



*Life After
Life After
Racing*

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The passing of Subzero in August 2020 was an emotional occasion for Australian racing. Few racehorses before, or since, have touched the public as he did, reminding us of the important role certain thoroughbreds have played long after their racing lives are over.

When Subzero passed away last August he was rising 32, an old white horse with a fuzzy coat and swayback. His life had been good and full. From his Melbourne Cup win in 1992 to his 14 years as a racecourse pony, and all the years thereafter visiting schools and hospices with their young, old and infirm, Subzero had logged a long and unusual life and, at his death, it was obvious that racetrack stardom had been just the beginning.

"For most of these horses, the Melbourne Cup is their life-defining moment," says Adam Crettenden, race-caller and author of the 2016 published *Subzero: More Than A Melbourne Cup Hero*. "But for Subzero, it really was just the beginning. He fulfilled two more lasting careers, which arguably made him more famous."

Subzero's story began as a Magic Millions yearling, vintage 1988, when he went through the Gold Coast sale ring on 15 January 1990. He was the first horse to sell that morning, an invidious situation for his breeder, the late Sydney lawyer Brian Agnew. But Subzero was sold well by long-time auctioneer David Chester, going to trainer Lee Freedman for \$100,000. Victories in the South Australian Derby and Adelaide Cup, into a two-length, going-away win in the Melbourne Cup, promised Subzero a shelf-life well beyond racing. The rest is an oft-told story.

In the care of horseman Graham Salisbury, Subzero spent the rest of his

life in the public spotlight. He attended galas and accepted awards, and raised the profile of horse racing like none before or since. He made headlines for touching noses with terminally ill children, and appeared to possess an empathy for human suffering. Such was his fame later in life that television and newspapers reported when he was sick and, when he died, it was a story that carried nationally.

There will be few racing legacies like that belonging to the affable grey. Subzero's importance as a post-racing racehorse is unique. However, the sport has always held its heroes up to the light. Think Phar Lap, whose hide has been on public display in Melbourne since 1932, and whose life remains in the news cycle 88 years on. As far back as 1866, champion thoroughbreds were ending up in Australian museums. The skeleton of important colonial sire Sir Hercules is assembled in Sydney, while those of Carbine, Maltster and Heroic were also donated to public collections. In addition, concepts like the Australian Racing Hall of Fame do important work in preserving, and pushing, the legacies of important racehorses.

A little way outside of Melbourne, Living Legends is doing similar as a retirement home for exceptional racehorses, animals that crawled into the public psyche either by achievement (like *Might And Power*) or anecdote (like *The Cleaner*). "This place is all about connecting people and horses," says Dr Andrew Clarke, Living

Legends CEO and resident veterinarian. "We're maintaining memories here and, if you look at the horses we have, you can see that through their achievements they've touched the hearts of millions."

Living Legends is an important preserver of legacies. As the only commercial, open-to-the-public retirement home for racehorses in Australia, Clarke says the facility is replacing the disconnect between horses and everyday city folk. "The real testament to this place is the number of bucket-list visitors we get," he says, "people that have been diagnosed with terminal illnesses and just want to visit a racehorse. We've had people come down from Queensland just to see a Cup winner."

For 14 years, Living Legends has been an industry leader in racehorse 'afterlife'. "If you think about a horse like *Chief de Beers*, a Magic Millions yearling with a huge career in Queensland," Clarke says. "Chief was a police horse, and then he came here. For horses like him, it's like life after life after racing."

In the Living Legends cemetery, the legacies live on. *Chief de Beers* died in July and will be interred alongside the likes of *Might And Power*, *Doriemus* and *Better Loosen Up*. Such is racing that the sport's great heroes, even in death, are rarely forgotten. Subzero, meanwhile, was cremated and remains with the Salisbury family in country Victoria, an irreplaceable, faultless old horse if ever there were one.