

Tribute to jockeys who made ultimate sacrifice

RACING: A new book out this Christmas shines the spotlight on a side of racing not often explored.

Their Last Ride – the Fallen Jockeys of Australia provides a compelling insight and story on every Australian jockey who has tragically lost their life riding a racehorse.

More than 600 pages cover the 938 Australian jockeys who have died while racing. That includes 150 from Queensland and about 50 from the Brisbane and Bundamba areas.

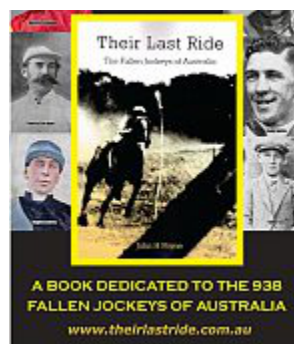
Author John Payne said the book was not intended to reflect grief or sorrow on the part of those who have given their lives to riding racehorse “but rather reflect on them as individuals and to honour them for their ultimate sacrifice each has made”.

Their Last Ride features the early days of racing in Australia when 35 riders had died by the end of 1879 in Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia and NSW.

Payne recounts how racing in this period, and for some years later, was conducted by virtually anybody – hotels, bookmaker groups, charities benefiting hospitals, ambulance brigades, or local communities, with rough tracks laid out behind hotels and/or on private lands.

There was no outside fencing, normally nil or little inside running rails, no ambulance or medical staff, no casualty rooms and often, miles from any sort of hospital.

Much racing was also done in those days over hurdles and steeples of solid construction, and in many cases quite severe,



with track surfaces varying greatly in quality.

With little supervision, children as young as 11 or 12 years were riding in races, with younger aged children engaged in riding trackwork.

Payne said vast numbers of jockey deaths continued until the mid-1920s, at which stage racing generally came under the regulations of major racing clubs, such as the Australian Jockey Club in NSW and the Victoria Racing Club in Victoria. They were given charge of approving courses for racing, licensing participants, improving safety, empowering stewards with given more authority.

That included enforcing the wearing of skull caps, which resulted in a rapid decline in the numbers of jockeys being killed and/or seriously injured.

However, despite all of the necessary adjustments, nearly 950 jockeys have lost their lives in racing-related incidents.

After eight years of painstaking research, Payne has completed his record of those lost lives, in memory of them.

The book is available online at www.theirlastride.com.au