

# FROM THE HEART, RT, a homage to the horse

This captivating tribute to the horse by host HAMISH McLACHLAN was the highlight of the October launch of the Spring Racing Carnival and the *racing.com* Australian Racehorse of the Year Awards at the Melbourne Museum.

**THE SPEECH:** Hamish McLachlan, in a replica of a stewards' tower at the museum, pays tribute to the horse.  
PHOTO SDP

I have been asked to pay tribute to the horse. That's easy. I really do love horses, everything about them.

Watch what a 500kg animal does with a child on its back—they will walk quietly and safely, or just stand still, or trot, or jump, or swim ... all because the 12-year-old asks them to. Nobody can make a child smile like a horse can.

What kindness! They do as they are asked, when they could do as they wanted to, but they don't. They love to please, to be a part of one of humanity's most enduring partnership.

I love everything about the horse. Watch closely the next time a horse parades in front of you—really watch—and you will see much more than a betting proposition.

That eye, that walk, that muscle, that subtle skin and those pins of legs carrying half a tonne of power; every part of the horse tells a story—you just need to look closely.

Consider a horse's toughness and bravery and that great heart. When a horse's lungs are burning and their legs are tired and they should be screaming for someone to stop the madness, they don't stop like they should—or could—they continue on bravely.

If only we could be like a horse, if only those famous words of that marvellous horseman George Hanlon were true: *Horses are only human.*

No two are the same. And the more horses you get to know, the more interesting life is.

They, in simplest terms, are just like people.

In the racing world, every year, at every carnival across the world, great horses emerge that make great racing even greater. Think through the past 20 years, here in Melbourne alone.

There was Vintage Crop, who turned this carnival on its head. Forever. Opened it to the world. To Saintly, who changed the way Bart trained for the Cup.

Imagine a horse being able to do that! Change the way Bart trains, now that's a story in itself. To Makybe Diva, who turned Lee Freedman into a poet, after the great mare had won her third Cup in a row: *"Go find the smallest child on this course and there will be the only example of a person who will live long enough to see that again,"* said Lee.

And to Black Caviar. What Black Caviar did for this sport, the best marketers could only dream of. She was everyone's horse. A mare cheered on like fans do for their footy team. The more I think about Black Caviar, the more I am sure people fell in love with her quite simply because she was a horse that provided certainty when the rest of the world couldn't guarantee a damn thing.

Since her retirement Black Caviar has been immortalised by Racing Victoria as THE brand for racing. Look at her on the *racing.com* logo—her ears pricked, dominant in victory number 13, the 2011 BTC Cup at Doomben, with Luke Nolen saluting the great mare.

For me, the image captures one of the beautiful moments in

racing, and it happens weekly at all levels of the sport—that moment when the jockey acknowledges the horse and asks all of us to do the same, to applaud the animal who has performed so courageously, so beautifully and so willingly.

Luke acknowledges the great mare, just as Bossy did so well with Makybe, and Fred with Northerly, and Jimmy with Might And Power and Dermot with Vintage Crop, and the late, great Roy Higgins did with Light Fingers and Bart with Saintly.

They loved these great horses. Love is a strong word, but Bart believes it, and he said as much when describing the way he trained: *"You really have to love the horse and read its moods ... horses are always sending you messages, and you have to learn their language ... you need to have empathy."*

As the dim son of a sheep farmer, I've chosen to steal the prose of the greatest of them all, Shakespeare, who brought the horse to life with simple, yet glorious words.

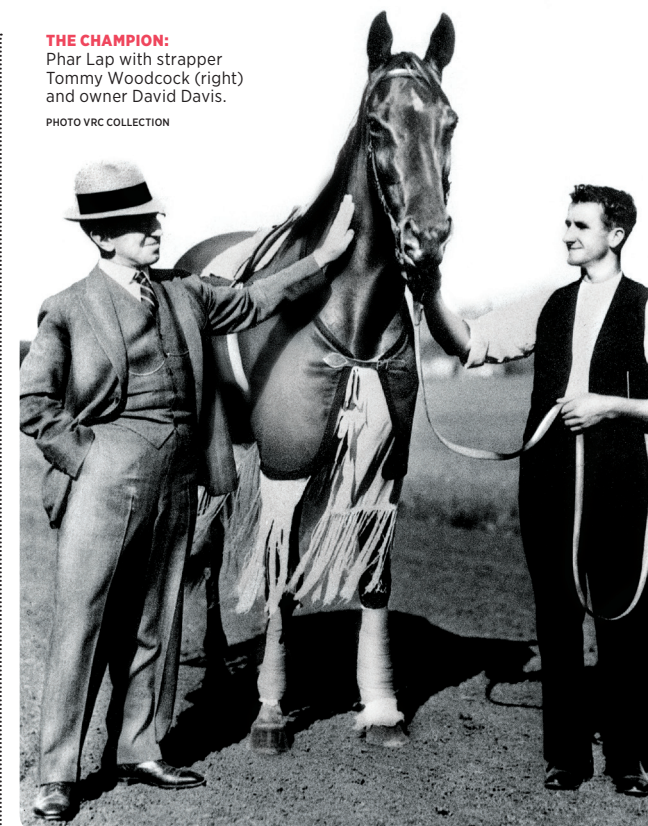
Shakespeare loved the horse, and many wonderful descriptions of this great animal are peppered throughout his work, but none is more evocative than those he gave to the heir to the throne of France in Henry V. He wrote:

*When I bestride him, I soar;  
I am a hawk  
He trots the air.  
The earth sings when he touches it;  
He is pure air and fire;  
and the dull elements of earth  
and water never appear in him,  
but only in patient stillness  
when his rider mounts him.  
He is indeed a horse,  
and all others you may  
call beasts.*

For those of us who love the horse—whether champion or hack—this is our love described.

I am a lucky man. I have ridden all my life, and do at least once a week still. And when I do, I am, indeed a hawk.

**THE CHAMPION:** Phar Lap with strapper Tommy Woodcock (right) and owner David Davis.  
PHOTO VRC COLLECTION



**“He won and confirmed his place in the folklore of this wonderful sport. He was indeed a horse, and all others you may call beasts.”**

HAMISH McLACHLAN ON PHAR LAP'S FOUR WINS IN CUP WEEK IN 1930

When I am with horse, I am soothed, I am calm, I have no cares. I hope the horse is the same with me.

Tommy Woodcock knew these feelings better than most. Shakespeare didn't see Phar Lap, but Woodcock did, and Tommy was a true poet, a man whose raw words had the ability to take you inside the heart and mind of Phar Lap. There's something spiritual about reciting Tommy's words about Phar Lap, here in this sanctuary (the museum where his hide stands).

For me, it's like being with Tommy, riding the words, letting his bush poetry sing and soar. Indeed, he loved Phar Lap, as he loved all those horses,

who came before and after. Just as we all do.

I hope I can do Tommy justice. Tommy said:

*"I loved the horse that much,  
I wouldn't care a dash as long as  
I got a pair of boots and a shirt.  
He used to rub against me and  
wear out a shirt pretty often and  
I used to wear a pair of boots out  
every two weeks, just walking and  
leading him, but that was for me  
own enjoyment.*

*I'll tell you what a great horse  
he was—he won the Melbourne  
Stakes on the Saturday and then  
the Melbourne Cup on the Tuesday,  
and then Mr. Telford came up on  
the Wednesday and he asked me,  
'What did you do with him this  
morning?'*

*I said: 'I rolled him, he had a*

*good old roll, and I gave him a long  
walk for about an hour and a half.'*  
*'Should have given him a bit  
of work, you know.'*

*I said: 'Aw yeah.'*

*He said: 'He's gonna run tomorrow.'*  
*'What?'*

*'He's running tomorrow, you know.'*  
*'Aw gee.'*

*So anyway, Oaks day come  
and I got him out to the races and  
he looked very well. He looked  
beautiful. And, of course,  
Oaks day with all the women  
all dressed up—when I was walking  
him up the enclosure, all the ladies  
they stood up and clapped and  
cheered him.*

*He was a real idol.*

*He walked around the enclosure,  
and he went out, and that was only a  
mile race after running two miles on  
the Tuesday, but he won quite easy.*

*So anyhow, that was on the  
Thursday and Mr. Telford came  
up on the Friday, and he said:*

*'How is he?'*

*'Oh he's good, not bad, he had  
a roll. He didn't dance and buck  
in the roll like he did on Wednesday  
morning.'*

*'You didn't work him?'*

*'No, gave him a walk, that's all.'*

*'He's running tomorrow.'*

*'What!'*

*'He's running tomorrow.'*

*'Aw no.'*

*'Yes, we're gonna run him  
again tomorrow.'*

*And 'course that was to be a  
mile an' a half on the Saturday.*

*And anyhow, up we come up on  
the Saturday and 'course everybody's  
idol he was, everybody stood up  
and clapped and cheered him ..."*

Phar Lap did what no horse will ever do again. He won his fourth race of the week, and confirmed his place in the folklore of this wonderful sport.

He was indeed a horse, and all others you may call beasts. **U**

*Woodcock's words on Phar Lap  
are from Me & Phar Lap—The  
remarkable life of Tommy Woodcock,  
as told to Jan 'Yarn' Wositzky  
(The Slattery Media Group, 2011)*

The Racehorse of the Year Awards: PAGE 28



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