



The Upper Murray bred a winner: Patrobas

*'He's big but full of quality,
And sound in wind and limb;
From top to toe he's built to go—
You're sure to hear of him.*

*But breeding is a lottery,
And racing is the same;
And none can say how they will stall
Till tested in the game.'*

From *'The Colt'* in Albert Bartlett, *Kerani's Book: being a memorial volume of the occasional writings of the late Albert T Bartlett (1921)*.

Like his older half-brother Trafalgar, Patrobas was born on 6 November 1912 and was sired by Wallace out of Sizzle and bred by Peter and Walter Mitchell at Bringenbrong. Unlike Trafalgar who amid some controversy and rumour failed to bring home the 1910 Jubilee Melbourne Cup, Patrobas won the fifty-fifth Melbourne Cup in 1915. The event was held before a record crowd including a number of service and returned service personnel, many of whom had been injured.

Known for his choice of Biblical names for their horses and perhaps reflecting his aspirations for the colt, Peter Mitchell, undoubtedly chose the name Patrobas, meaning son of the father. Equally for similar reasons Edith Widdis (Patrobas's subsequent owner) might have either chosen or been happy to accept the name.



Image 1. Photograph of Patrobas by Albert Mildren



Wallace not only excelled as a winner in the latter years of the nineteenth century, but also is reputed to be one of Australia's best sires. Of the finest lineage, Wallace was sired by the popular 1890 Melbourne Cup winner, Carbine.

As racing enthusiast and Commander of the 1st Light Horse Brigade on Gallipoli, Brigadier Harry Chauvel rightly surmised 'Thousands of Australians in Alexandria or in the trenches will ask each other who won the Melbourne Cup. They will tell each other stories of the Cup races they saw, and the Cup winners they backed or should have backed, or would have backed if something had happened that did not'.¹ Chauvel had the Melbourne Cup results telegraphed over to Gallipoli. Chauvel was well aware of how racing news helps the spirits of those dealing with extraordinarily tough and challenging circumstances. There is no indication as to which horse Chauvel backed for the 1915, but those putting money on Patrobas would have been happy with the betting at 8 to 1, according to *The Peninsula Press* (Monday November 8th, 1915).

Perhaps disappointed that Patrobas was knocked down at auction for around £300 Walter Mitchell was already suffering from the ravages of Bright's Disease and would undoubtedly have wanted his horse to go to a good home. And so it was that Upper Murray racehorse and his Upper Murray trainer crossed the Great Dividing Range to Gippsland, beginning an extraordinary relationship between trainer and horse.



Image 2. Patrobas

Towards the end of his life in 1941 Charlie Wheeler described Patrobas as having 'a bulldog finish; his rider could send him anywhere and he would fight, as though for his life. I've never known a stouter fighter than Patrobas. He was certainly a chip off the old block - Carbine.'² Patrobas was the first Melbourne Cup winner to be owned by a woman, the redoubtable Mrs Edith Widdis from Rosedale in Gippsland. Bearing out Charlie Wheeler's description of Patrobas,

¹ 'The Melbourne Cup', *The Age* (3 November 1915) p.6.

² 'Wheeler, Charles (as told to J M Rohan) 'Patrobas inherited Carbine's fighting instincts, *Sporting Globe*, 25 October 1941, p.6, cited in Scanlon, Jo, *Rosedale's Patrobas: The remarkable story of the 1915 Melbourne Cup* (The Patrobas Working Group, Rosedale with assistance from the John Leslie Foundation, 2020) p.29.

jockey Bobbie Lewis remarked about the actual Melbourne Cup race 'Patrobas gave me one of my hardest rides and he was all out to win by half a neck from Westcourt'. Patrobas also holds the unbroken record of being the only horse to win the Caulfield Guineas, the Victorian Derby and the Melbourne Cup.

Reaching his zenith in 1915, Patrobas went on to win the VRC St Leger in 1916 and the Aspendale Park Handicap, the St George Stakes at Caulfield, the Essendon Stakes and the King's Plate in 1917 at Flemington, his career was haunted by injury. Rather like his half brother Trafalgar, Patrobas didn't enjoy great success at stud. Patrobas's biographer Jo Scanlon points out that mated with Royal Charm - a daughter of Comedy King who stole the 1910 Cup from Trafalgar, Patrobas and Royal Charm's progeny were excellent hurdlers. Success doesn't always come in the way it is wanted!

Just like his trainer Charlie Wheeler, Patrobas was never forgotten in the Upper Murray.

Honor Auchinleck

References:

Albert Bartlett, *Kerani's Book: being a memorial volume of the occasional writings of the late Albert T Bartlett* (1921)

Jo Scanlon, *Rosedale's Patrobas: The Remarkable Story of the 1915 Melbourne Cup* (Savannah's Design, 2020)

'Charlie Wheeler's Memories: Two Wins, Two Seconds in the Melbourne Cup: Coup that Failed, *The Mail* (Adelaide, SA) Saturday 29 October 1932, P.9.

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