



MELBOURNE'S SPRING FASHION FIESTA

As Australia gears up for its biggest annual sporting event – the Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival – we look at one of the carnival's most popular events: the Fashion Stakes.

Written and photographed by **Richard Shaw**

Every year Angela Menz clocks up close to 20,000 kilometres travelling from her home in Canberra to Australia's major horse-racing carnivals. Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, the Gold Coast, and a number of country carnivals – they're all on Angela's yearly hit list. But if there's one annual event she truly looks forward to it's the Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival. This is Australia's biggest sporting event as on the first Tuesday in November some of the world's finest thoroughbreds do battle in 'the race that stops the nation'.

Well over 100,000 jubilant racegoers will be at Melbourne's Flemington Racecourse as these equine athletes and their pint-sized jockeys thunder along the track in the world's richest two-mile handicap. While some 40 races will be run at Flemington over the four days of the carnival, Angela freely

admits – the Emirates Melbourne Cup aside – she's not likely to see many of them. And yet well before this 25-year-old steps anywhere near Flemington she will have spent weeks and countless late nights meticulously preparing for this moment.

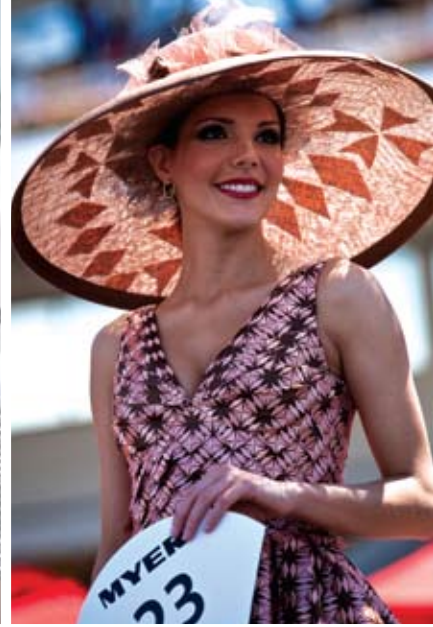
Angela is one of countless racegoers lured to the racetrack more for what's happening behind the grandstands than out front. Specifically, it's Angela's undying love for racing fashion that draws her through the turnstiles. Fashion and fine style has long been interwoven between the 'Sport of Kings' and the upper classes of Europe, but for the past 40 years Australia's racing industry has been unashamedly marketing this element to the masses. And it seems to be proving a winner – each year over the carnival's four days 400,000 (around 50 per cent of them women) descend on Flemington. "Girls love any excuse to dress up and the Melbourne Cup

Above: The Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival, which runs this year from October 31 to November 7, is an Australian and international highlight on the horse-racing and fashion calendar.

Right: Angela Menz, Lisa Tan and Laura Gleich love to compete in the Fashion on the Field (FOTF) competitions. The three of them became friends thanks to their interest in FOTF events.



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offers the perfect opportunity to show your own sense of style,” asserts Angela.

Fleur Salisbury, the Victoria Racing Club’s (VRC) head of marketing, says the Emirates Melbourne Cup has become a unique cultural event, with an alluring mix of the very best of Melbourne – fine fashion, food, wine, sport, culture and more. “Melbourne – the city and its people – comes alive, like no other time during the year,” she says.

As you cast an eye across Flemington’s sprawling crowds it’s the fashion that makes an immediate impact. The men are resplendent in their finest suits and traditional racing wear, but this vista is truly dominated with rich hues of colour and beautifully dressed women with exquisite hats and matching accessories. Today this racing carnival is the nation’s premier sporting moment, but it is equally synonymous as Australia’s largest outdoor fashion event.

For most women just dressing up and having fun is the order of the day, but Angela’s penchant for racing fashion runs much deeper. Each year she attends more than 20 major race days around Australia, painstakingly planning and making an outfit for each one. This infatuation Angela says began when her father introduced her to horse-racing at a young age. “I think he was hoping I’d fall in love with the racing, but my interest quickly drifted towards the contest in the fashion stakes rather than on track,” she jokes.

More than just looking great, Angela’s major aim is to impress the judges at the Fashions On The Fields (FOTF) competitions. An immensely popular concept at racing carnivals all across Australia and rapidly spreading to other major racing carnivals around the globe, here racegoers – both women and men – vie to be recognised as the best or most stylish dressed and win big prizes. Undoubtedly the big daddy of all



FOTF competitions is the Emirates Melbourne Cup, enticing quality entrants from all over Australia and overseas, as well as designers and milliners for the separate invitee-only competitions – all competing before a contingent of celebrity judges.

Lisa Tan is another who travels far each year to show her wares at the Melbourne Cup Carnival FOTF. Originally from Perth, the past few years has seen this 26 year old ritually make the trip to Melbourne from London, where she manages a Fashion Website. After second place in the 2007 Emirates Melbourne Cup Day FOTF, this June Lisa scored a major coup when her fashion flare saw her claim the ‘Style on the Downs’ competition at the UK’s Investec Epsom Derby. Despite winning a brand-new car at one of the world’s oldest and most prestigious racing events, Lisa maintains the Emirates Melbourne Cup’s FOTF is unrivalled.

Top left: The Emirates Melbourne Cup is the world’s richest two-mile handicap race.

Top centre: Entrants line up before the judges in the FOTF competition.

Top right: A contestant shows off her matching outfit.

Above: Hats are an integral fashion accessory for race day and finding the right milliner is all important to one’s winning chances.

Above left: Angela Menz attends more than 20 race days around Australia and painstakingly plans an outfit for each one.

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Below: Lisa Tan is a seasoned campaigner. She came in second place at the 2007 Melbourne Cup Carnival FOTF and this year claimed the 'Style on the Downs' title at England's Epsom Derby.

Below right: Professional make-up is available at the L'oréal powder room.

Bottom: There's also room at the Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival for some fun with 'alternative' fashion.

"The standard of fashion reflects the standard of racing," she argues. "It's where the best of the best come to show what they've got."

Melbourne girl Laura Gleich, a previous Emirates Melbourne Cup FOTF and Dubai World Cup Millinery Award winner, agrees the Flemington event is hard to top. "The magnitude of entrants and the competition is amazing," the 24 year old says. This seriousness means racegoers like Angela, Lisa and Laura – who have all become good friends after meeting at FOTF competitions – invest an incredible deal of time and energy on dressing up for the Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival.

The inspiration for that perfect outfit often comes after hours of obsessively trawling through countless fashion magazines, eyeing the latest trends and

working out what will work for the races. High in creativity and individuality, racing fashion also balances age-old rules of elegance, style, femininity and sophistication along with conservatism. "The aim is to look ladylike and well-coordinated – it doesn't have to match, but it has to look like it all belongs together," explains Lisa.

Lisa, Angela and Laura source their own materials and make their own outfits. For this year's Spring Racing Carnival in Melbourne, Angela has no less than eight outfits planned. Of course the hat is integral to racing fashion and Angela has become so adept at making her own unique race hats she now has a career as budding milliner, making hats for other people under her own name. What began from an inability to find the 'right hat' for her outfits has developed into something she truly loves to do. "My hats were getting lots of attention, so this career seemed a logical step," she explains.

The VRC estimates that over A\$34 million was spent last year on fashion and personal grooming for the Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival. A love for racing fashion might seem an expensive hobby for some, but Lisa insists that her own penchant – travel aside – costs her under A\$1,000 each year. "The shoes and bags are probably the most expensive part of the outfit, because they're the parts I can't make myself," she explains. Conversely, Angela is a little more coy on declaring how much she spends on her own passion. "I'm happy in ignorant bliss," she quips.

With so much FOTF experience between them, Angela, Lisa and Laura have countless ideas on how to turn a few heads and perhaps even impress the fashion judges at this year's Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival. "Dress to suit your physique," insists Laura. "Don't wear anything too short and definitely wear a smile."

Lisa advises that if you're buying off-the-rack you should try to customise the outfit so it will have a touch of difference. "Bold accessories often do the trick," she argues. "Consult a milliner to make a hat to match your outfit and you'll have something truly individual."

Angela believes the overall look is extremely important, but sometimes breaking those unwritten racing fashion rules can certainly impress. "Wear what looks good on you," she asserts. "My biggest payoffs have come from taking a fashion risk and daring to wear something out of the ordinary." ❖

The Emirates Melbourne Cup Carnival runs from October 31 to November 7. For information on The Cup or the Fashions On The Field competition visit melbournecup.com

