

Unbridled joy. You couldn't mask it.

Has there ever been a moment in racing so grand as when Glen Boss shook his head in disbelief on the line at Moonee Valley yesterday?

The crowd in the stands was cheering as one for his mare, the Diva, and the noise had completely drowned out the course broadcast. Tony Santic was hiding tears behind the up-market satin version of the cardboard red, white and blue masks that had been distributed through the crowd. And Lee Freedman was putting more than 20 years of Group One glory into perspective by declaring "this is as big as it gets for me."

It was some moment, the moment Makybe Diva raced past Kingston Town, drew level with Tulloch and set out in chase after Carbine and Phar Lap.

The mighty seven year old mare's place in history will be debated at length today and for year's to come and there can never be an emphatic conclusion because racing has changed so much.

Perhaps it's better instead to just focus on the moment and the event that was as close to two minutes of sporting perfection that you could ever be privileged to see. I never thought I'd see a better race meeting than the year Kingston Town won his third Cox Plate and less than an hour later the wonderful sprinter Manikato passed the million dollars in stakemoney (at the time he was only the second to do it, after the King). And I never thought I'd see as good a race as the year Bonecrusher and Our Waverley Star fought their war for the last 1200 metres of the 1987 Cox Plate.

But I reckon they've now been equalled by the Diva's performance and the excitement of seeing eight top class horses across the track on the home turn. In particular, the excitement of panning out across those eight horses and noticing that the one sixth from the rail was absolutely jogging.

This remarkable charge had been set up by the slow pace mid race. The charge to the first turn was less frenetic than usual and when the field got down the back, the frontrunners were able to slow in the knowledge that the main chances were near the rear.

Xcellent was last, God's Own next to last and Makybe Diva running 11th.

Between the 1400 metres and the 1200 metres, the sectional time was a staggeringly slow 13.79 seconds. It meant that the backmarkers had to go earlier than they would like – and when Xcellent set off about 900 metres from home, it not only evoked memories of Bonecrusher but it set the whole race alight.

Lad of the Manor and Grey's Inn missed the boat but it seemed like every other runner was determined to go at the same time. The gutsy and enduring Fields Of Omagh was driven through the middle by Stephen King and Lotteria was running a hell of a race three out.

But the authority and the force of the field was out wide. Six wide. Boss was there with the Diva and he had a handful of horse. It was a spectacle to behold.

The mare had them beaten there and then and it only added to the moment because it gave us the length of the straight to celebrate this magnificent achievement.

Bonecrusher and Our Waverley Star was a great race because you didn't know how it was going to end. The Diva's Plate was great because you knew *exactly* how it would end.

Even when it did end, there was more to see. As the horses returned to scale, Boss did the arm-waving saddle dance that he has made famous during his glorious three year ride,

and the crowd loved it as they always do. There have been bigger attendances than the 33,153 people who in turn sweltered in the sunny humidity and sheltered from the rain. But none could have made more noise – the Valley amphitheatre did its stuff again. In the winner's enclosure the only word to describe what was happening was mayhem. Tony Santic and the rest of the Diva crew may have looked like escapees from a New Year's Eve fancy dress party but no-one could begrudge them their celebrations. The girls in the camp were singing 'Diva – The Greatest' to the tune of Elvis Presley's Viva Las Vegas.

Moonee Valley chairman Don Abell was caught up in the moment too, repeating multiple times about what a great race we'd just seen. Premier Steve Bracks was only slightly less effusive in presenting the trophy and if someone had slipped him a Diva mask to wear he probably could have stitched up the next election on the spot. Some might also say he'd be suited in a mask.

And then there was Lee Freedman, reflecting on what he described as his 'crazy week in racing'. Last week he buried his much loved warrior Mummify and yesterday he received a greater thrill than any of his Melbourne Cups or 100 other Group One victories.

He was the calmest of the main players but the satisfaction was no less deep. "There were no tears today," he said in reference to the emotional day at Caulfield after Mummify's breakdown. "Today is a day for happiness."

Surprisingly, although he had no hesitation in naming the Diva as the greatest horse he has trained, he stopped short of rating her the greatest he has ever seen. Kingston Town impressed him greatly when he was setting out on his own career and he's not quite ready to put the Diva ahead of him.

Winning a third Melbourne Cup might just change that and it is to be desperately hoped that Santic and Freedman decide in the affirmative and give her the ultimate shot at history. Unlike other debates about running champions in the Cup (Northerly, the latest) the difference is that Makybe Diva has already proved her liking for the 3200 metres. She has to run. She's a racehorse and racehorses race.