

Gus Theobald: 1897 – 1990

The popular and amazing Gus Theobald was born in April 1897 and joined the Victorian Walkers Club in 1931, just after Frank McGuire. A comparative late starter in athletics at 35, he had nearly 59 years of competitive racing until, at the age of 93, he was tragically struck by a car and killed while crossing a road in suburban Ormond on August 8 1990.

Gus finished third in the Victorian 50km title in 1935 at 38, claiming he turned to walking 'because I thought I was too old to compete in other events'. Gus went on to win the Victorian 50km title in 1949.

Gus was a hardworking club member of VRWC and, being an electrician, he offered his services and did the electrical work for the Alf Robinson Clubrooms which were built at Albert Park in the early sixties.

Gus was awarded his life membership of VAWC in 1961 but he was regarded as a senior member of the club long before that. When the club reformed in 1946, one of the first trophies to be set up was the Gus Theobald Trophy and it was contested for some years.

This trophy was re-instituted by VRWC in 1990 and is awarded annually to the winner of the Open Mens 20 km Club Championship.

During his illustrious career he was president of the Glenhuntly Club from 1958 to 1972. During that period it was Victoria's most successful distance club boasting internationals Ron Clarke, Pat Clohessy, Trevor Vincent, Chris Wardlaw, Rob De Castella and Pat Scammall among its membership. Gus officiated at the 1956 Olympic and 1962 Commonwealth Games and was very proud when awarded life membership of the Glenhuntly Club

Gus was a member of the VAAA since 1932, with 58 years of racing. He was the second longest competing walker. Only Tom Daintry could match his record.



*Left: The start of the 1951 Melbourne to Frankston 25 Mile Handicap – Gus with Jim Gaylor
Right: 1946 VAWC 50 km at the Melbourne Showgrounds - Alan Reid, Alex Philpott and Gus*

Gus loved travelling and competing. He drove his van to the Lake Burley Griffin Carnival in 1972 (at 75 years of age) and finished the 20mile event in front of 4 walkers half his age. He continued to drive his van till the day he died.

A foundation member of the veteran movement in 1971, Gus was unbeaten over the 5km and 20km distances in his world age divisions. He won the coveted double at Toronto in 1975, Gothenburg in 1977, Christchurch in 1981, Rome in 1985, Melbourne in 1987 and at Eugene in 1989.

His times at these veteran championships showed that he could still walk a pace that belied his years. In Gothenburg in 1977 he clocked 30:42 for the 5000m walk as an 80 year old. In Christchurch in 1981 as an 83 year old, he clocked 34:46 for the 5000m walk. In Rome in 1985 as an 88 year old, he clocked 34:53. In Melbourne in 1987 as a 90 year old, he clocked 35:18 and in Eugene in 1989 as a 92 year old, he clocked 39:49. His last big races were the Australian

National Veteran titles in Melbourne in April 1990 when he once again won the 5000m/20km double – he had been unbeaten in National Veteran titles since their inception in 1972.



*Left: Gus as remembered in later life, walking for athletics club Glenhuntly
Right: Gus competing in the 1987 World Veterans Championships in Melbourne*

Sadly, on 8th August 1990, at the age of 93, Gus was struck by a car and tragically killed while crossing a road in suburban Ormond.

The following obituary was published by Glenhuntly Athletics Club to mark the passing of Gus Theobald in 1990.

**GUS THEOBALD (B.E.M.)
1897 – 1990**

A TRIBUTE TO AUGUSTUS ALBERT THEOBALD “GUS” 1897 - 1990

On August 8th, the club lost its oldest and much loved member, Gus, in a tragic accident in Ormond. He was struck by a car and killed instantly: Gus was 93 years old.

One of our members recalled meeting Gus when he was invited to Caulfield Racecourse as a 14 year old by Peter Colthup; then club secretary. Gus was mowing the long grass in front of the old jockey changerooms - The CLUB rooms - so that some youngsters could practice long jump and high jump. He was introduced to him and was told that he was still an active competitor and Club President. He was amazed; Gus at 64 and still competing. Gus took an interest in the juniors who had come to training that day, he made them feel very welcome, and after doing chores for over an hour went off to do his training. He was an amazing man, a “MAGIC” person.

Many members may have met Gus in a similar way and will still remember Gus for his TOTAL dedication to the club he loved so much; sweeping the newrooms at Duncan McKinnon, officiating ALL afternoon. competing, and making everyone, especially juniors. feel they were so important to the club.

Gus believed the club always came first, and he was immensely proud of its traditions, its champions, its juniors, and anyone who was to give his best for the club.

The club was like family to Gus, In the winter, over three decades of runners will recall, with appreciation, the enormous effort Gus contributed to the club, with his role as Team Manager, supporter and provider of afternoon tea. In days when transport to city and country venues was difficult, Gus and Mrs Theo “Jessie” would meet us at his landmark electrical store in Olenhuntly, pile club members into his car and drive them to Adelaide, Ballarat, Bendigo, Sunbury, wherever.

Gus had an enormous impact on the club. Joining it at the age of 35 (old in those days), he contributed 58 dedicated years to the club. As Club President 1959 - 1972 he was in the chair as our club established its impressive reputation, and to Olympians and Tailenders alike, Gus was a friend and staunch supporter. Everyone had a kind word on Gus, whether they were from our club or the opposition. He was a current Vice President and had filled this role since 1972. He was on the committee since 1937 and a club coach of walkers, official at summer and winter (every week) and judged at the Melbourne Olympics and Perth Commonwealth Games.

Born in Swan Hill, Gus moved to the Northcote area as a young man and took out his apprenticeship as an electrician. From there he played football and cricket until a chance meeting with some club members at a football match started an association with our club that remained until his death.

As an athlete Gus was a champion. In veteran competition, he was the doyen of walkers, still competing and since the beginning of the veteran movement in 1972 Gus has been Victorian Australian and World champion in his age group ever since. In the 1940's Gus was a top distance walker, being placed over 50Km regularly in championships and winning the state title in 1949. At interclub he could still be seen strutting his stuff to gain points for D Grade, even though he "retired?" 16 years ago.

Gus was a Life Member of our club since 1953 and was awarded the B.E.M. for service to athletics.

He was also a Life Member of the Amateur Walkers Club.

In 1947 Gus instigated the Western District Adelaide Challenge shield, and for 44 years this has been regularly contested with Gus and Mrs Theobald always there in support.

His assistance to others and his charisma were traits people loved and respected Gus for. He never gave in and was always the first to put forward suggestions and support with actions. He helped Little Athletics; he loved youngsters and they loved him. Whether as a 'Lollypop' crossing man or as a coach, Gus was popular.

All of us at Glenhuntly will miss Gus Theobald. We will miss his presence, his encouragement, his friendship, his generosity, his humility. Gus had heaps of all these.

We all just expected that Gus would just go on doing all the behind scene things so necessary in a club, to go on competing forever and to see his interested person at training and club functions. At 93 years of age Gus was fit and well. It seemed he would easily achieve the century doing what he loved best. It is this that is so hard to come to terms with. His loss is so tragic because he had so much more life in him.

To Gus, everyone who gave of their best was a champion. The truth is, the one who gave the most was Gus Theobald.

Thankyou Gus for the encouragement, the friendship and the memories. How the club overcomes the loss only time will tell.

One thing is for certain: Augustus Albert Theobald will not be forgotten by his mates at Glenhuntly; there are too many there to let that happen.

To Mrs Theo "Jessie", to children Joan and Ian, and to the grandchildren go our deepest sympathies. May he rest in peace.