



Dan O'Brien

The Original Owner of Carbine: Australasia's Forgotten Turf Legend
by Robert Wuchatsch

Dan O'Brien (1847-1916) was an Australasian turf legend during his lifetime, yet today few Australians or New Zealanders have heard of the original owner of Carbine.

Born in pre-gold rush Melbourne to Irish immigrants and orphaned before he was 14, Dan O'Brien grew up among horses. From birth to seven years old, this renowned jockey, trainer, owner, breeder and publican, son of a drover, lived less than 100 metres from Kirk's Bazaar, Melbourne's famous horse market. At 14, he was working in racing stables and by the time he celebrated his twenty-first birthday, he was living in New Zealand and had ridden winners in Melbourne, Sydney and Christchurch.

In 1867, after several years working for the Fisher brothers at the famous Maribyrnong stables in Melbourne, Dan left Australia to try his luck in New Zealand. There, in a long, colourful and successful career, he rode, trained, owned and bred many famous horses. Among these were Tambourini, Fishhook, Tasman, Rubina, Trenton, Sextant, Gipsy King, Carbine, Florrie, Loyalty, Multifid and Maranui, the last of whom was the first New Zealand-bred horse to win a Caulfield Cup. Although O'Brien grew to love New Zealand, he twice returned to live in Australia, eventually dying in Sydney in 1916, aged 69.

The most famous of Dan O'Brien's horses was Carbine, purchased as a highly bred but unattractive yearling at Auckland in January 1887, for 620 guineas. As a two-year-old he was undefeated in five races in New Zealand. In September 1888, O'Brien shipped Carbine to Australia, where after winning two more races, he was sold for 3,000 guineas to Donald Wallace, for whom he went on to win a further 26 races, including the 1890 Melbourne Cup.

In his outstanding Melbourne Cup win, Carbine carried the greatest ever winning weight (66.5 kg) and set an Australian record of 3 minutes 28¼ seconds that lasted for 15 years. He also ran in the largest field ever – 39. Yet today, when people argue about the greatest horse ever to race in Australia, most overlook Carbine for two later Melbourne Cup legends – Phar Lap and Makybe Diva. Unfortunately, Carbine raced before the era of film and television, so to most people today he simply never existed. Each of these three horses has dominated their respective centuries, but to now exclude Carbine from the debate is to have forgotten probably the greatest of them all.

In *Dan O'Brien: the Original Owner of Carbine: Australasia's Forgotten Turf Legend*, Robert Wuchatsch restores Dan O'Brien and Carbine to their rightful places in Australasian turf history.

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