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Gay Icarus Passes Life's Final Post

by Ian Eddington

Back in 1971, Gay Icarus, the horse with the unfashionable pedigree, took Australian Racing by storm.

That year, Gay Icarus was the best racehorse in the land, and - in one stunning sequence - won nine out of 12 starts in elite company.

Sadly, in February, 1995, the same Gay Icarus passed away at 'Sheehan's Farm', Bacchus Marsh, Vic, at the ripe old age of 28 years.

During the past decade, Gay Icarus had lived in 'semi-retirement'; for awhile he was used as a polo pony before graduating to trail-riding.

Mrs Joan Sheehan reported that Gay Icarus was a " ... gentleman" to the day he died.

"Gay Icarus was a lovely natured horse. We buried him in the paddock in which he died," said Joan Sheehan.

Gay Icarus will long be remembered as one of the most exciting stayers to grace the Australian Turf.

Sired by the moderate Icarus (GB) (ch h 1969, Tenerani - Sun Chariot, by Hyperion), Gay Icarus was out of Gay M'selle, by Bilbo (Fr) from Gayuga, by Atout Maitre from the Coronation Day mare Gay Day.

Despite the fact both his parents were champions, Icarus was a flop on the racecourse, winning only one minor race at Newbury.

Icarus cost Dr WS Lawrence less than \$2,000 when he was put up for auction as a stallion in England, and dropped dead when he was nine. Gay Icarus was the only winner of note that he sired.

Gay M'selle, Gay Icarus' dam, was sold as a yearling for \$273. Foaling Gay Icarus was her lone claim to fame.

Regarded as " ... the people's horse", Gay Icarus was plagued by unsoundness throughout his career but in 1971, when fully fit, he won nine Group races in Melbourne and Sydney - the VRC Blamey Stakes (10f), VATC St George Stakes (9f), VRC Australian Cup (10f), AJC Chipping Norton Stakes (10f), AJC Australasian Champion Stakes (10f), AJC Queen Eliza-beth Stakes (12f), VRC Craiglee Stakes (1m), VATC Underwood Stakes (10f), and - the highlight - the VATC Caulfield Cup (Gr I) (12f).



**Gay Icarus and
'Mick' Mallyon**

Gay Icarus was bred and part-owned by 'knockabout' Victorian trainer Cyril Beechey, who also prepared Analight to win the 1975 Caulfield Cup.

Born in 1911, Beechey travelled Australia during the Great Depression, earning a quid here and a quid there as a camp cook in shearing sheds, a roustabout with Ashton's Circus, a timber-cutter, railway ganger and a blacksmith.

After serving with the RAAF during the WWII, Beechey was granted a soldier settlement at Heyfield, in rich agricultural country about 200km East of Melbourne.

Cyril turned his block of land into a prosperous farm which he sold 15 years later, keeping a mare named Gay M'selle who he used as a hack to roundup stock. He settled for a time in Melbourne before shifting to Queensland in semi-retirement.

To keep himself interested in life, Cyril trained a horse or two on the side, met with success, and returned to Victoria to set-up stables at Lyndhurst.

Beechey decided to breed from Gay M'selle and he sent her to Icarus (GB) who stood for Dr Lawrence at Werribee, on a property owned by Cyril's long time friend Maurice Flynn.

When Gay Icarus was foaled, Cyril showed what true friendship means by registering the colt, later gelded, to race in the names of himself and Flynn, and their wives.

Placed once from four starts at two, when second to Message at Caulfield, Gay Icarus hit his straps at three. He won his first race, an Intermediate Handicap at Werribee, before moving on to success in the VATC Burwood Handicap and then finishing second to 'Triple Derby' winner Silver Sharpe in the VRC Victoria Derby.

In the New Year, 1971, Gay Icarus' improvement took just about everybody by surprise, except, maybe, Cyril Beechey.

At his third start back, linking up with colourful jockey 'Mick' Mallyon, Gay Icarus beat Trial and Error and three-year-old rival Silver Sharpe in the VRC Blarney Stakes, and then edged out Rajah Sahib in the VATC St George Stakes.

From then on, Gay Icarus was the crowd's favourite.

He ran rampant through the remainder of the Autumn racing; the one setback coming when beaten a 'lip' by Fileur after a tremendous struggle in the VRC Queen Elizabeth Stakes. In the Queen Elizabeth Stakes at Randwick, Gay Icarus turned the tables on Fileur in no mean order.

At four, from six starts, Gay Icarus won three including the Caulfield Cup from Igloo and Big Philou, but from then on was beset by one injury after another.

His only other win from 15 starts at five, six and seven years of age came in the 1974 VRC Craiglee Stakes.

Finally retired, after finishing fourth in the 1974 VATC Caulfield Cup won by Leilani, Gay Icarus had registered 12 wins, six seconds and five thirds from 42 starts and stakes of \$179,000 which wasn't a bad return for a horse sired by a \$130 service fee stallion.

The 1971 Caulfield Cup won by Gay Icarus boasted a quality field with the likes of Beau Sovereign (Caulfield Guineas), Igloo (Brisbane Cup), Gunsynd (every major mile along the East coast), Big Philou (1969 Caulfield Cup), Baghdad Note (Melbourne Cup) and Oncidon (Metropolitan Handicap).

From the outset, the two NZ gallopers, Brookby Hill and Han's Beau, set the pace. Passing the 800m, they led from Latin Knight, Oncidon. Igloo and Gay Icarus.

Mallyon was biding his time, waiting on Roy Higgins. Melbourne's Premier Jockey, to make his move on Igloo.

Higgins took Igloo forward and from 400 metres from home, he was up front, poised to take the lead. Camped on his tail was Gay Icarus.

Mallyon let Gay Icarus loose, and it was all over ...

Cyril's 'cheapie' complete 1% destroyed' the field, drawing away to defeat Igloo by two lengths with another six lengths to Big Philou who was followed by Gunsynd, Arctic Symbol and Tails.

At the post, Mallyon waved his whip in jubilation. 'Mick' claimed he was waving to his wife.

It was a expensive exercise as the jockey was fined by VRC Stewards who have maintained their dislike of jockeys showing any emotion at winning races.

New Zealand trainer Arthur Didham, who had prepared Igloo for the Caulfield Cup that year, was full of admiration for Gay Icarus.

As the field returned to the mounting enclosure, Arthur was heard to exclaim: "Fancy running into a champion like that!".

Gay Icarus was most certainly a Turf legend, and now the legend is dead. Long live the memory of a gallant thoroughbred.

Gay Icarus' Racing Record

TWO YEARS (1969-70) 4 starts, 1 2nd

(Second - VATC Chadstone H'cap (6f - Winner Message, head)

THREE YEARS (1970-71) 17 starts. 8 wins. 4 2nds, 1 3rd

WON - Werribee Intermediate H'cap (6'/4f) 7 st 13lb, G Garth, 8-1. Margin length to Enoch, Lunic Light.

WON - VATC Burwood H'cap (I Of) 8 st 5 lb, H White, 1-1 f. Margin 2 lengths to Rich Legend, Dario.

WON - VRC Blarney Stakes (I Of) 8 st 3lb, R Mallyon, 9/4f. Margin 1/4length to Trial And Error, Silver Sharpe.

WON - VATC St George Stakes (9f) 8 st 3 lb, R Mallyon, 6-4. Margin half neck to Rajah Sahib, Royal Show.

WON - VRC Australian Cup (I Of) 7 st 10 lb, R Mallyon, 9-4f. Margin half-head to Rajah Sahib, Tails.

WON - AJC Chipping Norton Stakes (t Of) 8 st 6 lb, R Mallyon, 7-4f. Margin 4 lengths to Arctic Symbol, Bluelough.

WON - AJC Australasian Champion Stakes (I Of) 8 st 7 lb, R Mallyon, 11-8f. Margin 2 lengths to Baguette, Gunsynd.

WON - AJC Queen Elizabeth Stakes (12f) 8 st41b, R Mallyon, 10-9f. Margin 5 lengths to Fileur, Arctic Symbol.

(Seconds - MVRC Cumberland H'cap (1 m - Winner Top Subject, long neck); MVRC Moonee Valley Stakes (1 m - Winner Eastern Court, neck); VRC Victoria Derby (12f - Winner Silver Sharpe, 3 lengths); VRC Queen Elizabeth Stakes (12f - Winner Fileur, head); Third - VRC Oxford H'cap (7f - Winner Abdul)

FOUR YEARS (1971-72) 6 starts, 3 wins, 1 3rd

WON - VATC Underwood Stakes (JOf) 9 st, R Mallyon, 1-2f. Margins 1 3/4 lengths to Lancelot, Baghdad Note.

WON - VATC Caulfield Stakes (9f) 9 st, R Mallyon, 1-2f. Margin long neck to Arctic Symbol, Big Philou.

WON - VATC Caulfield Cup (12f) 9 st 21b, R Mallyon, 7-2f. Margin 2 lengths to Igloo, Big Philou

(Third - VRC Craiglee Stakes - (1 m - Winner Dual Choice)

FIVE YEARS (1909-10) 5 starts. 1 3rd

(Third - VATC Caulfield Stakes (9f - Winner Gunsynd)

SIX YEARS (1973-74) 3 starts. 1 win, 1 2nd

WON - VRC Craiglee Stakes (1600m) 58.5 kg, RJ Hall, 5-1. Margin length to Golden Sam, Zambari.

(Second - VATC JJ Liston Stakes (7f - Winner Zambari, 6 lengths)

SEVEN YEARS (1974-75) 7 starts, 2 3rds

(Thirds - VRC Craiglee Stakes (1 m - Winner All Shot); VATC Underwood Stakes (10f - Winner Frozen Section)

(42 starts, 12 wins, six seconds and five thirds for \$179,790)
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