

Harold Freedman and Andrew Lemon, *The History of Australian Thoroughbred Racing, volume two The Golden Years - from 1862 to 1939*. Southbank Communications Group, Melbourne, 1990. Illustrations. pp. 246, \$85 + \$5 postage (from Victoria Racing Club, 1 Queens Road, Melbourne 3004).

Peter Brennan and Stephen Brassel, *A Portrait of Racing. Horseracing in Australia and New Zealand since 1970*. Simon and Schuster, Sydney, 1990. Illustrations. pp. 287.

Bob Cain, *Harnessing a Miracle. The Miracle Mile Story*. Bob Cain, Kilmore, 1990. Illustrations. pp. II + 359. (Available from the author, 36 Fitzroy Street, Kilmore, Victoria 3764.)

The three books under review here are all concerned with the history of horse racing but their aims are quite distinct. Although each achieves its aims one work stands out as a major contribution to racing historiography. Harold Freedman and Andrew Lemon embarked on a very ambitious task, with Lemon researching and writing 'the' history of thoroughbred racing and Freedman depicting that history in a series of mural paintings (to be mounted on the ceiling of Flemington's Hill Stand and reproduced throughout the text of the book.) The history was planned for publication in three lavish volumes. This is the second volume to be published.

Like volume one, Freedman and Lemon's book is a glorious production, with high quality paper permitting quality reproduction of both paintings and prints from nineteenth century newspapers. Even at \$85 (plus \$5 postage and handling) it is a bargain for the student of horse racing. Unfortunately few students can afford such a bargain (especially in three volumes) and most of us will have to settle for viewing and reading the work in the library.

Comment on the mural is best left to someone competent in that field, however I was left with two gripes. One concerns the sheer volume of material depicted. On those pages where an entire panel of the mural is reproduced the overall impact is one of excess. Too many 'pictures' of too many horses (most of them chestnuts) and too many portraits of men. Perhaps the impact is different when the original mural is viewed at Flemington, though I suspect that the overwhelming impression would be the sore neck achieved through the time it would take to work through the illustrations and their captions. My second gripe is that it is a great pity to see the mural defaced by the consistent misuse of the possessive apostrophe when referring to a decade. Thankfully Andrew Lemon did not permit this infection to spread into the text.

The volume is clearly the second in a series. It begins with Chapter 13 and covers the period from 1862 to 1939 in fourteen chapters, divided both chronologically and by state. New South Wales and Victoria have been allotted three chapters each and the other states two, reflecting their relative importance in the racing world. Another design feature of the volume is the breaking up of the state/chronology sequence by the insertion of three sections (which are neither chapters nor parts of other chapters) telling the story of the dominant equine force of each era. In the 1860s it was The Barb, in the 1890s, Carbine and in the 1930s, of course, Phar Lap. It will be interesting to see which horses are chosen to perform this function in volume three.

The stories of the great horses of the period are all told, as well as those of the prominent identities and the racecourses but so too are the stories of many of the 'little people', of whom racing abounds, such as Mary Wentworth Dickson. Miss Dickson was probably New South Wales' first female owner/trainer. She had mixed success with a team of horses in the early 1860s, but exploits in the courts where she sued racecourse stewards and race clubs, and later defended a charge of theft after 'repossessing' three horses which had been sold by her 'agent', did little to advance the cause of feminism. In fact they probably hardened

the attitude of male racing officialdom against women for decades to come.

Although Lemon uses such anecdotes to evoke the flavour of the period and of racing with great sensitivity his work also extends much further. It is also an analytical history concerned with the change in the nature of the sport over time and with the differences in the sport from place to place. This is the first history of racing which really provides proper treatment of Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. Lemon not only contrasts the sophistication of late nineteenth century racing in Sydney and Melbourne with the picnic atmosphere and general amateurism of the sport in Perth and Brisbane at the same time, but offers some explanations of the reasons behind the contrasts.

He also reminds us of the changing importance of some racing regions over time. This is illustrated by the place of Launceston in the mid-1860s when a prize of £1150 was offered for the Australian Champions Race. The winner of that event was the Tasmanian stallion Panic who easily defeated a strong field of interstate entrants, before going on to run second in the 1865 Melbourne Cup and later siring Nimblefoot, the legendary 'dream horse' of the 1870 Melbourne Cup.

Lemon has expertly charted not one history of thoroughbred racing but many histories in many districts. As one region prospered another failed. Launceston's importance declined as Melbourne's grew. While valuable feature races proved an important impetus to the sport in some places, elsewhere they became millstones. While the railway was a boon to some city racecourses, providing greater access for both horses and crowds, it was a disaster elsewhere. In New South Wales it almost destroyed country racing by making the larger purses of the Sydney raceclubs more available to the country stables.

Lemon also documents the growth of racing, how it changed from a sport based around a few carnivals each year, into an industry with at least weekly meetings. It is not, however, nor does it pretend to be, an

economic history of that industry. Lemon's emphasis is on the sport and its social (and political context) yet the figures of interest to the economic historian can also be found in the text. For example, we are told that by 1929 Eagle Farm racecourse had five training tracks, three grand stands, automatic totes in all three enclosures; that the course hosted 34 race meetings per year, admission prices ranged from 12 shillings for the grandstand to 1 shilling for the flat; that Brisbane supported '800 horses in training, 95 trainers, 78 jockeys, 34 apprentices and 111 bookmakers' and that average attendances were 6,800 for Eagle Farm and 4,600 for Albion Park.

Andrew Lemon clearly displays a real affinity with the sport he has documented. His attachment to the horses and their deeds is apparent, perhaps nowhere more so than in his lament that Ajax is remembered more for one loss (at odds of 1/40) than for his 36 wins, but it is the scholarship of this volume which makes it outstanding. Lemon has made good use of the small collection of secondary sources available on the topic but most of his material has come from the hard grind of peering at almost eighty years of sporting newspapers from all states. Anyone who has attempted to work in this field will appreciate the enormous amount of primary research he has undertaken. Racing's history has been researched in both depth and breadth to an extent which is truly admirable; and in presenting his findings Lemon has performed an immense service to those who follow him. Not only has he contributed the spadework for those who follow but he has also hinted, throughout the volume, at the themes which later scholars should pursue. Volume two has proved equal to the first volume. Together they provide a contribution to the history of racing which is unmatched.

Stephen Brassel's study of Australian and New Zealand horse racing since 1970 is much less ambitious and displays far less sense of history. It offers a two page history of Australasian racing from 1810 to 1970 and then embarks on a series of portraits, with chapters on: horses and studs, jockeys, trainers, clubs and courses and the great races.

Each chapter involves the selection of some cases for discussion because space does not permit a comprehensive analysis. The ten stud farms chosen may well be representative but we are given no explanation of their selection. The same could be said of the fifty trainers or sixty jockeys on whom brief biographical entries are provided, but at least in those instances the numbers included is sufficient to ensure that all the obvious characters are listed. No doubt, however, many more jockeys and trainers will be wondering why they did not make the select list when others have done so.

The entries on nineteen recent star gallopers are probably even more contentious, given the strength of affection which followers of the turf develop for their equine heroes. Nevertheless, of the biographical entries these are probably the most satisfying. They provide the details of each horse's career, documenting the highs and the low points and providing a record chart for each horse, complete with the weight carried and the starting price.

With all of these entries Brassel provides a handy reference work for future historians. He has compiled a useful (if not comprehensive) encyclopedia of racing in the 1980s. The work itself is certainly not a history and it has little to offer on the 1970s except in the section which provides a list of winners of the major races from 1970 to 1989. The 'oldest' horses examined are Dulcify and Manikato who began racing in 1978, and most of the entries raced in the mid or late 1980s. Nevertheless it does provide some useful insights into racing in the modern era.

Among its more appealing features are the sections on 'A day in the life of...', a racehorse, a jockey, an apprentice jockey, a trainer and a racecourse. To the reader not closely involved in racing these sections offer a very brief glimpse of life in the industry. It is here especially that the photographs of Peter Brennan are most effective, emphasising the early rising, the hard work and the occasional moments of elation.

Although this book is more a small encyclopedia of racing than a history it is well packaged and quite readable, at least to the enthusiast;

yet it is also more than a reference book for the shelves. Perhaps it is Brennan's photographs, concentrating on the people and the scenery rather than the horses, which make the book one which is taken down from the shelf for regular browsing.

Bob Cain's history of Sydney harness racing's Miracle Mile does not have the same appeal to the browser, nor does it offer Lemon's scholarship. Nevertheless this work, published with assistance from the New South Wales Harness Racing Club, also successfully achieves its aims, namely, to document the stories surrounding (and the running of) the first twenty-four runnings of Australia's most famous sprinting race for pacers. In importance the Miracle Mile ranks behind only the Interdominion Championships on the annual harness racing calendar.

Cain's book is a meticulous account of the race's history. He provides a good discussion of its origins and its initial appeal, explaining the importance of an event which could provide an opportunity for Australian horses to break the two-minute barrier under race conditions - a feat which had become commonplace in the United States, where sprint racing was emphasised. The fact that the barrier was broken by the New Zealand mare Robin Dundee in the very first Miracle Mile in 1967 helped to establish the race as a classic event right from its beginnings.

After an introductory chapter Cain's book is divided into twenty-four more chapters, devoted to the twenty-four Miracle Mile winners. In each chapter Cain follows a basic formula of telling the story of the race first and then providing a discussion of the winner's career and the lead up to the race. In the process he manages to provide discussion of other competitors and the stable connections concerned. Although the Miracle Mile remains the unifying theme of the book Cain's approach enables him to wander across the broad field of Australian and New Zealand harness racing.

This is particularly evident in the chapter on the 1976 winner Paleface Adios who continued racing until 1981, collecting 108 victories

more than \$500,000 and seven sub-two-minute miles. In this chapter alone Cain's topic takes him to all states and provinces, to city and country tracks, to stud farms and spelling paddocks, to controversial suspensions and to magnificent on-track duels.

Much of Cain's real contribution is incidental to his main purpose and it is purely anecdotal. He does not attempt to provide any real analysis of Australian harness racing. He is content to be the storyteller and he is competent in his appointed task. The book does evoke the essence of harness racing and it provides a compact source of information on many of the champion pacers over a quarter of a century. The Miracle Mile is the device used but the real focus is the champion horses.

Each of the three books has something to offer the student of racing. Brassel and Brennan provide a useful compendium and evocative photographs, Cain provides a more detailed (if anecdotal) study of harness racing which achieves more than it intends, but Lemon and Freedman demonstrate what can be done. Their book extends the limits of racing historiography, combining scholarship and art in a very readable and beautifully presented package. They manage to reach both the general reader and the serious student with equal success, combining art, scholarship and 'readability' in a way seldom found on any topic. It is to be hoped that volume three will soon appear to complete a remarkable trilogy which will stand the test of time as by far the most significant work in its field.

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