

Podcast 25 – The Race That Stops a Nation – The Melbourne Cup

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 25 – The Race That Stops a Nation – The Melbourne Cup

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Hi,

The Melbourne Cup is the third richest horse race in the world. But to Australians, it is much more than that. It has a special place on the Australian calendar, even for those who are not interested in horse racing at all. It's hard to explain why that is. For example, I've never been interested in horse racing, neither has my wife. Yet we are both interested in the Melbourne Cup and we take part in the activities on Melbourne Cup day. I think perhaps it is because, in Australia, you grow up with the idea that the Melbourne Cup is a great Australian tradition. Everyone stops to watch or listen to the Melbourne Cup. That's just the way it is for Australians. It's become a part of Australian popular culture.

The race is run at Flemington in Melbourne, Victoria at 3.00pm on the first Tuesday in November. It was first run in 1861. So it's been around for a long time. If you live in Victoria, the Melbourne Cup day is a public holiday. Around 110,000 Melbournians go to Flemington to enjoy the day and cheer for their favourite horse. It's a great Melbourne Cup tradition that people dress up in their finest clothes. In particular, the ladies wear beautiful hats, something which is hardly ever

done anymore by women in Australia. But on Melbourne Cup day, hats are the go. And the more colour, the better.

(See [Fashion at the Melbourne Cup](#) for some great pictures.)

Some Interesting facts About the Melbourne Cup

The race is 3,200m long and is a handicap race for horses 3 years old and over. Handicap means that each horse carries a different weight in order to make the race more even. To measure the weight, you must include the jockey, riding gear and extra ballast. The amount of ballast (or lead in this case) depends on the horse's age, what races it has won and how much money it has won. The better the horse, the more weight it must carry.

24 horses can start the race, but only the first 10 past the post (or finish line) will win prize money. In 2012, the total prize money was \$6.2m. The winner received \$3.6m and the 10th horse received \$115,000. If you finished 11th or after, you got no prize money.

The prize money is distributed 85% to the horse's owner, 10% to the horse's trainer and 5% to the jockey. The owner also receives a gold trophy which is made with 1.65kg of gold. Wow!! The trophy is valued at \$150,000. Only 2 other races in the world have bigger prize money. The Dubai World Cup has \$US 10m prize money and the Japan Cup has \$US 6.7m prize money. Just in case there is a dead heat for the Melbourne Cup (which means that two horses are equal winners), they always have a second identical cup available at the finish. So each year, two trophies must be made.

See 2018 race video <https://youtu.be/wwjat1Ri8NI>

But why do they say that the Melbourne Cup is the race that stops a nation?

Well that's because, at 3.00pm on Melbourne Cup day, all around Australia, most people will be watching a TV or

listening to a radio to be part of the Melbourne Cup. I grew up in Western Australia, so I never had a public holiday like the Victorians. But nonetheless, we still watched the Melbourne Cup. Work stops all over the country. Classrooms stop. Businesses stop. Government stops. Many workplaces actually organize a special celebration, so that at around 3 pm everyone gathers in front of the nearest television, including the boss, and cheers on their favourite horse. There are usually drinks, something to eat and sometimes people even dress up. It's great fun.

Another tradition is the Melbourne Cup Sweep. Most workplaces will have a Melbourne Cup Sweep. I've even organized a sweep one year, when it seemed like no-one else was going to.

So here's how it works. There are 24 horses in the race, so you need at least 24 people to be involved, or perhaps some people could buy more than one ticket, if you have less than 24 people. You choose a ticket price, usually between \$1 and \$5. I think a \$2 sweep is the best. With 24 horses, that means there is \$48 to be given out as prizes. Each person in the sweep gets given a horse. The prizes go to those who have the first, second and third placed horses. First place might get \$25, second place \$15 and third place \$6, with last place getting their money back, \$2. That makes \$48.

Next, you draw up a list with 24 spots on it, numbered 1 to 24. Leave a space for the person's name, and also the horse they will be getting. Sell all the tickets and write each person's name down on the list. The person running the sweep needs to look after the money. No money, no ticket – that was my rule when I ran the sweep. Most people have a \$2 coin on them, so that's not a problem. When all the tickets are sold, get a list of the names of the 24 horses running in the Cup. The newspapers will have this. Write each horse's name down on a small piece of paper, fold each piece up and put them all into a box, a hat or some other container. Okay, now get the team together and draw out the horses' names. The first horse

drawn goes to the first person on the list, the second horse drawn goes to the second person on the list, and so on. Write down the horses' names on the list as you go. When all horses are drawn, you are ready for the race. Enjoy the Melbourne Cup.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it by clicking the comments link at the top of this story. You can leave your comment in English or in any language and I will translate it. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 25 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like. Your individual scores are not recorded.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

available = when something is ready to be used

ballast = extra weight put onto the horse, to make it easier for the other horses to keep up with it

calendar = a list of all the dates in a year, including what

things you will do on each date

celebration = when you are happy and have a party

cheer = to shout for your team or your best player

classrooms = where the students and teachers have their lessons

coin = money made out of metal (usually round in shape)

container = something which can hold other things. For example, a bucket, a bowl, a box, a hat.

dead heat = when two runners in a race finish exactly at the same time

distributed = to share something with others

draw out = to pull out one thing from a container which has many of those things. For example, a ticket

dress up = to put on special clothes

equal = the same

favourite = the one you like best

finest = the best

fold = to turn paper over on itself in order to make it smaller

gathers = to come together

handicap = when you slow the fastest one down, so that the race is closer or more even

hats are the go = hats are popular

idea = something new that you have thought of

identical = the same as something else

involved = when you agree to be part of an activity

jockey = the person who rides the race horse

lead = this is a very heavy metal. It is used as ballast (extra weight) on race horses

measure = to find out how heavy, or tall, or long something is

Melbourians = people who live in Melbourne

nation = another word for country. For example, Australia, China, Japan

neither = also not

nonetheless = in spite of, even though it is not expected

past the post = to go past the finish line

popular culture = the common things people do in a particular country

prize = the amount of money you get for winning a race

race = when many horses run together to see who can run fastest

received = when something is given to you

richest = the one with the most money

riding gear = the things which the jockey uses to ride the horse, such as the saddle

spots = a place on a list

sweep = where you buy a ticket so that you might win a prize

tradition = something which has been done for a long time

trophy = something you get when you are successful in a race. An example is a special cup

valued = when you find out how much something costs

Victorians = Australians who live in the State of Victoria

weight = how heavy something is