entertainment opportunities.

New tracks of higher quality were developed at places like Moonee Valley and Globe Derby, but gradually crowds have declined. The reliance on the TAB for turnover has reached the point where the TABs almost control the racing product. The advent of Sky Channel, firstly into the pubs and clubs and later into the homes, has meant that more and more people can actually watch the races live, but don't actually have to be on the track.

Telephone and internet betting have revolutionised the way that betting is undertaken and the on-course bookmaker is almost a thing of the past. Giant betting companies have grown and flourished all over the world, but they have largely taken a predatory approach to all of the racing codes. They have bet on the racing product but have only been prepared to put back a limited amount or nothing at all into the racing coffers.

From a punting perspective, the industry is at the crossroads. Each state is realising that TAB distribution is not going to be able to be relied upon for the level of income that it has in the past.

The projected sale of Harold Park would appear to underpin the future of NSW from this perspective, but a lot of work is yet to be done before that will become a reality. Similar moves are afoot in Brisbane and Adelaide, and in Melbourne the opportunity for HRV to develop the 80 hectares of mixed use zoned land at Melton over the coming years will provide it with an income stream to supplement wagering income.

But for all of these fundamental issues facing the industry, there is a lot to be proud of.

The advent of Menangle in NSW and Melton in Victoria herald new eras where the sport is being taken to the people. The ever-growing metropolises don't function as harness racing cities any more. Getting to Harold Park on a Friday night was nigh on impossible with Sydney's infamous traffic. Menangle is going to be so much more accessible for many participants.

Tracks such as Menangle, Newcastle, Melton and the plethora of 1000 metre tracks in Victoria provide the opportunity for our horses who are travelling faster and faster with every generation. Part of this has been far reaching changes to the breeding scene over the last 15 years.

There have been significant changes to the breeding scene with the advent of unlimited books of mares, artificial insemination, surrogacy programs, frozen and chilled semen and shuttling stallions. This has led to certain sires getting huge books in



above: Over the years we have embraced many champions... Popular Alm was one of the all-time greats in harness racing.

the hundreds of mares, but it has also opened the door for breeders to access the best bloodlines, at a price, that the world has had to offer.

The breeders of trotters appear to have had the greatest success with the resultant progeny of sires whose chilled or frozen semen has been available, perhaps due to the relative quality difference between the top sires in the world and those that we have standing here.

In the pacing world, the quality difference has not been as great, but the major change may well be the emergence of locally bred stallions and their sons. Whilst not yet directly an Australian phenomenon, the success of imported sire, In the Pocket, and his sons Christian Cullen and to a lesser degree Courage Under Fire, has led to the situation where huge sums are being paid for sons of Christian Cullen as racing and stud prospects.

Leviathan breeder Mick Lombardo has thrown his considerable weight behind a series of locally bred superstars such as Saab and Lombo Pocket Watch. With second rate stallion imports decreasing, are we on the cusp of a breeding scene where we get to breed to the best from overseas, New Zealand and Australia? Time will tell.

Sires Stakes Racing emerged thirty years ago and certainly filled a huge void. It has had its time and now mares-based Stakes racing is in vogue. The advent of VicBred and more recently the NSW Breeders Challenge offers the opportunities that Breeders need to continue and grow in the sport. The Breeders Challenge, whilst in its infancy, offers the opportunity for NSW to catch up to the VicBred program and once again push NSW to the forefront of the breeding industry. There is no reason why that cannot happen and every reason why it has to be successful.

Over the years we have embraced many champions. Paleface Adios, Hondo Grattan, Popular Alm and Gammalite. Who will forget Preux Chevalier and how he came back off the canvas to win the 1985 Inter-Dominion? Westburn Grant took all before him and then the great Our Sir Vancelot did what we thought was



above: *Champion sire Christian Cullen... huge sums are now being paid for his sons as racing and stud prospects.*

impossible by winning three Inter-Dominions. That was then equalled and almost surpassed by Blacks A Fake in winning three and almost a fourth Inter-Dominion. He led an unprecedented Queensland charge on the back of the wonderful Fake Left, who is possibly the second greatest sire this country has seen behind Globe Derby.

The trotters are a continuing emergence in the sport that almost saw them dead and buried thirty years ago. There is nothing better than a well balanced trotter in full flight and we have been given the pleasure of watching True Roman, Scotch Notch, Maori's Idol and Knight Pistol strut their stuff on the big stage. With an ever decreasing world, the opportunities to race overseas continue to be presented and accepted by the best of the southern hemisphere has to offer. The growth of the trotter is vital to the sport in every state that is struggling for racing stock and product. For those who irrationally dismiss the trotter, think again. The sport is going to depend on them.

The sport has gone through a lot of change over the last 50-60 years. Many challenges have been presented and many have been overcome. Many challenges will exist into the future and the sport will need to adapt if it wishes to remain relevant, especially in the dominant metropolitan markets. The sport, especially in NSW, has the basis for success if the sale of Harold Park is able to result in money which can be invested to allow the sport to grow. It is still somewhat off being a reality, but with the right leadership from the likes of people like Rex Horne, the industry may well be on the edge of one of its great periods.

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