

Letting off steam: Sales parties are racing folks' Emotional Rescue!



SALES parties bring out the best, and probably the worst, in people. But so what? We're here for a good time, not a long time!

A thoroughbred sale, as most of you will agree, is a party waiting to happen. Turf Talk Editor CHARL PRETORIUS knows too, that there is always choice, yet he got involved again on Thursday night in an ordeal that ended in front of massive, locked industrial gates on the coldest morning this decade in Johannesburg.

CLOCK-in time at the TBA Complex on Thursday was around 4pm, as it happened. The Equine Group's office, ringside, is always the first stop because it's convenient, well stocked with biltong, cashews and beverages and has the lovely Christine Terblanche in attendance.

I ask for a coke on ice which is promptly poured and I remark: "No involvement for me today, this will be a coke and ice day. Tomorrow I will be as fresh as a daisy!" Christine just chuckles and pours a scotch for Marsh Shirtliff, who has arrived

after a good, body-cleansing gym workout following the Equus Awards.

Form Bloodstock's Jehan Malherbe is also there, remarkably cheerful for a man of his years and dishing out his usual chirp about something he didn't like in a recent Turf Talk Newsletter. Then he walks off to the ring with his sales catalogue to sweat out another hard-earned commission.

Chris Gerber of Moutonshoek has popped in to watch a race at the Vaal on Equine's Plasma screen. *(to p2)*



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EMOTIONAL RESCUE (...cont)

He has a runner at the Vaal called Captain Chips, 22-10 favourite with the field 7-1 bar one. "Alec fancies him strongly," Chris says, and the gelding duly arrives under a confident Randall Simons.

"You should have told us earlier," moan a few, but in fairness, Chris did give us about 10m notice. But there were distractions, people walking by, greetings, horses being knocked down to buyers, empty tote accounts, and so on.

My second stop was going to be the Moutonshoek stable office to convey thanks for their advertising support and Chris says I should go right on ahead. Moutonshoek's recently appointed Marketing Man Colin Gordon has opened the bar for refreshments, and they'll probably pack the fire for a braai later.

Here then, comes the moment of decision, the choice that will shape destiny for the next few hours. Invariably, too, a choice that destiny always seems to make in advance. Colin's welcoming drink, a Johnny Black neat on rocks, is served at 16:35.

At 5pm, Chris positions himself in the corner of the entertainment area and welcomes incoming guests with similar gusto. Dean Kannemeyer enjoys a sip of scotch, Jane Thomas gets busy with a Bacardi Breezer and Dr Bennie van der Merwe finds a glass of red wine. Alec Laird's in later, followed by Moutonshoek's six-pack of delightful

horse girls, the handlers who make sure that their sales prospects get to the auction ring and back.

It's already bitterly cold and the sale has ended, which means that people will be flocking from the sales arena to the stable blocks to look for coffee, which is never stocked by anyone, ever – and will hence accept a shot of warm brandy or liqueur.

It's 7pm, we're on the second bottle of Johnny Black and we're in the 'Let's solve the problems in racing' phase. Opinions are expressed, discussed and then set aside before things get too heated.

Bennie prompts Chris to put on some "light background music" as the attention moves to Alec Laird and his aunt, Dr Marianne Thomson, who talk fondly about the days when "Uncle Syd" was still alive and then recall Alec's first trip to Newmarket in the London News days (1987) when he had to pose as Marianne's son so those backward Englishmen wouldn't hit on her!

At 8pm Chris is in full DJ-mode and we're playing "Guess The Song", as he flips through a range of some of the greatest tunes ever – if you were born midway through the 20th century, of course. We sing along to Queen's "I want to break free" and Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven".

Auntie Marianne is busy having an argument with Drs Terry Casey and Manfred Rohwer. "You young vets of today have a lot to learn," and she scolds Manfred for rejecting one of her (to page 4)

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EMOTIONAL RESCUE (...cont)

young fillies due to a vaginal problem. “There was nothing wrong with her,” she argues.

Manfred responds: “She had a skew fanny, I’m telling you. All skew.” And he forms something with his fingers to show what he means. I want to pitch in with something I’d once heard about Chinese women, but suddenly the speakers boom with the Rolling Stones’ 1982 hit song, ‘Emotional Rescue’ and now it’s balls to the wall as the okes start singing in unison and drumming with their palms on their catalogues. “*You will be mine you will be mine all mine.... I will be your knight in shining armour.. I come to your Emo – tio – Nal Rescue... !*”

There are people around us who have never heard this song, including big-hitting Justin Vermaak of Green Street Bloodstock, who prefers music from this century. Justin is raving about a Trippi colt he’d bought from Heversham Park, a steal at R170,000. He’s also already started “working the room” and there is response from way out there at the back, where the delightful blonde “Danny” and brunette Jenna signals him to join them for a smoke outside. Justin doesn’t smoke, but he slides out the door anyway, and they’re out there in the terrible cold for quite a long time.

Justin returns with Matthew and Mike Sham in attendance – the New Turf brothers invariably pour oil on any fire, especially Matthew with his endless energy and love for life. The jokes are flowing along with the drinks, Chris must have joked with his assessment that Bruce Springsteen is greater than Freddy Mercury. Marianne Thomson says she prefers Brahms to rock music, throws another curse at the younger veterinarians and calls it a night.

During the course of the evening I am chuffed to hear how many people enjoy reading Turf Talk and are in fact fans, including James Armitage of Sandown Stud, Colin Gordon, Terry Casey and Jan Mantel of Millstream Farm. There is nothing like honest, non-patronising praise, and criticism is needed too as Mantel remarks that Thursday’s cocaine article (John Gosden/Robert Havlin), looked awkward next to stud farm promotions. The other okes disagree. “It’s a fun read, a good

story is a good story!



Dr Marianne gave her fellow-vets an earful.

Around 11pm, I’m out for a smoke with Justin, the really nice blonde Danny and Jenna, the delightful brunette who remarks that I look like “a distinguished gentleman”. Robyn Louw once used those words in a profile (she probably wouldn’t today), but Jenna’s echoing of it stir my loins to the point of legs getting weak and shaky. I put it down to the bitter cold.

Danny reckons she’s also a Turf Talk reader and that she recalls that Robyn Louw and I were fighting about the recent case involving horses stolen from a farm. No, I correct her, we just had different viewpoints. Again though, a warm feeling to know that people read what we say. Unless, of course, Justin put the two lovely bints up to praise to make this old man feel good! Forever will I wonder.

Around midnight, the crowd is down to six or seven and an Uber truck has arrived for all but Jan Mantel and I. Colin locks up, we pay our respects and the Uber van disappears through the TBA’s side gate en route to Joburg North via the Industrial Park road.

Jan Mantel and I stumble on to the main complex, which will allow through fare and access to the lot across the road where our cars are parked, but it’s pitch



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JET-setting Anthony Delpuch with his third SA Champion Jockey Award, handed over by Lyndon Barends, NHA.



JOHN Freeman of The Thoroughbred Group indicates the number of luxury cars in the garages of his seaside home; or perhaps he's talking about the Highlands/Ridgemont star sire Dynasty, four-time Outstanding Stallion winner.

EMOTIONAL RESCUE (...cont)

dark now, everything is locked and there is nobody in sight. "This cannot possible be," moans Jan. "We are locked in!"

At 00:23 we find a security guard who opens the TBA's side gate onto an enclosed industrial area, the only keys in his possession. There is a massive boom exit down the road, surrounded by huge steel gates which gives access to a detour to the TBA's car lot. This, too, however, is locked and chained. At 00:30 we decide not to attempt to climb over these gates. There is no barb-wiring, but they are eight feet high and one, or both of us, will get hurt.

Dylan Thomas wrote: "Do Not Go Gently Into That Good Night". No problem. We are about to go brutally into a very cold night. By 5am, Jan and I will be found frozen to death, wrapped in each others' windbreakers for comfort.

Decisions, decisions. There is a choice, always. - tt.

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