

The Open Steeplechase

Banjo Paterson

I had ridden over hurdles up the country once or twice,
By the side of Snowy River with a horse they called 'The Ace'.
And we brought him down to Sydney, and our rider Jimmy Rice,
Got a fall and broke his shoulder, so they nabbed me in a trice —
Me, that never wore the colours, for the Open Steeplechase.

'Make the running,' said the trainer, 'it's your only chance whatever,
'Make it hot from start to finish, for the old black horse can stay,
'And just think of how they'll take it, when they hear on Snowy River
'That the country boy was plucky, and the country horse was clever.
'You must ride for old Monaro and the mountain boys to-day.'

'Are you ready?' said the starter, as we held the horses back,
All ablazing with impatience, with excitement all aglow;
Before us like a ribbon stretched the steeplechasing track,
And the sun-rays glistened brightly on the chestnut and the black
As the starter's words came slowly, 'Are — you — ready? Go!'

Well, I scarcely knew we'd started, I was stupid-like with wonder

Till the field closed up beside me and a jump appeared ahead.

And we flew it like a hurdle, not a baulk and not a blunder,

As we charged it all together, and it fairly whistled under,

And then some were pulled behind me and a few shot out and led.

So we ran for half the distance, and I'm making no pretences

When I tell you I was feeling very nervous-like and queer,

For those jockeys rode like demons; you would think they'd lost their senses

If you saw them rush their horses at those rasping five foot fences —

And in place of making running I was falling to the rear.

Till a chap came racing past me on a horse they called 'The Quiver',

And said he, 'My country joker, are you going to give it best?

Are you frightened of the fences? does their stoutness make you shiver?

Have they come to breeding cowards by the side of Snowy River?

Are there riders on Monaro? ——' but I never heard the rest.

For I drove the Ace and sent him just as fast as he could pace it,

At the big black line of timber stretching fair across the track,

And he shot beside the Quiver. 'Now,' said I, 'my boy, we'll race it.

You can come with Snowy River if you're only game to face it,

Let us mend the pace a little and we'll see who cries a crack.'

So we raced away together, and we left the others standing,
And the people cheered and shouted as we settled down to ride,
And we clung beside the Quiver. At his taking off and landing
I could see his scarlet nostril and his mighty ribs expanding,
And the Ace stretched out in earnest and we held him stride for stride.

But the pace was so terrific that they soon ran out their tether —
They were rolling in their gallop, they were fairly blown and beat —
But they both were game as pebbles — neither one would show the feather.
And we rushed them at the fences, and they cleared them both together,
Nearly every time they clouted, but they somehow kept their feet.

Then the last jump rose before us, and they faced it game as ever —
We were both at spur and whipcord, fetching blood at every bound —
And above the people's cheering and the cries of 'Ace' and 'Quiver',
I could hear the trainer shouting, 'One more run for Snowy River.'
Then we struck the jump together and came smashing to the ground.

Well, the Quiver ran to blazes, but the Ace stood still and waited,

Stood and waited like a statue while I scrambled on his back.

There was no one next or near me for the field was fairly slated,

So I cantered home a winner with my shoulder dislocated,

While the man that rode the Quiver followed limping down the track.

And he shook my hand and told me that in all his days he never

Met a man who rode more gamely, and our last set to was prime,

And we wired them on Monaro how we chanced to beat the Quiver.

And they sent us back an answer, 'Good old sort from Snowy River:

Send us word each race you start in and we'll back you every time.'

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