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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

MANSFIELD MOUNTAIN COUNTRY FESTIVAL

October 31 - November 4

The great race: It's wide open

Australia's best bush riders are preparing for the 1986 Aunger Great Mountain Race of Victoria.

And fate has blown open the field. The racing combination that scooped the first three cups - Mansfield stunt rider, Gerald Egan, and his magnificent bay, Maurie - has been broken by injury.

Maurie is at home in the paddock after an injury at Flemington and will never race again. But after bringing the horse back from death, Egan and local vet Rod Manning say their work has been repaid just seeing the horse moving freely at pasture.

Egan won't be drawn on a decision on whether to compete in this fourth cup.

If he does enter, the tip is he'll use his No. 2 horse Tasman, described as more of a stock horse than a race horse.

Although Tasman has performed well at local cross country events this year his owner isn't saying much.

Since July the festival office has been taking calls for race entry from

riders as far north as Queensland.

The field is likely to include riders who have come close to Egan in the last few races.

Ken Connley, the Cattlemen's Cup champion from Ormeo, has to be a race favorite.

And young Chris Stoney of Mansfield, third in this year's Cattlemen's Cup, also must have a chance. Stoney was third in the 1985 Howqua River Dash, and his bush competition skills are increasing all the time.

This year the race winner will take home a magnificent silver cup worth \$600, his or hers to keep forever. The winner also takes a race purse of \$500 - which should come in handy for shouting the losers a beer - and a full bush wardrobe by Morrisons of Euroa, including oilskin, moleskins and shirt.

Second and third placegetters also will receive silver cups and prizemoney of \$300 and \$150 respectively. The field will get prizemoney down to sixth place.

