**No. 1 Phar Lap and jockey Jim Pike**

# THE 10 GREATEST THOROUGHBREDS EVER

## JUST WHO IS THE BEST THOROUGHBRED TO HAVE RACED? AN IN-DEPTH STUDY REVEALS THE 'GREATEST' OF THEM ALL

WORDS: **KINGSLEY EDWARDS**
PICTURES COURTESY: **ERN MCQUILLAN & NEWS LTD**

**No. 2 Tulloch (George Moore)**

# Biography – Kingsley Edwards

Kingsley was a thoroughbred racing and breeding enthusiast from a young age. A regular racegoer and racehorse owner, he joined the AJC, STC and VRC over 20 years ago and continues to be an active member of the new Australian Turf Club.

He holds a Bachelors Degree in Agricultural Economics from Sydney University and a Diploma in Financial Services (Insurance Broking) from the Australian & New Zealand Institute of Insurance & Finance.

Kingsley commenced his career in bloodstock insurance 16 years ago and has been with Gow-Gates Insurance Brokers since 2004.

He formerly worked for Arrowfield Stud and is a regular contributor of articles to the NSW Racehorse Owners' Association Monthly Newsletter.

Since the first official Australian race meeting was held in Sydney's Hyde Park in October 1810, there have been countless great gallopers who have captured the imagination of the racing public.

The question of "who are the greatest?" has always been passionately debated by racing fans and experts alike.

The bicentenary of thoroughbred horse racing in Australia last year prompted me to undertake a detailed study with the aim of adding another chapter to that endless debate by contributing my list of the 10 greatest Australian racehorses of all time created from a statistical analysis designed to be as objective as possible.

The study was conducted on the racing careers of the 37 horses which have thus far been inducted into the Australian Racing Hall of Fame and are listed on the right.

These 37 horses are all champions for various reasons, however, for those among them to be considered the 'greatest' they must set themselves apart from the rest by achieving not some, but all, of the following:-

Win the best races, defeat the best of their contemporaries, set records, perform extraordinary feats, and produce uniformly impressive results.

Additional essential factors that distinguish such horses are their ability to perform in unfavourable circumstances, as well as at a range of different distances and ages, ensuring the overall greatest performers are determined, and not the best at a certain distance or age, or in particular conditions.

'Greatness' in the thoroughbred was therefore defined in the study to be a racehorse that exhibited the highest level of quality and consistency, as well as versatility in such performances, throughout its entire racing career.

An essential component of the study was the design of a methodology to overcome the difficulties in comparing horses which have competed over a 200-year period.

In addition to the significant challenges presented by horses from different eras not having competed against each other, and also against a differing quality of horses, the fact is that race times are faster now than they have ever been.

It does not, however, follow that gallopers in the modern era are better than those of the past – it may simply be the difference in the prevailing conditions of yesteryear.

The improvement in times has evolved due to of the myriad of changes which have occurred in Australian horse racing throughout its history.

The development of the thoroughbred breed, the quality of racetracks, advances in veterinary care and feed/nutrition, and improvements of training methods and riding styles, have all combined to enable faster times to be recorded.

This analysis counteracted these factors by assessing each horse's performance against its peers and also recognising the status of races in the past, each on its merits of the era in which it was run.

This has been effected by applying the Australian Pattern Committee race classification system for Black Type races, viz. Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, and Listed Races, to those races run prior to the introduction of that system in 1971.

## Australian Racing Hall of Fame

| | |
|---|---|
| AJAX | NORTHERLY |
| AMOUNIS | PETER PAN |
| BETTER LOOSEN UP | PHAR LAP |
| BERNBOROUGH | POSEIDON |
| CARBINE | RISING FAST |
| CHATHAM | SHANNON |
| COMIC COURT | SKY HIGH |
| EURYTHMIC | STRAWBERRY ROAD |
| FLIGHT | SUNLINE |
| GALILEE | SUPER IMPOSE |
| GLOAMING | THE BARB |
| GRAND FLANEUR | TOBIN BRONZE |
| GUNSYND | TODMAN |
| HEROIC | TRANQUIL STAR |
| KINGSTON TOWN | TULLOCH |
| MAKYBE DIVA | VAIN |
| MALUA | WAKEFUL |
| MANIKATO | WENONA GIRL |
| MIGHT AND POWER | |

As a consequence, Stakes races in this study have been described as Grade A, B, C & D which correspond to Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, and Listed Races, respectively. Such races are referred to here as 'graded races'.

Horses competing in Black Type races since 1971 have been classified according to the status of the race in the year it was run.

For example, due to the downgrade of the AJC Craven Plate, a horse which contested that race after 1995 was recorded as having run in a Grade C (Group 3) race, however, between 1994 and 1971, was noted as having run in a Grade B (Group 2) race.

For horses who contested stakes races before 1971 when no official classification system existed, the status of those races was assigned based on a combination of the quality of its winners and placegetters as well as the prizemoney offered relative to the other major races at the time. For example, the AJC Craven Plate was deemed to have been a Grade A race from 1895 to 1970.

Another example is a high quality race with significant prizemoney which is no longer held, such as the VRC C.M. Lloyd Stakes (also known as the VRC All-Aged Stakes), would be deemed to have been a Grade A race.

Only races run in Australia have been included in the analysis primarily due to the difficulty in fairly grading overseas races against Australian races.

This restriction had an adverse effect on some of the horses analysed and, in particular, New Zealand champions Gloaming and Sunline, who both won a number of high quality races on both sides of the Tasman.

The metric system has been used in this study for both distance and weight measurements with the equivalent imperial (for distance) and avoirdupois (for weight) measurements used for races prior to 1 August 1972.

Versatility is the only characteristic of the three identified in determining greatness which is not a relative measure, but an absolute measure.

Versatility has therefore been used as a pre-requisite for horses to qualify for the quality and consistency components of the analysis. The five criteria for versatility to be satisfied were:-

- Grade A winner at a minimum of three ages (ensuring that horses had been successful at the highest level in open company and not just in 2yo and/or 3yo races as well as having demonstrated their ability over a longer period than just a couple of seasons);
- Grade A winner in at least two distance categories*;
- Grade A winner in both a clockwise and an anti-clockwise direction;
- Graded race winner on both dry and rain-affected racing surfaces; and
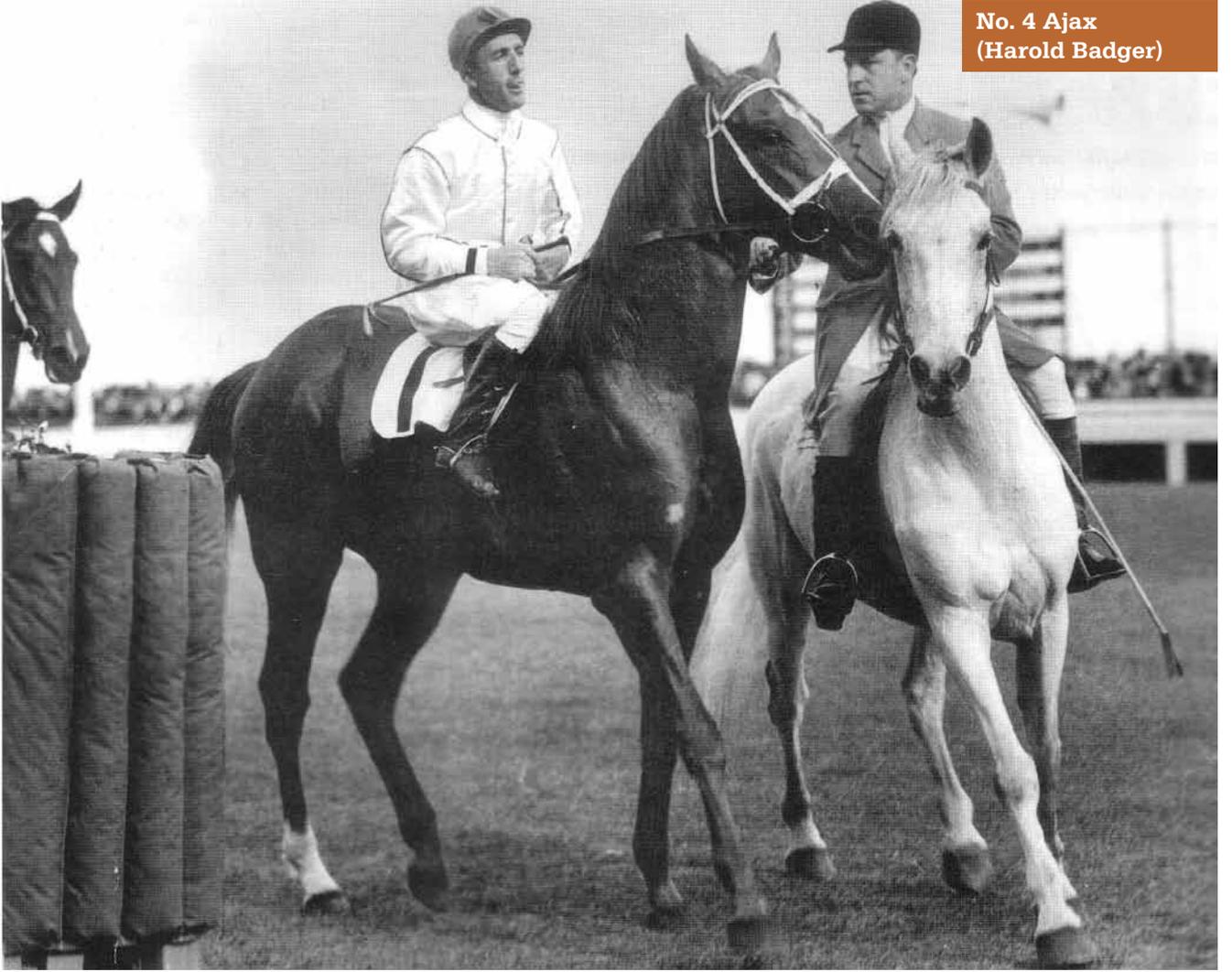- Graded race winner at its first run in at least one of its racing preparations.

* Three distance categories were used in the study – Sprinter/Miler (up to 1600m); Middle-Distance (1601m to 2399m); and Stayer (2400m and beyond).

The characteristics of consistency and quality were then quantified by allocating points on a weighted basis depending on the relative importance of the factor being assessed.



No. 7 Manikato
(Roy Higgins)

No. 4 Ajax
(Harold Badger)



No. 6 Todman
(Neville Sellwood)

Points for consistency were awarded by calculating percentages for each of the following criteria (the higher the percentage, the higher the number of points):-

- Grade A wins from the number of Grade A races contested;
- Grade A placings from the number of Grade A races contested;
- Graded race wins from the number of Graded races contested;
- Graded race placings from the number of Graded races contested; and
- Number of wins from starts in all races.

Points for quality were awarded for each of the following criteria (the higher the achievement, the higher the number of points):-

- The number & standard of Graded races won;
- The standard of horses beaten in Graded races;
- Number of consecutive wins in Grade A races;
- Number of consecutive wins in all races;
- Weight carried to victory above the weight-for-age scale in handicaps;
- Number of feature race doubles and trebles;
- Number of multiple wins in the same Graded races;
- Winning margins in Graded races and records set for winning margins;
- Record times set for individual Graded races, racecourses and Australian records;
- Records set for weight carried to victory in Graded races;
- Extraordinary performances to those not covered by the other quality criteria described above.

The quality criteria analysis does contain some bias towards horses with longer careers because it provides such horses with an increased number of opportunities to achieve outstanding results.

This acknowledges that the ability of a horse to compete in more races over an extended period is a reflection of its soundness and the ability to overcome injury, which could also be argued as contributing to its greatness.

Having applied the methodology to all 37 horses analysed, the points awarded ranked in order the following 10 horses (see chart top of the page) as the greatest thoroughbreds in the history of Australian racing.

The points awarded for each horse are listed here purely for the purpose of comparison.

The differential from the 1st ranking to the 10th ranking is almost 23 points and in this context, it is interesting to consider the following – there is less than 2.5 points separating the top three of Phar Lap, Tulloch and Carbine; then there is a considerable gap of 8 points to Ajax; 5 points to Wakeful; a further 3.5 points to Todman and the last five are all within 3.5 points of each other.

The composition of the 10 horses listed will be a source of much conjecture, although few would question the inclusion of the five inaugural inductees into the Racing Hall of Fame (Phar Lap, Tulloch, Carbine, Kingston Town and Bernborough), but their ranking, and those of the five other horses, is sure to cause as much discussion.

Keen students of Australian racing history will note the

## Australian Top 10 Thoroughbreds

| No. | Name | Points |
|-----|----------------|--------|
| 1 | PHAR LAP | 57.22 |
| 2 | TULLOCH | 54.93 |
| 3 | CARBINE | 54.76 |
| 4 | AJAX | 46.55 |
| 5 | WAKEFUL | 41.42 |
| 6 | TODMAN | 37.87 |
| 7 | MANIKATO | 37.18 |
| 8 | KINGSTON TOWN | 36.11 |
| 9 | BERNBOROUGH | 36.06 |
| 10 | SKY HIGH | 34.38 |

omission of Vain, arguably the best two and three-year-old sprinter in Australian turf history.

Vain was the only horse that would have been ranked in the 10 greatest but was excluded as he failed to pass the versatility test, having never raced beyond a mile and also only competed at ages two and three.

Finally, it is important to note that of the horses included in my 10 greatest, the last to race was Manikato in 1983.

The fact that no horses racing since then made the list is largely attributable to the increased competitiveness that has made it more difficult than ever to dominate the opposition, and the significantly higher prizemoney available to the best horses.

These have combined to influence owners in the modern era to be more mindful of not contesting races out of their comfort zone due to the risk of not winning and thereby reducing their horse's value (both as racing and breeding prospects).

As a consequence, horses over the last 30 years have specialised much more and their race programmes have been far more selective; inevitably limiting their versatility.

A contemporary example is Black Caviar whose racing career appears unlikely to satisfy the versatility criteria of my study, despite being currently rated as the best sprinter in the world.

*HOOFNOTE: *Next month's Racing NSW Magazine will feature the breeding, race records, winning distance range and major race wins of the 'Top 10 Greatest Thoroughbreds'* **RNSW**