

TASMANIAN RACING CLUB – HOBART CUP 2022
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, WEDNESDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2022

Good evening and welcome to this reception to mark the 2022 Hobart Cup to be run on Sunday the 13th of February.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- the Honourable Jane Howlett MLC, Minister for Racing;
- Madeleine Ogilvie MP;
- Andrew Scanlon, Chairman ,Tasmanian Racing Club and:
- Kim Boyer, Vice-Chair;
- Brendan Blomeley, CEO, Tasmanian Racing Club.

History records that the first ever Hobart Cup was run at Elwick in February 1875. We now mark the 147th year of the race. That is a singular achievement and no doubt your 150th year will ensure significant celebrations.

We all know that horse racing has long been a special part of the Australian identity. So much so that intercolonial races – with large numbers of horses moving between the colonies to race – were hugely popular and betting generally robust.

What might be less well known are the difficulties Hobart endured to actually get the Hobart Cup up and running, back then in 1875.

A full ten years before in 1865, plans had been made to initiate an annual race in Hobart. That did not go down well. I'll quote to you from the "Turf Talk"

column in an 1866 Melbourne newspaper. The columnist using the pseudonym “Tomboy”, wrote:

“According to present appearances, Tasmania will provide two Champion Races for next year – one at Hobart Town at the beginning of February, another at Launceston at the end of the month. Far be it from “Tomboy” to throw cold water on the ambition of his racing friends of southern Tasmania, but two Champion Races within a month, in one colony, will never do. I would wish to give Hobart Town every praise for her desire to “hold her own” with the north, but it seems to me to smack of greediness when she hints at holding a Champion Race only a few weeks before the Champion meeting at Launceston. But when the Hobart-Townians cool down, their own common sense, I think, will suggest to them that they are doing wrong in wishing to cut out their northern friends.” End of quote.¹

But the love of racing remained strong in Hobart. In that same year, 1866, Hobart’s satirical *Punch* magazine ran a long piece describing a field for a race, the described horses being thinly veiled skewering of high-profile public identities.

Here are two who were obviously in the legal profession, and I quote:

“ ‘Stuffed Judge’ is an aged animal of a very sour temper, and who can never manage to behave well under any rider. The old horse is scarcely to be trusted upon his pins. Betting against ‘Stuffed Judge’ stands at one hundred million billion to 1.” What excellent odds!

The other, a horse called ‘Landshark’ which was sailors’ slang for a lawyer:

“ ‘Landshark’ is known to be a sure horse on his legs, and though no bigger than a pony, is said to possess great strength, and a very fine temper; indeed he is usually looked upon as one of the best “ladies’ hacks” in the colony; and we only fear that side saddle work has to some extent spoiled his chance on the turf.”²

The inaugural Tasmanian Racing Club program ran over two days – Wednesday 10 and Thursday 11 February 1875. There was a total of twelve races, the final two being called the Hack Stakes and the Consolation Stakes.

There was great excitement in Hobart. Government offices, the Telegraph Office, the GPO, the banks and most merchants closed at noon. Dedicated steamer trips ran to and from Elwick from the Hobart waterfront and the Eastern Shore’s Kangaroo Bay.

In our Theatre Royal there were special performances of *Les Huguenots*, the grand 5-act opera about the French Wars of Religion, performed by the Royal Italian Opera Company.

According to the *Launceston Examiner*, “Everything passed off most pleasantly ... the most conspicuous object on the ground was the [new] grand stand, where there was a space allotted for Governor Sir Frederick Weld and suite, but His Excellency, for the most part of the day, preferred walking about ...”³

I was interested to learn that the inaugural Hobart Town Cup winner was Ella, by two lengths. Ella was followed another filly, Edith, then John Peel, Gaslight, Dilke, and Stoic.

The following year was even more extravagantly dressed up. I quote again: “A procession of four-in-hands led by Governor Weld started for Elwick from the Town Hall at noon [and] “drew together a large concourse of people, the steps of the Town Hall, the telegraph office and each corner of the streets being thronged with people anxious to obtain a glimpse of so unusual a sight” ... His Excellency, “handling the ribbons” of his coach and four, led the 7-coach procession ... “Each vehicle was crowded with occupants ... [the procession being] followed by a heterogenous mixture of vehicles ... The gates of Elwick were reached in smart time ...” End of quote.

So, ladies and gentlemen, perhaps for our 150th anniversary the TRC might come up with a range of suitable celebrations for this historic enduring tradition. Perhaps a coach and four or perhaps an Opera!

Thank you!

¹ *Bell's Life in Victoria and Sporting Chronicle* (Melbourne), Saturday 10 March 1866 page 3.

² *Tasmanian Punch* (Hobart), Saturday 29 September 1866 page 5.

³ *Launceston Examiner*, Saturday 13 February 1875 page 5.