

## Roadsters

The Roadster was an active, robust horse with excellent action – and good looking. Roadsters are an important ancestor of the Waler. They were immensely popular in the nineteenth century, when road surfaces and carriage design had undergone radical improvements.



*Tarridale, Mr. Dowlin's Roadster stallion, Mildura Show.  
The Australasian, October 1912.*

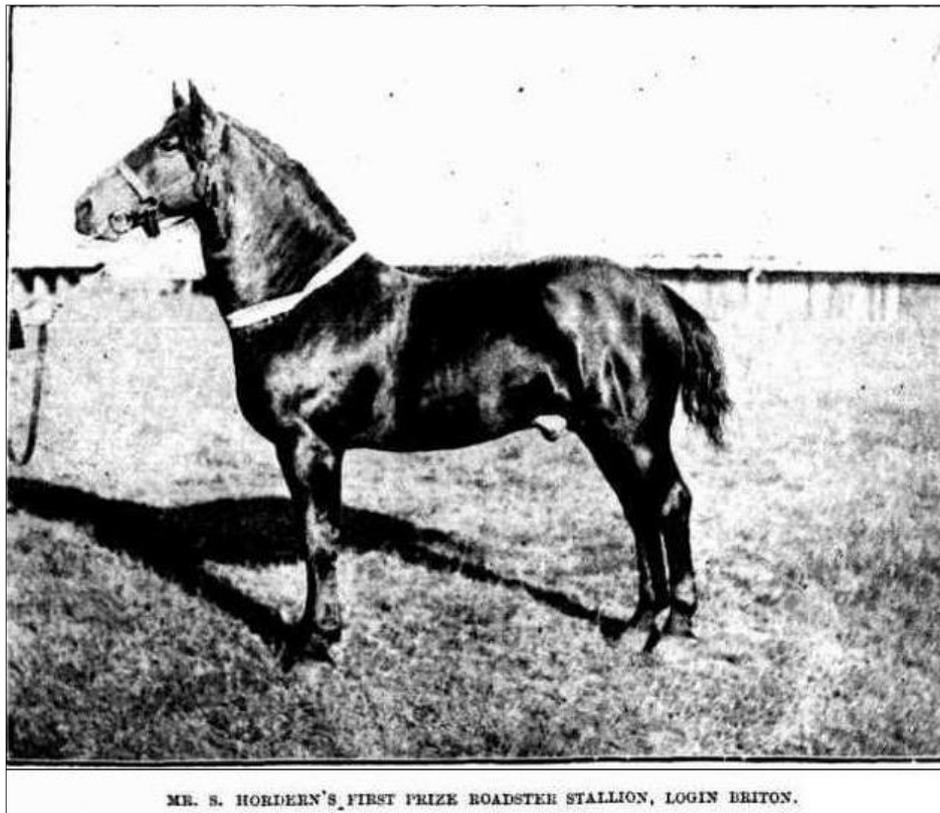
It was the height of fashion to have a good roadster to drive – better a pair, for the dedicated it was a four-in-hand team - some had teams of six. It was considered an important part of a being gentleman to be a skilful whip (driver.) As coach horses were bred to be strong and active, so were Roadsters.

There was a revolution in horse breeding in the nineteenth century. Fabulous breeds were being crossed and created – all utility horses.

The fascinating thing was the Roadster had to be good looking, with excellent action – as well as useful. Road racing was immensely popular among young bloods – over immense distances. A man was judged by his horse, it had to be the best. Stylish and strong.

Roadsters developed from the harness horses of farmers, used to take goods to market. Lincolnshire Blacks, Norfolk Trotters (later called Norfolk Roadsters) and Yorkshire Trotters (Roadsters) were three types of early Roadster. They were strong, the Lincolnshire Blacks not high – about 14.2

hands - and needed to get along at a good rate with a big load, up hill and down dale. Roads were bad and strength was needed to haul through mud, ruts, potholes, dust. A worker that was essentially a road horse, of unflappable temperament and incredible bone. They in turn, had the blood of the chariot ponies of old Briton in their veins – Boadicea was a chariot driver par excellence. The chariot ponies had upright necks. And there was a good dash of The Black Horse of England (a heavy draught-like knight's and farmer's horse.) All these breeds, like the Roadster itself, are now extinct.



*Mr. S. Horder's first prize Roadster stallion, Login Briton.  
Sydney Mail and NSW Advertiser, April 1898.*

When 'blood' horses became fashionable in Charles II's time, it was discovered that crossing these lean, light Eastern horses with the heavier farmers horses made an ideal roadster – ridden or driven it was strong with endless stamina, with the iron feet and legs and steady character of its farming progenitor. The Norfolks in particular developed into a fast handy road horses for travellers and young bucks. The Roadster came into being, and was the foundation of the Thoroughbred. Yes, the 'founding' three stallions were eastern, but the mares? And there were many more stallions than three. Great Roadsters like Wroot's Pretender is rightly claimed as an ancestor of the Thoroughbred and the Hackney. The famous Shales lines were all Roadsters entered into the TB studbook, the Bay Bolton's had a

touch of eastern blood in primarily Roadster blood. Fireaway and the mighty Bellfounder lines were Roadster.

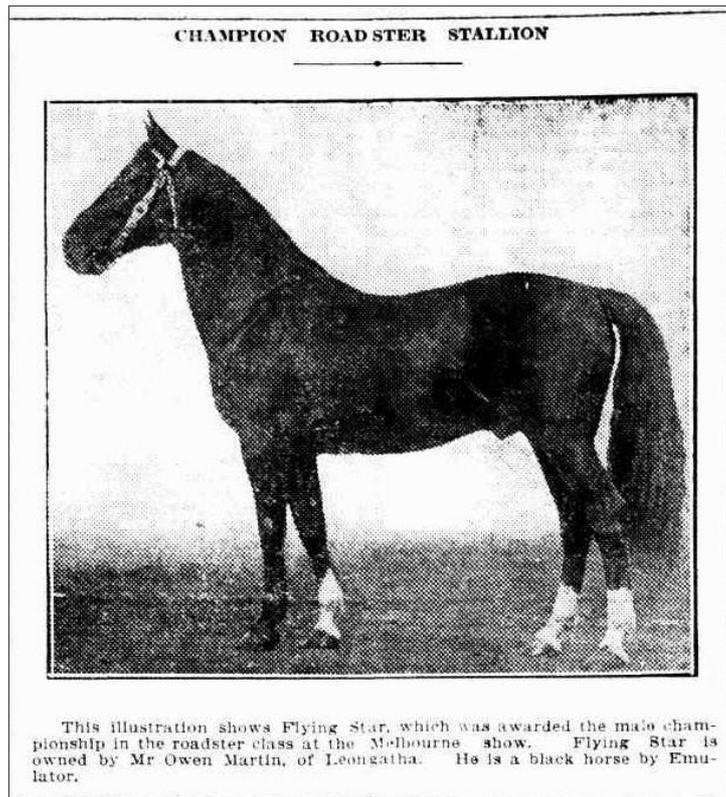
The Norfolk Phenomenon line of Roadsters is famous; he went to the continent and influenced many breeds from Russia to Poland to Hungary to Prussia, as did the Roadster Stuart. The Orlov Trotter of Russia, a beautiful breed, owes a lot to the Roadster. So does the Furioso of Hungary. The Welsh Cob owes its stocky build and good neck/head carriage to the Roadster. The Tori horse of Estonia benefitted from the Roadster. The Gelderland of Holland. The Oldenburg. They went to Sweden.

Countless Roadsters of all the great lines came to Australia. A good Roadster took your breath away with its upstanding impression of beauty and power. They were bred to be taller than their little nuggety farm cart ancestors, and faster. The Lincolnshire Blacks, still a farmer's horse however, did take delight in racing Roadsters when met on the road – and pulling a heavy load, often held their own!

Young men and women wanted Roadsters. It was a daily activity to be seen driving your magnificent Roadsters. This was entrenched in society when Australia was colonised and all aspired to such fine steeds. The best way to get about a giant country before motors? By horse. In Australia anyone with a bit of effort could get a decent horse. All who so desired, could keep and drive beautiful Roadsters. All shows had classes for Roadsters.

They were bred with Thoroughbreds, ponies, draughts, to get India horses. All the great India traders who also bred horses, used Roadster stallions and mares, and showed them successfully. Sir William Clarke imported many. His son Sir Rupert had several for breeding for India, the artillery, hunters, hacks and driving horses. Lots of people imported them, and bred them. Too many to list.

It was not uncommon to find some Roadsters registered as Thoroughbreds here, as they were in England. The Australian Stud Book use to list carriage class wins at shows these horses had to their credit, not race wins, as they were not raced – except in Corinthian races – those for gentlemen not considered as common racing, and rarely on Thoroughbreds. Roadsters often won the big show classes for horses best for getting Remounts. As well as harness horses, they made top hunters.



*Flying Star, Champion Roadster stallion at Melbourne Royal.  
Weekly Times, October 1916.*

In the 1880's the term "Hackney" was chosen as a breed name for Roadsters and a society formed. It was the beginning of the end of the Roadster. More stylish, high stepping horses - used in cities - were bred over the next decades. It was forbidden to canter or gallop horses in towns and cities but one could get about at a trot - hence Roadsters had become immensely fast at the trot. Many however wanted not speed, but style - the high stepping Hackney which "went up and down in one place" was a safe conveyance in the city, but too slow for a big place like Australia. The Hackney came here but they did not take over from the immensely popular Roadster until after the era of the horse was past - when people were buying for looks, not utility. They were derided as "naildrivers" here for their up and down on the same spot action. By the 1890's some harness horses were referred to as Hackney-Roadsters.

Roadsters were popular in Australia until the 1920's. After that they disappeared. This is what happens when no studbooks are formed. The invention of the motor saw many breeds disappear before people realised it was too late. The term 'trotters' rarely applied to Roadsters, and were shown in different classes at shows. Usually these were Standardbreds of American extraction, or Thoroughbreds that were good trotters (a surprising amount).

Harness horses were called trotters as a collective noun by some, but a horseman would not call a Roadster a trotter – a trotter being of far lighter build and little style, primarily a professional racing animal.



*Kentucky, a champion Roadster stallion.  
The Bendigo Independent, October 1914.*

These days Hackney numbers are dropping and conservation genetics are being used, in a losing battle, to try and keep the real Hackney lines of old, which were the Roadster genes, rather than the extremes inbred for exaggerated action. One can see in a good Hackney its Roadster ancestry. The Roadster went extinct because no studbook was formed. Their lines were absorbed into newer breeds - Hackney, Thoroughbred, Standardbred, Morgan and Waler. There is a creditable theory Justin Morgan was Arab x Roadster.

Many Waler breeders for India such as Sir Rupert Clarke, Alf Glasscock, Charlie Gidney, countless others, showed Roadster stallion used to get India horses. One of Rupert's named Bounding Willow was so magnificent - with such speed and style - that crowds rushed to the rails at Melbourne Royal every time it was trotted around. Like angels, their feet never seemed to touch the ground. Roadsters were used to breed coach horses here as their feet and legs and wind was legendary.

Roadster stallions went to the outback onto big stations for breeding India horses. Hackney were not used to breed Walers. Their 'naildriver' action was not desired for military or stock horses. Roadsters however, were ideal. A good Hackney was a magnificent horse nonetheless, and was a Roadster selectively bred to be lighter and with more pronounced action.



*Mr. C.H. Angus' imported roadster stallion, Shirley Free Lance.  
Critic (Adelaide), September 1911.*

Roadsters that came here were good big horses, usually about 16 hands. Fireworks, son of imported Fireaway was advertised at stud near Portland, Vic, in 1877 and stood 16 and half hands, this was the usual height. Foaled 1873 he went back to Shales and Norfolk cobs, an extensive and lengthy pedigree. The Roadster Confidence among others stood in the Maitland area 1870's-80's where many India horses were bred. Many advertised at stud and as travelling stallions throughout Australia.

Roadsters were among the horses taken to Undoolya by Ned Bagot in 1873, then Tennant and Love about 1880. The incredible Alfred Giles included roadster blood in the horses he took there – the first in most areas of the NT.

Horse breeder Tom Pearce of Willeroo, near Katherine, N.T. bought a Roadster stallion in 1905. His name was Young Woldsman, by Woldsman, a Roadster imported from England. Young Woldsman was bred in South

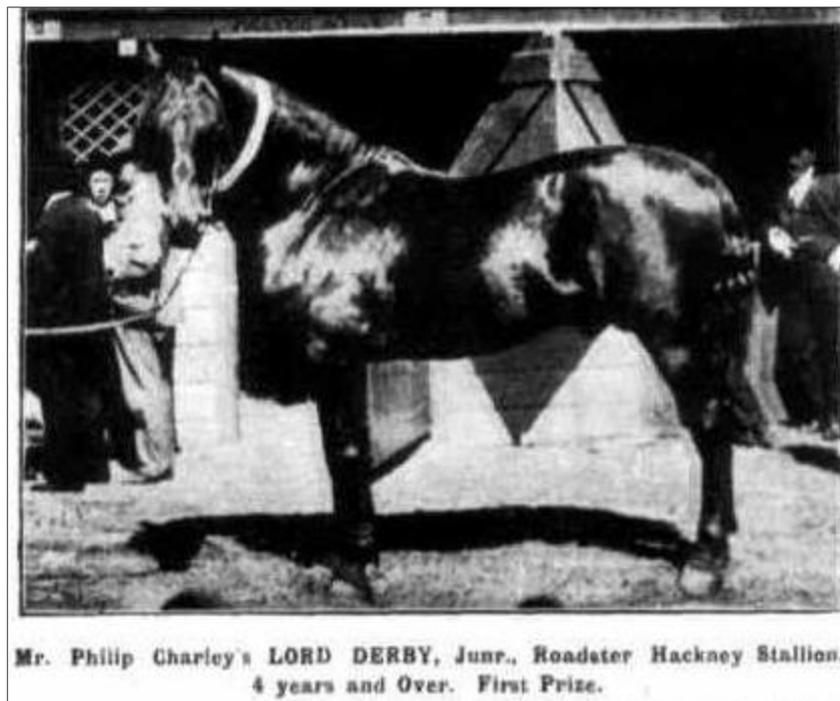
Australia. Tom bred for the India trade, and his horses were sought after as stockhorses.

Mr. Porter imported the dark bay Roadster named King Frederick The Great in 1901 and put onto his station Glenbrook at Victor Harbour, South Australia.

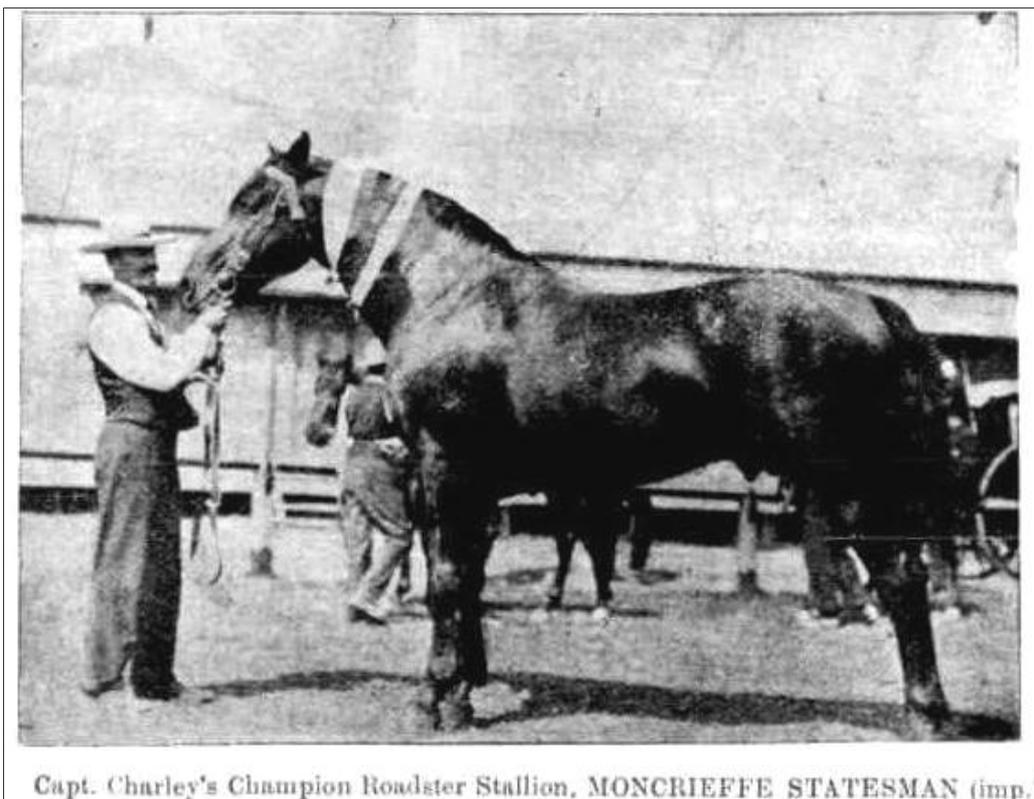
In 1903 Osmond and Panton imported a 'powerful black Roadster stallion' on the steamer Tsinan, from England, and put him on Elsey station, N.T. to breed India horses. Osmond had bought Elsey from Dr. Browne, and Giles' good horses ran there.

1902 the Roadster Sandwing was bought for his Victoria River station by Mr. Bradshaw. Sandwing was of Thomas Elder's breeding and Bradshaw bought him to get India horses.

Probably more am just adding these as sighted. Roadsters owned by India traders who also bred too numerous to list.



*Philip Charley's Roadster Hackney stallion Lord Derby.  
Charley, who made his fortune founding the Broken Hill Co., imported many  
good Coacher and Roadster horses, and Cleveland Bays.  
.The Dubbo Liberal and MacQuarie Advocate, April 1901.*



Capt. Charley's Champion Roadster Stallion, MONCRIEFFE STATESMAN (imp.)

*Philip Charley's Roadster stallion Moncrieffe Statesman.  
Guyra Argus, April 1906.*

We were lucky Walers were developed when all the breeds were at their height of perfection. From the Roadster the Waler gained its upright neck carriage perfect for the cavalry horse, its good safe action (a Roadster had high action so it would not trip at speed over rough ground), stamina, excellent hooves and legs, strong shoulders, tremendous bone and good temperament. Bearing in mind the Thoroughbred was created from Roadsters too, another source of Roadster genes. The Thoroughbred was the main ancestor of the Waler, and it's wise to remember what a complicated set of genes this 'breed' was – and which breeds were in its genesis.

Notes :

Early sporting motor vehicles were called Roadsters after these horses.

The Tori Horse <http://www.torihorse.com.au/tori-history/>

The term Roadster now means a type of harness class in America.

Janet Lane (Copyright 2017)