Barrier Rise — *noun.* the start of a horse race.

*Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary 5th edition*
The Daily Examiner is a newspaper from Grafton in north-eastern New South Wales. In July 2009 it reported on a bowls tournament:

‘The semi-finals of the club triples was held last Saturday. The first semi was won by Bill McDonald (sub) Bill Cox and Peter Forrester who sprinted at barrier rise to an unassailable lead eventually defeating Laurie Thompson, Jamie Eichorn and Ray Miller.’

The term barrier rise is usually associated with horse racing. These days horses usually begin their races from starting stalls, which open out to release the individual horses. The term barrier rise refers to an earlier stage of racing, before the 1960s, when a wire strand was positioned across the front of the horses, and this strand was raised by a spring mechanism to indicate the start of the race: this was the barrier rise. With the introduction of starting stalls, there was no longer a raising of the barrier. Indeed, there was no longer a barrier in the original sense of the term. Horses, however, are still ‘taken to the barrier’ or ‘walk up the barrier’, as if the older style of starting races still exists. And so, the term barrier rise remained meaning ‘the start of a horse race’. Thus, in report in a Perth newspaper in September 2010:

‘Paul Harvey rode a very confident race, taking Ringmeister ($1.80 to $1.50 fav) to the front on barrier rise and slowing the race down to a canter, bunching the field up behind him.’

The Grafton bowls report indicates that the term barrier rise can be transferred to other sports, where it there means ‘the start of a contest’. We have yet to see a more general transfer of the term—would it have been possible to talk about the barrier rise that started the election contest between Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott?

The horseracing sense of barrier has given Australian English a number of barrier-compounds. A barrier trial is a practice race for young, inexperienced, or resuming racehorses, especially to familiarise them with the starting gates. A barrier blanket is a heavy blanket placed over the flanks of a racehorse to calm it when entering a barrier stall at the start of a race. And a barrier rogue is a racehorse that regularly misbehaves when being placed into a starting gate.

Even if you are not a racegoer, when tuning in to this year’s Melbourne Cup carnival, watch out for some of these distinctively Australian terms.