

Grim History at Epsom

Ideally, each Nostalgia column would relate events from the same month of a previous year that ended in the same number as the present one. Thus, you should be reading “Two Novembers” this month instead of last. In the New Year, we will renew efforts to coordinate better, but one must maintain enough flexibility to utilize surprise blessings. This month, that was two choice old magazines — July 8, 1911 and June 28, 1913 issues of *Rider and Driver*. These were sent by Cynthia Kelly, one of several friends who watches for references to Belle Beach for me. *Rider and Driver* was small — at least at that time — a weekly established in 1890 to report on equine sports. Among offerings in '13 were: details of the new (first held in 1907) International Horse Show at Olympia in London, surely the century's most



Sweet Briar in action.

glamorous gathering of horses and riders; reports on racing at Epsom Downs; new skinny on coaching competitions; and an amazing amount of attention to the dogs of horse people. There was much more, including data on the relationship between Belle Beach and one of her most noted clients, Miss Dorothy Webb of Greenwich, Conn. But in addition, came details of a stunningly newsworthy event in the struggle for women's suffrage. In 25 years of doing this column, I've found few times when history from the big world interfaced with horse world history to such a dominating degree.

Taking the latter first to make sure it gets its due: At the Epsom Derby, which in 1913 conflicted with dates of the Olympia show, a woman whom the *Rider and Driver* writer termed “a crazy and

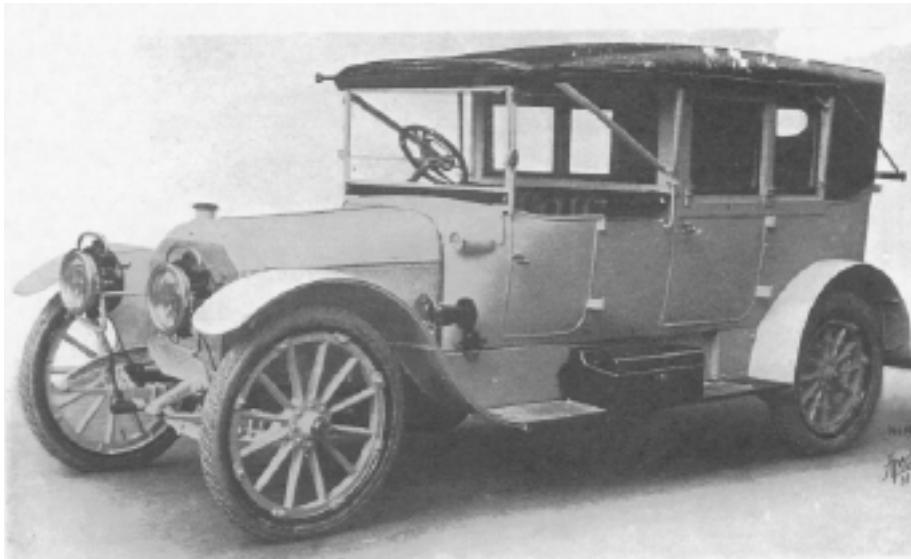


Miss Dorothy Webb's Chesterfield, Miss Belle Beach, up.

fanatic suffragette” leaped from behind the railing and grabbed the king's entry, Anmer, by his bridle, thus “throwing him” in the writer's description. Witnesses said he stumbled sideways, unseating his jockey and then fell on him, after hitting the suffragette with his chest, spinning her for several feet over the turf. A picture showing the result is taken from too far away to show much detail, but Anmer is unmistakably on his rider, from the hips down, and both seem to have a strange, flat appearance, as if they had been trampled by the 11 horses by then ahead of them on the track. The culprit lies a very short distance away, her arms raised, as if seeking help. A small paragraph of explanation says that she died of injuries sustained there and reminds readers of a similar recent event starring a man who claimed to be a suffragette sympathizer; he had attacked a horse called Tracery, possession of August Belmont. *Rider and Driver* does not give the names of these offenders, declaring that the main issue is that such violent people are permitted to run at large. The king was present — with a party of European royalty from several other countries — to see his horse and rider downed, and Belmont was at sea, en route to the Olympia.

A few relevant facts: the suffragette, who died two days later from head injuries, having never regained consciousness, was named Emily Wilding Davison. She held a bachelor's degree from London University and had first-class honors from Oxford in English Language and Literature. She had been in the suffrage movement for years, was among the thousands of women imprisoned repeatedly for their actions and among those who were forcibly fed when they staged hunger strikes. She had participated in countless peaceful demonstrations, vigils, parades, and other give-us-the-vote strategies.

From all this, says a writer in a book called *Shoulder to Shoulder*, she had concluded that authorities would never listen to reasonable pleas, that the drama of a human sacrifice was necessary. One wonders if she considered whom she might take with her, for the king's jockey (a man nowhere identified beyond the name Jones) died a few feet away from her on the track. Whether the king's horse, Anmer lost his life as a result of Miss Davison's demonstration was nowhere reported that I could find.



Mr. George Johnson's 50-horsepower Mercedes, with touring landaulette body manufactured by The Holbrook Company.

He was shown being led away by policemen, and he was holding up his left front leg. One race report in the 1913 magazine lists him as having come in sixth in a race earlier that day.

Pictures of Miss Davison's funeral cortege showed block after block of London streets packed solidly from curb to store fronts with people the book described as "hushed and reverent." Her body was sent to her mother's rural home for burial.

Did her gesture help the cause of votes for women, perhaps by inspiring more martyrs? Not noticeably, for not until 1918 was legislation passed that the suffragettes hailed as partial victory. Probably women's greatest boost came from the zeal with which they turned to helping win WW I. They did everything from serving as nurses and ambulance drivers to producing food, doing factory duty and a great deal of other taxing, unladylike work. They received such wide and admiring public appreciation for their contributions that few legislators could be so stupid and callous as to continue trying to lock them into second class citizenship. If Emily Davison could have foreseen the future, she and Mr. Jones would not have needed to die when they did, and Anmer would not have had to suffer for this particular human cause. Any woman who does not bother to vote should sometimes think of these three.

All of the above leaves little room for other stories in the '13 issue of *Rider and Driver*. We will go back to them another time, but here are a few of the top items: The coliseum at Olympia, whose dimensions are not given, had been provided

with a ceiling of 20,000 yards of light blue silk, draped to suggest a cloudless summer sky.

Cost of putting on the show would be more than \$250,000 of which \$60,000 was devoted to prizes and \$50,000 to elaborate decorations which included masses of "rare and gorgeous flowers and plants."

The only opening ceremony was simply the sounding of a coaching horn in the great arena followed by Alfred G. Vanderbilt's driving through the gates with a dashing team of bays and browns. This was the Marathon's winning team. Vanderbilt also took fourth, with a team and coach driven by his manager, Charles Wilson. Prominent American Judge William H. Moore, who had won in '11 and '12 over Vanderbilt, did not place. In '11 his team had been in perfect condition when they finished, in contrast to Vanderbilt, who arrived 25 minutes later than Moore with his off leader "looking very distressed and tucked up, not pulling as he should." The *Rider and Driver* writer reminded readers that the marathon was not a race; judging was on how fit the teams were after covering the 12 miles from Hampton Court to the Olympia arena at a businesslike rate of speed. These two drivers had been competing in the U.S. for several years, seeming to take turns at winning. But wouldn't it be fascinating to know what it cost these gentlemen to repeatedly transport their teams and vehicles — often more than one team — across the ocean along with all the employees necessary for care-taking? What could possibly be more interesting than the oddments of history?

And where did Belle Beach fit into the '13 issue? I could find no place where it said that she was present, though she had competed there at least twice in other years. But she was pictured in the US on a horse named Chesterfield who belonged to Miss Dorothy Webb, apparently a major Beach client at the time. Miss Webb was quoted as to the superb condition Miss Beach had kept the Webb horses in while their owner was abroad.

Miss Webb, we're told, was a motorist as well as a rider and very fond of speed, often going 65 miles an hour, but having delegated that kind of driving to another — chauffeur, perhaps? — "on account of possible explanations necessary to authorities." She sometimes drove herself to and from New York. The issue more or less belonged to her, for the cover showed two bronze representations of her horses, Sweet Briar and Royalist. Belle Beach is listed in show results as having won with both and is pictured on still another Webb winner, Chesterfield.

This issue of *Rider and Driver*, is among those magazines reflecting the horse world's acceptance of automobiles. It sported a page-long column by James R. Doolittle, called "Good Roads and Rules of the Road." In this issue, it was devoted to educating readers about carburetion, offering drawings of two models produced by a firm called Gallagher. Or perhaps they had been developed by some individual of that name.

With three pages devoted entirely to ads, this 24-page magazine had covered an incredible variety of topics, wouldn't you say?

Judi Lovell
Switch Company

Long Flowing Switches
Please visit my exhibit
at the Crown Plaza
(formerly the Executive West)
during the Kentucky State Fair.

judi-lovell.com

(423) 479-7857
243 Jessie Lane
Charleston, TN 37310