

## **7 Cool Things You May Not Know About Oswald the Lucky Rabbit**

By Dave Bossert

When Walt Disney lost the contract to create *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* cartoons he turned a lemon into lemonade by creating Mickey Mouse. Oswald ultimately passed onto Universal where his design changed from a cartoony scamp to a more realistic looking rabbit and eventually fading into obscurity. Because of that and the fact that Oswald was not part of Disney for more than seventy years, there are some really cool things that you might not know about Oswald.

I love lists and in keeping with tradition, I've compiled some cool facts that you might not know about or favorite cartoon rabbit—Oswald. This list is in descending order from number seven to the number one top cool thing; at least it is to me. These are interesting because in some cases they are unique to Oswald and others they bare some very close similarities to the Mickey Mouse cartoons that followed.

So, the following is my “7 Cool Things You May Not Know About Oswald the Lucy Rabbit” list:



(Notice Julius being helped by Alice, very similar to Felix the Cat; ©HeritageComics.com)

7. *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* was created after the Disney Brothers ended their live action/animation combination *Alice Comedy* series. In the *Alice Comedy*'s, Alice's side kick was Julius, an animated cat character that looked a lot like the then popular *Felix the Cat* cartoon from the Pat Sullivan Studio. There was also Krazy Kat from the George Herriman Studio. Walt's

producer at Winkler Film Corporation, Charles Mintz and Universal, felt that there were too many cat characters and wanted something different that is why Oswald was developed as a rabbit with his distinctive long ears to differentiate him from other well-known animated characters.



(A still with many characters from Poor Papa, completed in in early 1927 but not released until June 11, 1928; ©Disney)

6. The first *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit* short, *Poor Papa*, was rejected because Walt's producers thought Oswald looked too old and they were very "disappointed." But they also were critical of too many other characters in the short and thought it didn't show enough of Oswald. Producer Mintz said; "There is entirely too much repetition of action. Scenes are

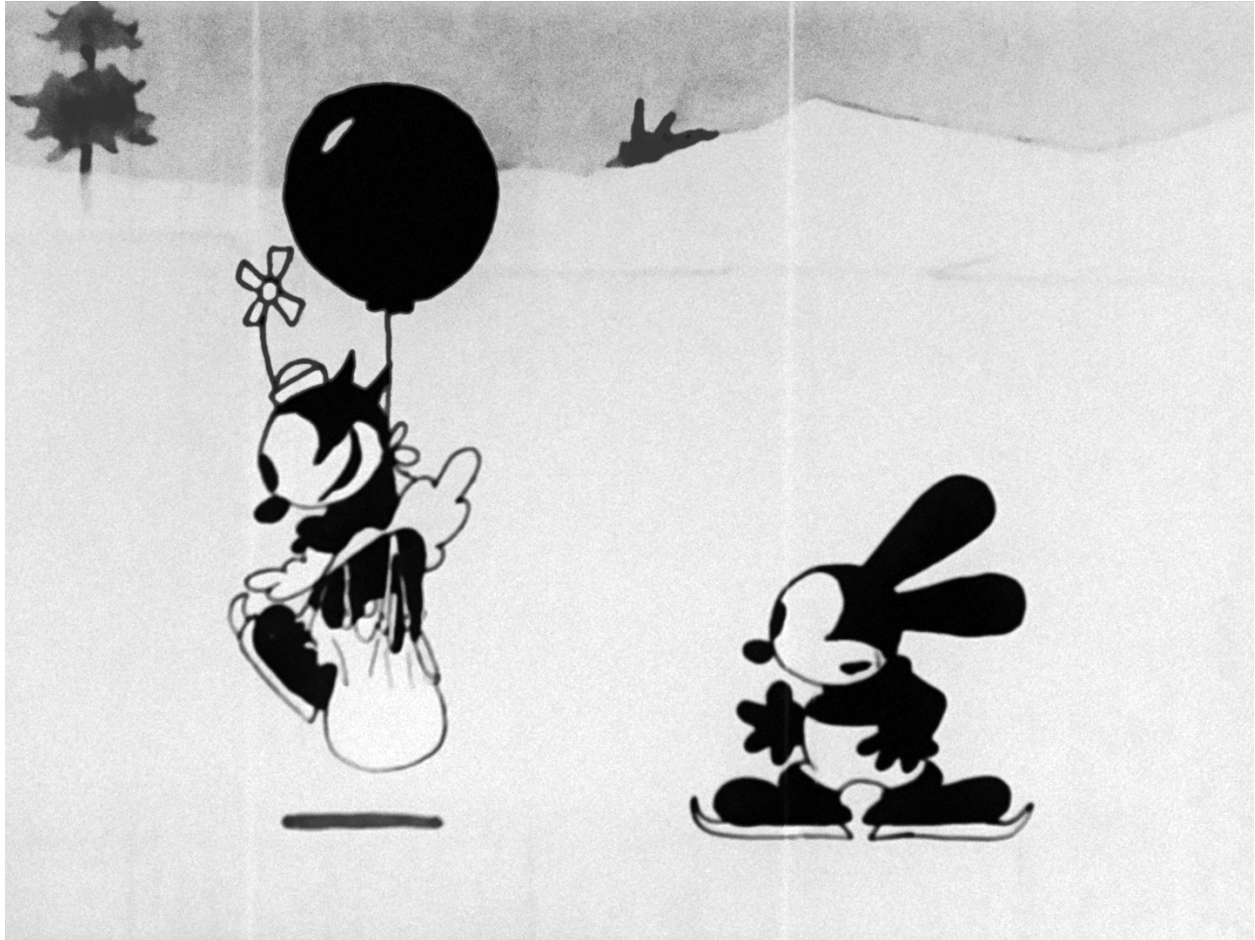
dragged out to such an extent that the cartoon is materially slowed down. The Oswald shown in this picture is far from being a funny character.” He also Suggested that Walt make Oswald “young and snappy looking with a monocle.” Walt took the criticism in a professional manner, at least in his response to Mintz. He responded to each point of criticism but also told Mintz to “forget the monocle.” The original telegrams between Mintz and Disney are in the book.

5. Did you know that in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the studio made 16mm prints of the Oswald cartoons and that were rented for home use. It was an early form of home entertainment just like DVD and Blu-ray is today. Because of that, we have been able to locate some of the lost Oswald cartoons as surviving 16mm prints. In some instances, we have been able to cobble together a full cartoon from partial 16mm and 35mm prints.



(Wanted Poster from the short *OZZIE OF THE MOUNTED*, released on April 30, 1928; ©Disney)

4. In the *Oswald the lucky Rabbit shorts*, the villain Peg Leg Pete is a bear character. He went by the alias' Putrid Pete and Kid Pete. When Pete appears as the villain in the later Mickey Mouse cartoons he is a cat character. A minor change to essential the same character. That won't happen today!



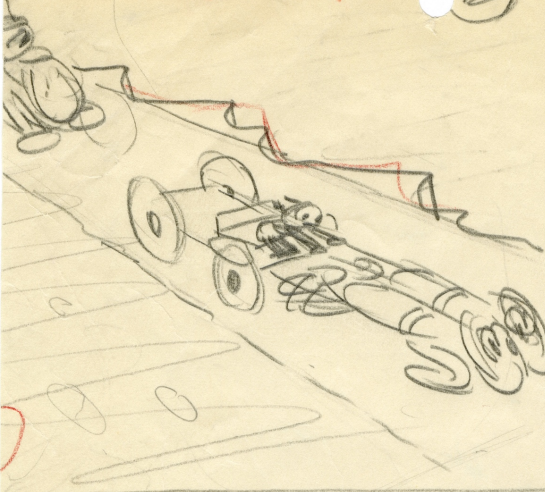
(In this still frame from SLEIGH BELLS, Ortensia has a boulder in her underpants as a counterbalance to the lift of the balloon. Note the similarity of her hat and dress to that of Minnie Mouse; ©Disney)

3. Did you know that Oswald has two gal pals, Ortensia and Fanny Cottontail. Ortensia is a cat and Fanny is a rabbit. Each was referred to in the production notes and gag/situation documents by different descriptions such as “lady”, “the girl”, “a nurse.” The name Ortensia, which is referred to as Oswald’s wife, was not widely used and became more popular when the *Epic Mickey* game was released in 2010. During the research for my new book, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit: The Search for the Lost Disney Cartoons*, many of the original production notes had mistakes that confused both Fanny and Ortensia. The more widely used is Ortensia who has many similarities to Minnie Mouse.



OSWALD #17

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"SAGEBRUSH SADI E"

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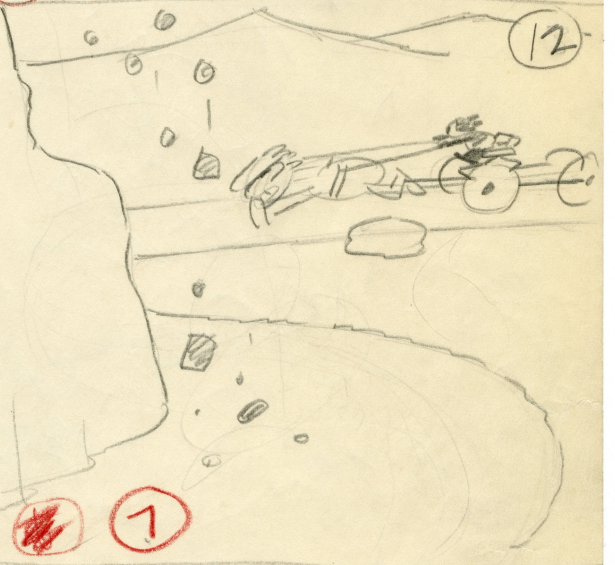
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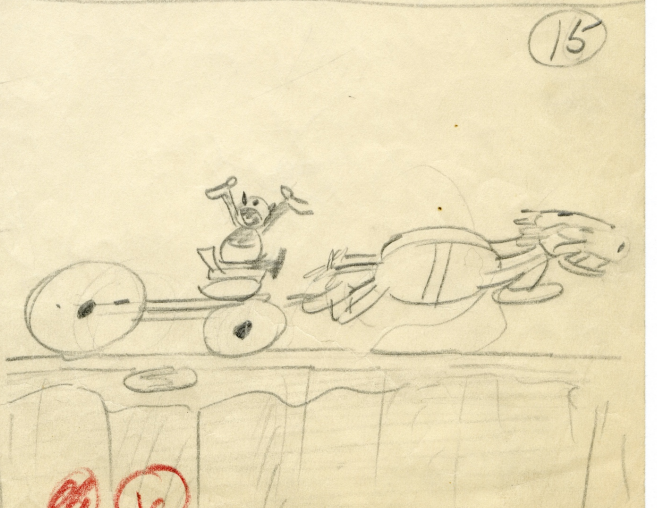
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(A story sketch page from SAGEBRUSH SADIE, the short was released on April 2, 1928; ©NBC/Universal)

2. Did you know that there are now nineteen of the twenty-six Oswald cartoons known. Six “lost” titles have been recovered in the last seven years. But there are still seven titles missing including; *The Banker’s Daughter*, *Harem Scarem*, *Rickety Gin*, *Neck ‘N’ Neck*, *Sagebrush Sadie*, *Ride ‘em Plowboy*, and *Hot Dogs*. Even though these are missing we have found animation, story sketch pages, and other material from many of these shorts in various locations including the Walt Disney Archives and the Animation Research Library. Also, one of the Oswald shorts above has been located, but not acquired yet. Exciting!!



(The title card with Walt Disney’s name on it for HIGH UP, released on August 6, 1928. Believed to be the 27<sup>th</sup> Disney created Oswald short; ©Disney)



1. And number one, during the research for the book, a 27<sup>th</sup> Disney created Oswald short was re-discovered called, *High Up*. The short was completed at Winkler Studios in Hollywood after Disney lost the contract. It is speculated that Walt may have begun work on this cartoon anticipating a renewal of his contract with Winkler and therefore it was released with Walt Disney credited on the title card. *High Up* was in theaters prior to the release of *Sleigh Bells* and *Hot Dogs*, the last of the Disney created Oswald shorts for Winkler and Universal.

Well, I hope you learned a little more about Oswald the Lucky Rabbit that you might not have been aware of. There is much more information and many never-before-seen images from all the Disney created Oswald shorts in my new book, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit: The Search for the Lost Disney Cartoons*, which is available wherever fine books are sold.