FOR THE OLD GREY MARE

When they made The Man from Snowy River *film, they used the mountain cattlemen as the "cracks" for the hard riding scene - some said because they were the only ones skilled and crazy enough. When they finished the film they couldn't agree who was the best rider, so they held a race at Sheepyard Flat in the Howqua Valley - and the race was as tough as the men who raced it with their stockhorses. It became the* Great Mountain Race*, and over the years Gerald Egan, the stand-in for Tom Burlinson in the film, and Chris Stoney both won three times and retired. In later years, thoroughbreds from the city challenged the stockhorses. When Chris returned from a long stay away he saw his beloved old mare, who turned lame after his first win galloping along the flat. He declared he would race one more time, for her sake. "I'm sorry mate," they replied, "She died while you were away, that's her foal, grown up."*
"Well, I'll race him for her sake," he said, and this is the story of his ride ....

A hammer of hooves and a billow of dust, as the triallist gallops by,
his time for the mountain race to make, and his mountain horse must fly.
To Sheepyard flat from a far and a wide, they'd heard of a legend's call,
they've come for a glimpse of the final twelve, top mountain horsemen all.

New riders had made the cut-off fast, and the cracks from years gone by
had spared their mounts, for a lesser cup tomorrow they would vie.
Of the three time winners of earlier years, Egan would start the race
and Stoney, back on an untried horse, had missed out on a place.

That night bush music rolled over the flat, and under a shining star
country four step met the city beat, and a hell of a crush at the bar.
Then – a horse with colic, and a rider's out - bring on the first reserve!
And a crowd rolled home from revelry, to give last chance Stoney a serve.

Old Froggy, by the fireside, said "He won in '88, on a grey mare, brave and true
but when next year came he pulled up lame, and on my grey he won two.
And now he's back to ride her colt - he's never raced him yet,
but a cooler head when the riding's hard I swear I've never met."

At sober dawn he stared at the coals, and I asked him how he'd fare.
"I really shouldn't ride", he said, "But I'm here for the old grey mare.
I raced her too hard, years ago, so young I didn't know,
but when I saw her colt grown up, I had to have a go."

Rain stayed to grey that morning sky, and from a flooded track
there were two riders in Mansfield hospital, before the main race starting crack.
Then from the whip, a dash to the swags, and the old hand running wide
got off with twenty yards of start, his mountain grey in stride.

But Marshall came through on his thoroughbred, he fair blazed past them all,
he led them up the mountainside, at a pace to make lesser men pall.
Then a mad descent to the Howqua's ford, twists and jumps spread out the pack,
but all the way it was Marshall first, with Stoney at his back.

At the last river cross and it's treacherous bank, that mountain grey let fly;
sure footed, as his breed can be, but like he knew it was do or die
To the final bend on a treacherous track, and Stoney's line was bolder,
their horses clashed - and he shot up the straight, from an equestrian hip-and-shoulder.

As tired horses steamed the dismount yard, two riders shake hands, we saw.
Those mountain horsemen are sporting bred, and they were two brothers in law!
But they both looked lost on the winners stand, bereft of their horse-borne flair.
"I didn't ride for the prize," he said, "but I rode for me old grey mare."

