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'Nup to the Cup': Protesters' concerns turn to injured horse Rostropovich

By [Charlotte Grieve](#)

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Less than two kilometres from the Flemington track, a very different race was under way.

Anti-racing activists dressed in bright costumes – some with fake blood staining their clothes – raced around Newmarket Reserve at 3pm.

"This is a race like no other," the race caller boomed over the microphone.

Victory was declared on creativity, not speed. Sydney costume designer Marty Jay took home \$150 in prizemoney. He was dressed as serial pest Peter Hore, who famously ran onto the track during the running of the 1997 Melbourne Cup.



Sydney costume designer Marty Jay took home \$150 in prizemoney for his efforts. LUIS ASCUI

About 400 animal rights activists boycotting the Melbourne Cup gathered in the park to 'Say Nup to the Cup' – an event organised by the Coalition of the Protection of Racehorses. There was vegan food and live music, as well as the novelty races.

Now in its seventh year, the protest was spurred on this time by the ABC's confronting recent expose on the mass slaughter of ex-racehorses at abattoirs and knackeries.



Racegoers cross paths with anti-racing protesters. LUIS ASCUI

"It's amazing. Biggest turnout we've ever had," said event organiser Kristin Leigh.

Scores of police watched on as protesters with placards lined Racecourse Road shouting "shame" at passing cars and playing a six-minute anti-racing song on loop.

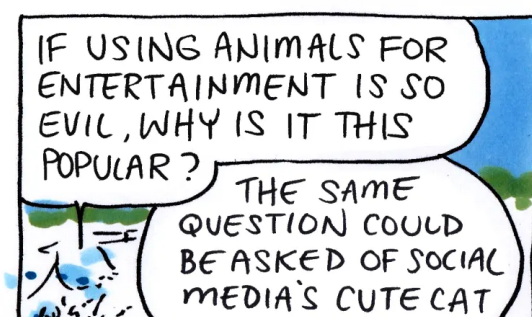
"You lose your money, they lose their lives. Horse racing is nothing more than an abattoir with a winning post," the boom-box blasted.

Tension ebbed and flowed as taunts were exchanged between dressed-up racegoers and placard-wielding activists but for the most part, the protest was peaceful and contained to the park.

But after the big race, protesters' concerns turned to five-year-old gelding Rostropovich, who finished last with a stress fracture in his pelvis.

"The Melbourne Cup might not be the only thing Rostropovich loses today – he could lose his life too," said Elio Celotto, founder of the Coalition for the Protection of Racehorses.

"Even if Rostropovich survives, Australian racing has already demonstrated clearly that 'horse racing kills'. Both on the track as these magnificent animals are pushed to breaking point.



"We seriously hope that Rostropovich doesn't become another Red Cadeaux – kept alive until the carnival hype dies down and then euthanised."

Protesters Alyssa Moore and Harry Ross were not "not surprised" by the news of Rostropovich's injury, but deeply saddened.



Illustration: Matt Golding

"It's really upsetting, really disappointing. I'm hoping it's able to pull through but the industry does not have a good track record with injuries," Ms Moore said.

Mr Ross also condemned the jockey who was fined for overusing the whip. "It's not OK to whip any other animal, so why is it OK to whip a horse? I doubt people at the races even care."

Mr Celotto discouraged disruptive protest tactics, such as those seen used by climate protesters in recent weeks.

"That's not what we do. We are a peaceful organisation and find the best way of getting the message through is through peaceful means and I think it's working," he said.

The hashtag 'NupToTheCup' was trending on Twitter throughout the day.



Protesters who boycotted the Melbourne Cup. LUIS ASCUI

Mr Celotto started the advocacy group in 2006 to lobby the racing industry for greater animal welfare regulations and a mandatory rehoming process for retired horses.

The volunteer-run group now has more than 63,000 Facebook members.

"This is just the start. There's a lot of work that needs to be done in years to come. We're committed to making the racing industry accountable," he said.





Protesters dressed in costume for the 'Say Nup to the Cup' event. LUIS ASCUI

Claire Stanley worked as a strapper when she was young. She bet on the Melbourne Cup and used to love watching the racehorses go swimming at Mordialloc beach. "I was brought up in that environment," she said.

She now sees the industry as "barbaric", yet she doesn't want to see an end to horse racing altogether.



Protesters and racegoers interact before the Melbourne Cup. LUIS ASCUI

"I just want the cruelty, the jiggers, the whips, what they do behind the scenes to these horses inflicting pain to end."

Ms Stanley has seen horses being put down before, but the report on ABC's 7.30 program left her "traumatised". "If it's got to be done, it's got to be done properly."

Peter Lalich, 55, who admits he's not the "typical vegan", hit the road before dawn on Tuesday from Shepparton to join the protest.

He started working as a builder, before turning his hand to tattooing. Most recently he worked in warehouses, but started an animal welfare advocacy group this year after seeing his neighbour's cat mauled by a stray dog.

"When I saw the look on that cat's face everything changed for me," Mr Lalich said.

Now, he spends his spare time advocating for animal welfare and wants to see an end to racing horses, as well as greyhounds. "I'm against any form of animal exploitation."



Anti-racing protester Peter Lalich. JOE ARMAO

Animal Justice Party MP Andy Maddick, who has called for a royal commission into the racing industry, joined the protest after tearing up two racing season passes sent to him by Victorian Racing Club.

"I believe every other MP should do the same thing," Mr Maddick said. "We shouldn't be given free gifts by an industry that is mired by gambling and corruption and the death of innocent animals."



Charlotte Grieve



Charlotte is a reporter for The Age.