

## The Tale of a Hat

In deference to the heat and dust of the outback setting, it was decided Dick and Joe should wear hats in the *Wake in Fright* daytime “roo chase” sequence and wardrobe dutifully came up with a pair of brand new Akubras.

One looked about right – fawn coloured with a rustic hatband – in the cattleman’s style that could be bashed into fair shape by the wearer.

It was Jack Thompson’s size and he accepted it graciously.

Jack’s satisfaction with his hat was no doubt prompted by the fact that the other hat, by way of distinction, was cloth-trimmed dark grey in the man-of-substance, “squatter” style that would come to be favoured many years later by Prime Minister John Howard for country electioneering.

What it had in common with a miner yahooping around the outback in a V8 was a mystery.

With the admonition: “you can fix it up a bit if you want”, it was placed in my hands.

During a previous Christmas Gold Coast sabbatical with my brother and his army mates (he had just finished his Nashos in Queensland at the time), I had noted one of the cohort sporting a hat with a hat band made of beer can ringpulls linked together.

Along with short hair and ubiquitous tinny, this became a sort of alky counter to the counterculture – a reminder of certain home truths to the latter’s long-haired, beaded and bearded adherents.

At the time of making *Wake in Fright*, I lived across from Bondi Beach and a short hunt around the known drinking spots there garnered a generous fistful of ringpulls which I fashioned into a chain.

It replaced the cloth hat band and after rolling up the hat’s flat sides and indenting its top into a narrow crown, I had a sort of pork pie titfer with a bush tweak.

[*The French Connection’s* Popeye Doyle with omnipresent pork pie hat would appear on screens at about the same time as *Wake in Fright* adding further credence to my hat’s place in the zeitgeist.]

Ted Kotcheff also latched onto the idea of the alky ringpull chain as a Christmas decoration and he worked a shot into the film of Dick and Joe festooning Tim Hynes’ Christmas tree with a long chain supposedly garnered from an afternoon’s drinking at Tim’s place.

When we eventually got to the Yindee location, my hat was “broken-down” some more with glycerine and red dust to become the hat you see on screen.

The interior lining eventually gave way (thanks, not least, to Nelson’s frenetic pawing – the hat did sterling duty in our “fight” scene) and was replaced by sewn-in foam which has since deteriorated.

A couple of ringpulls have broken and been replaced over the years, but most are still the originals picked up at Bondi in 1970.

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