

SOUTH AFRICA: **Racing's Best-Kept Secret**

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By BILL FINLEY

Gary Player's Stud

In winning the Masters and the U.S. Open, Gary Player captured the biggest, most prestigious golf events in the world. Now, he wants to breed horses that win the biggest, most prestigious horse races in the world. At age 74, that is what keeps him young, ener-

getic, and passionate. He has the wealth to do so, but that's not why he never stops believing the next horse bred by his Gary Player Stud Farm will be The One; rather, it's his faith in his country, its land, its people and their determination. When it comes to horse racing, South Africa, he says, can do anything anybody can do.

"This has been the best kept secret in horse racing."

Gary Player

"Look at South Africa. Look at what we've done," he says, his voice rising as he speaks, an evangelist preaching to the non-believers everywhere. "The proof is in the pudding.

I am not someone who says these things when I cannot back them up with the bottom line. I am a bottom-line guy. We've had Colorado King (Grand Rapids II), Horse Chestnut (SAf) (Fort Wood), Ipi Tombe (Zim) (Manshood {GB}). Ipi Tombe

was the best filly in the world. She went everywhere and she won. We are just a small country, but our horses go anywhere in the world and run extremely well."

It's easy to dismiss Player as just a proud South African, someone whose enthusiasm causes him, perhaps, to lose touch with reality. He knows what people must think. South Africa? Isn't that some tiny, irrelevant country on the bottom of the world still trying to escape from its racist past? It cannot possibly ever be a horse racing power, even on a modest scale. Can it?

"It's already happening," Player said. "This has been the best-kept secret in horse racing. We have some very wealthy people here, and they are buying the best, most beautiful ranches in the world. We have people coming here from all over to buy our horses and they can buy them much cheaper than they can in Europe or the U.S.--for way, way less. We've always been good, and we're getting better all the time."

Maybe he has a point.

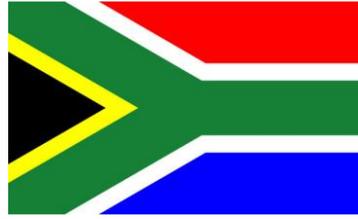
It has only been within the last 10 years that the South African racehorse has begun to venture outside the coun-



BILL FINLEY

Gary Player is a firm believer in the virtues of the horses of his homeland

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try's borders, and the results have been impressive. Led largely by trainer Mike de Kock, South African-bred or raced horses have won dozens of races in Dubai, a number of stakes in the U.S. and England, and some of the world's richest races in places like Hong Kong and Singapore.

That, South Africans argue, is only one part of the equation, one reason among many that South Africa is about to emerge in the horseracing world as a small-scale global power. These horses, they say, have won around the world, yet remain great bargains. Top horses in training still sell for a few hundred thousand dollars, and the best-looking, very best-bred horses at the yearling sales will cost you no more than the equivalent of about \$350,000.

"The price is right here, and that's the main point," said bloodstock agent Jehan Malherbe, who represents Sheikh Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Maktoum. "The costs are low. You can buy yearlings here and start them here. If they are good enough, you can ship them to the States or to Europe. The costs of failure are much less, and that's important."

Horses came to South Africa with the white settlers, and the first-known horse races were conducted by the British around the late 1700s. The South African Jockey Club was established in 1882, and the sport would grow into a plaything for the country's many wealthy whites.

Along the way, as was the case with most things South African, the racing industry was a complicated and insular business.

There was the occasional breakout horse. Colorado King, a foal of 1959, came out of South Africa to win the 1964 Hollywood Gold Cup. *Hawaii (Utrillo II), bought in South Africa as a yearling for the equivalent of just \$12,600 by New Jersey millionaire Charles Engelhard, came to the U.S. and won the Man o'War and United Nations Handicaps. He was the champion older turf horse in America in 1969. But such things as African horse



Gary Player's Stud in The Karoo

sickness, apartheid and geography played a role in keeping the sport in South Africa small, isolated, largely ignored by the rest of the world, and suffering from an inferiority complex.

It didn't help that South Africa was a pariah in the rest of the world because of its racial policies.

"When we had apartheid, getting money out of the country was a long and lengthy process," Malherbe said. "There were a lot of little complications, and sending a horse outside the country became very difficult. The feeling was, why bother? You might as well just race here."

A bigger problem was African horse sickness. A highly infectious and deadly viral disease that has affected African horses, mules, donkeys and zebras, it can devastate a horse population. The South African horse industry

has had to go to great lengths to guarantee that it does not spread the disease to other countries and South African horses have to go through long quarantine periods before being allowed to go elsewhere.

Even South Africans had all but given up on ever being anything more than small and insignificant when it came to racing and the global picture.

"Everyone was rather critical of South Africa and played us down," said Mike Sharkey, the stud manager at Highlands Farm, which was owned by the late Graham Beck. "People would say, 'Oh, it's only South Africa.' And we would listen to them. So we had this tradition of knocking ourselves and comparing ourselves to racing in Eng-

"The price is right here, and that's the main point."

Jehan Malherbe

land and the rest of the world. Instead, we should have realized what we had in the way of strengths and promoted ourselves right from the beginning. We lost a lot of time when it came to establishing ourselves, getting on and being seen as a country to be reckoned with."

What happened? There was no one watershed moment, but many point to Apr. 13, 1997 as a key turning point for South African racing. London News



London News (SAf) won the 1997 G1 QEII Cup at the Sha Tin Racecourse, Hong Kong

Hong Kong Jockey Club

(SAf) (Bush Telegraph {SAf}) had won five Group 1 races in South Africa for trainer Alec Laird and owner Laurie Jaffee. Jaffee was daring enough to try something different and sent his horse to Hong Kong's Sha Tin for the G1 Queen Elizabeth II Cup. The good horse from the little racing country did it, winning by a half-length.

"I think it all started with London News," Sharkey said. "I can remember being at a sale when he won a race in Hong Kong and everyone there was shouting for London News. It didn't matter who you were. Even the grooms were shouting for him. All of South Africa was behind him."

London News helped give South Africans the confidence they had been lacking and convinced many that their horses were indeed good enough to compete against the best in the world. London News's victory didn't immediately lead to anything close to a South African conquest of the world's major racetracks. In fact, things pretty much returned to normal.

It took a brash young trainer who believed in himself and South African horses to come along and change everything.

Mike de Kock wasn't like most trainers. He didn't grow up in a racing family and wasn't steeped in the customs of South African racing. He turned that into an advantage. While his rival trainers had come to believe that their horses weren't good enough to beat the world's best or that the problems created by African horse sickness were simply too big to overcome, de Kock came into the sport with fresh ideas and a new perspective. He wasn't afraid to try something daring and different.

Starting with Horse Chestnut (SAf) and then with the great mare Ipi Tombe (Zim), de Kock started going after some of the biggest prizes in the world, particularly those offered in Dubai. The results have been nothing short of spectacular. Ipi Tombe won the G1 Dubai Duty Free in 2003 on the same night that de Kock won the G2 UAE Derby with Victory Moon (SAf) (Al

How and why Mike de Kock took on the world

Mike de Kock seemed to have it all. By the mid-nineties, he had established himself as one of South Africa's top trainers. He had the best owners, the best horses and was winning most of the country's top races. De Kock knew he had nothing to complain about, but he couldn't put a stop to a growing sense of discontentment.

Racing just in South Africa wasn't working for him anymore, not when he was always butting heads with racing officials. He no longer felt challenged under the constriction of the limitations that came along with racing in a small country; one which the rest of the world barely knew existed. So de Kock decided he had to do something to reenergize himself and his career. His solution? Take on the world.

It turned out to be more than just the best thing ever to happen to him. It was the best thing ever to happen to South African racing.

"I can't tell you what Mike de Kock has done for this industry," breeder Graeme Koster said. "Without him, this industry would be completely flat. What he has done is to broaden people's ideas around the world about our horses and what they can accomplish."

De Kock hadn't planned on being a globetrotting ambassador for South African racing who could, and has, gone into a number of countries and conquered their biggest races. He does not come from a racing family, but grew up near a racetrack in his hometown of Alberton, South Africa. He was soon following the races and visiting the stables. He would eventually go to work for top trainer Ormand Ferraris before moving on to the stable of Ricky Howard-Ginsburg. When Ginsburg died in 1989, de Kock, then just 25, took over as the stable's head trainer. He was soon on his way to the top.

During the 1998/99 season, he won the South African trainers' championship with 106 winners and a then-record R10.2 million in earnings. Yet he had never been unhappier.

"I got to a stage where I was quite stale in South Africa," he said. "I'm quite outspoken and I have a very broad mind, and I was finding that people in South Africa can be a little narrow-minded and wouldn't accept me. I was always in trouble, always clashing with people in authority. I was doing fantastic in South Africa, but I was not enjoying myself."

De Kock also had to deal with accusations that he was doing something illegal. Many, he said, assumed that no one could be so successful without cheating.

"When you are in a little gold fish bowl like you are in South Africa, there are always knockers," de Kock said. "People didn't believe what I accomplished was legitimate. I felt I needed to leave this country for people to accept I am actually a legitimate trainer and I can train racehorses. I always did well, and I took horses over from other trainers and moved them up, and that had people saying, 'what is he doing? What is he using?'"

De Kock doesn't lack confidence, but even he wasn't sure at the time that he had horses that were good enough to win major races outside of South Africa. Even a win in the 2000 GIII Broward H. at Gulfstream by Horse Chestnut (SAf) (Fort Wood) didn't do much to change his mind.

Then along came Ipi Tombe (Zim) (Manshood {GB}).

Bred and raced initially in Zimbabwe, she was far too good for that country's small racing program, and was purchased by a syndicate of South African owners and turned over to de Kock. In 2002, she won three major South African races before defeating males in the G1 Durban July S., one of the country's most prestigious races.



Trainer Mike de Kock with Asiatic Boy at the track work at Nad Al Sheba, Dubai, UAE

Horsephotos

"I looked at her and thought, 'if there are horses in the world any better than this, I would like to see them,'" de Kock said. "For me, it's the same with any sport. You need to test yourself against the best in the world. I was ambitious myself, and looking for new challenges. Then this filly came along with an ownership group that was also ambitious and willing to let me try to make it happen."

Ipi Tombe turned out to be every bit as good as de Kock thought. In 2003, she won three straight races in Dubai, including the \$2 million G1 Dubai Duty Free. She then left to conquer U.S. racing and won her one start in America, taking the GIII Locust Grove at Churchill Downs for new trainer Elliott Walden.

"Ipi Tombe basically put me and South African racing on the map," de Kock said. "After that, I'm not saying it has been easy, but that broke the ice. If I had never had Ipi Tombe, I never would have gone to Dubai."

Since Ipi Tombe's successful trip to Nad al Sheba, de Kock has been a regular in Dubai.

He may not have the numbers to compete against Godolphin and some of the other Arab interests, but he is a major force, rarely returning to South Africa without a number of major prizes.

In 2011, he will have 13 horses based in Dubai and is hopeful this will be his best season yet there.

He has often talked of setting up a small string in the U.S., and said that may still happen some day. He would like to take a handful of horses to Saratoga. With quarantine problems and other red tape, that won't be easy, but de Kock prides himself on being resourceful and finding ways to get things done. He says that is among the reasons he has been so successful.

"I don't come from a racing family, so the first day I walked into racing, I questioned what was being done," de Kock said. "People would say, 'this is the way it has always been done.' But I always believed that just because something had been done for 50 years, doesn't make it right. Times have moved on and we have learned a lot of new things, like with nutrition.

"I've always been willing to try anything that I think I can do to get an edge on my competition. I always work my horses a little harder than everyone else. I've

made a serious study of nutrition, and I think that gives me an edge. I have traveled the world and have come back with my own ideas. There are things like treadmills. I wouldn't say I am a pioneer, because I learned about them in Australia and Singapore, but I think I took them to the next level. Since I started using them in Newmarket, there are a number of trainers there who have started using them or have called me for advice on using them. It's about thinking outside the box. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about."

Beyond the obvious benefits of winning major rich races, the overseas wins have, de Kock said, changed the way people regard him. Maybe he isn't too good to be true after all?

"I think my colleagues have come to accept me," he said. "At first, yes, there were doubters. I don't think that's the case anymore. People believe in me now."



Horse Chestnut (SAf) winning the GIII Broward H.

Equi-Photo

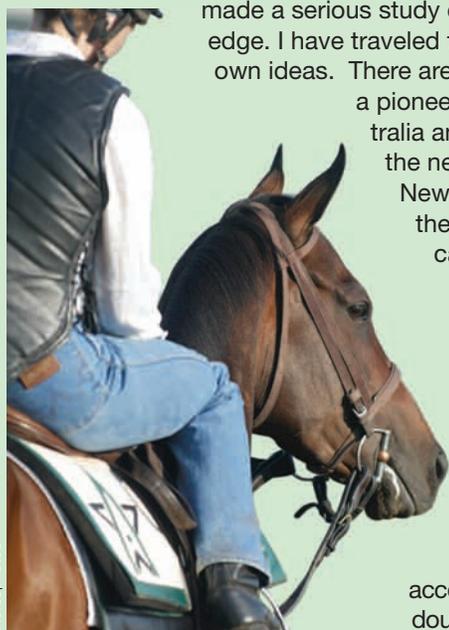
Mufti). He pulled off another double a year later in Dubai, winning the UAE Derby with Lundy's Liability (Brz) (Candy Stripes) and the Dubai Duty Free with Right Approach.

Wherever he has gone in the world, de Kock has been a major threat who has shown that the best South African horses can compete against the world's best. This year, he lost the G1 Dubai World Cup by a nose with Lizard's Desire (SAf) (Lizard Island {Aus}), but got revenge in Singapore where Lizard's Desire won the \$2.16 million Singapore Airlines Cup. There, he turned the tables on Gloria de Campeao (Brz) (Impression {Arg}), the horse who beat him in Dubai. He also won on World Cup night in Dubai with Musir (Aus) (Redoute's Choice {Aus}), who captured this year's UAE Derby.

"We needed to tell our story," said John Koster, the managing director of Klawervlei Stud. "The best way to tell our story was to go out and be successful. Mike de Kock proved that success is tangible, that it is here. We have really good horses. I wouldn't say we have the very best horses in the world, but we know that our horses can compete with a lot of the best horses in the world. Being on that international stage is what it's all about for us. That's how we will be discovered."

That the South Africans could win one major international race, let alone a bunch of them, is quite remarkable considering the size of the industry. The normal foal crop in South Africa is somewhere between 2,500 and 3,000 horses. Considering that approximately 10 times as many horses are born each year in the U.S., and about twice as many in England, South Africa should be at a huge disadvantage when facing international rivals.

Nor, on the surface, would it appear to have the sort of quality bloodstock needed to produce top-quality horses. Because yearlings normally sell for relatively low prices, no South African breeder can afford to bring in expensive stallions from overseas. For years, they tried to get around that by buying rela-



Ipi Tombe at Churchill Downs, 2003

Horsephotos

tives of America's and Europe's best horses and stallions.

Example: Krusenstern (Mr. Prospector). A full-brother to Gone West, he made just one start, finishing last in a maiden race in France before being sent to stand at stud in South Africa. Predictably, he was unsuccessful in his second career.

"The rand began to slide and everything became very expensive for us," John Koster said. "So we bought broken-down or unplaced full-brothers to champion stallions or racehorses and bred to them, instead of giving our own horses the chances they deserved."

Realizing that strategy was a mis-



Mick and Cheryl Goss of Summerhill Stud

take, South African breeders began to focus their attention on horses that had at least accomplished something of note on the racetrack overseas. In recent years, they have brought stallions in from America like A. P. Arrow (A.P. Indy), a Grade II winner who earned \$1.4 million, and Mambo in Seattle (Kingmambo), who missed by a nose in the GI Travers S. in 2008.

Still, the typical South African breeder has to hope to get lucky when importing a stallion--to find a horse that others might have given up on too soon, or who was never given a fair chance at all.

"To import a horse of any class, we have to compromise somewhere," said Mick Goss, whose Summerhill Stud is the nation's leading breeder and stands



Trippi

A. P. Arrow. "What I have been trying to do is to find the brilliant racehorse where something went wrong. Maybe he didn't win a Group 1 because he hurt himself or had some other issues. These are cases where I have good faith in the people connected with him and listen when they tell me he was as good as anything they ever had. Unfortunately, here, we can't have everything."

"We're only discovering ourselves now."

Mick Goss

The South African racing industry is very high on one of its newest sires, Trippi (End Sweep), who is standing at Drakenstein Stud. The winner of the GI Vosburgh, he stood in Florida where he was modestly successful, producing graded stakes winners Trippi's Storm, Miss Macy Sue and Let It Rock. His stud career got a huge boost earlier this month when he produced his first Grade I winner, R Heat Lightning, who captured the Spinaway S. at Saratoga.

Though he may not have been a huge success in the U.S., Trippi can only get better, the South Africans believe. The



The Karoo

theory is that in their country, he will be bred to only the best broodmares available.

But nothing has moved the South African-bred forward more than a sudden awakening that South African-raced and bred horses might actually turn out to be terrific sires. For years, they didn't think that was possible. Call it a lack of confidence in themselves and their horses.

"We always thought the imported product was better," Goss said. "The Americans have always believed in themselves. The Australians discovered themselves a long time ago. We're only discovering ourselves now."

South African-bred and raced sires like Jet Master (SAf) (Rakeen) and Captain Al (SAf) (Al Mufti) are annually among the leaders in all categories, and Jet Master is widely considered the nation's best sire.

"There's no doubt that Jet Master is one of the best sires not just in South Africa, but in the world," de Kock said. "Just look at his statistics. He consistently comes up with 12 to 15 percent stakes winners. How many stallions can do that?"

Still, there wouldn't appear to be the type of quality among South African bloodstock to keep producing horses that win seven-figure races around the world. So, how do they do it?

Some point to de Kock, saying he is so good that that he makes the difference when it comes to international competition. But others believe it has something to do with how the typical South African horse is raised and the country's environment; that South

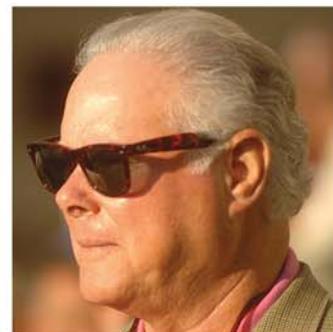
TEAM VALOR

INTERNATIONAL

RACING PARTNERSHIPS

Team Valor regularly forms partnerships of yearlings bought in South Africa. The horses race in South Africa and the best ones are exported to continue racing in the United States, Dubai and Europe. From time to time, Team Valor buys exposed horses privately to race abroad and at home. Successful runners of this type include Ipi Tombe, Irridescence, Gypsy's Warning, Crimson Palace, Tara's Touch and Jazzy.

Contact Barry Irwin at Valorific@aol.com



INTERNATIONAL TURF TOURS

Newly launched International Turf Tours, featuring trips to South Africa and Europe, with one tour to South Africa and two tours of Europe annually. Tours are limited to 20 participants, 10 of whom are existing Team Valor clients and 10 of whom are prospective TVI racing partners. Tours include racing, yearling sale, safari and wineries. Contact Megan Jones at (859) 533-8545 or teamvalor3@aol.com



BOUGHT IN SOUTH AFRICA BY BARRY IRWIN'S TEAM VALOR INTERNATIONAL SINCE 2000



IPI TOMBE

Horse of the Year in U. A. E.
\$2-million Dubai Duty Free-G1,
Locust Grove H.-G3 in U. S.,
Topped Tattersalls December Sale at \$1.7 million.

IRRIDESCENCE

Champion Filly at 3 in SAF,
\$1.8 million Queen Elizabeth II-G1 in Hong Kong.
2nd beaten head \$750,000 Beverly D-G1 in U. S.

CAPTAIN'S LOVER

Champion Filly at 3 in SAF, Cape Fillies Guineas-G1,
Prix du Pins-G3 at Longchamp,
\$200,000 Matchmaker S.-Listed in U. S.

CARNADORE

Champion Colt at 2 in SAF,
Gold Medallion Stakes-Grade 1

RUSSIAN SAGE

Champion Colt at 3 in SAF, Daily News 2000-G1
2nd Jebel Hatta-G3 in U. A. E. to 5, 2010.

GYPSY'S WARNING

South African Fillies Champion S.-G1, Eatontown H.-G3
3rd \$750,000 Beverly D-G1 in U. S. to 5, 2010

CRIMSON PALACE

Won only start for TVI in Dubai, sold to Godolphin,
for whom it won \$750,000 Beverly D-G1 in U. S.

ON HER TOES

Allan Robertson Fillies Championship S-Grade 1
KRA Fillies Guineas-Grade 2 to 5, 2010.

STRATOS

Empress Club Stakes-Grade 1

LITTLE MISS MAGIC

Empress Club Stakes-Grade 1

JAZZY

Gallant Bloom Handicap-Grade 2
Caress Stakes-Listed, both at Belmont Park in U. S.

TARA'S TOUCH

Royal North Handicap - Grade 3 at Woodbine
Stravinsky Stakes- Listed at Keeneland in U.S.

DELTA FORM

Del Mar Handicap-G2 (new course record)
3rd Turf Classic-G1 at Belmont
Hollywood Turf Cup-G1 in U.S.

SHE'S ON FIRE

Gerald Rosenberg Memorial-Grade 2
2nd Challenge Stakes-Grade 1 in SAF

SALLY BOWLES

South African Fillies Guineas-Grade 2
2nd Allan Robertson Fillies Championship Grade 1

ALEXANDRA ROSE

Monrovia Handicap-G3 at Santa Anita in U.S.
2nd beaten nose Cape Fillies Guineas-G1 in SAF

WARNING ZONE

Marie Krantz Memorial S.- Listed at Fair Grounds
3rd Triple Tiara Stakes-G1 in SAF

STATELY

Strelitzia Stakes - Grade 3 in SAF

JOSHUA'S MISTRESS

Laissezfaire Stakes - Listed

MILLER TIME

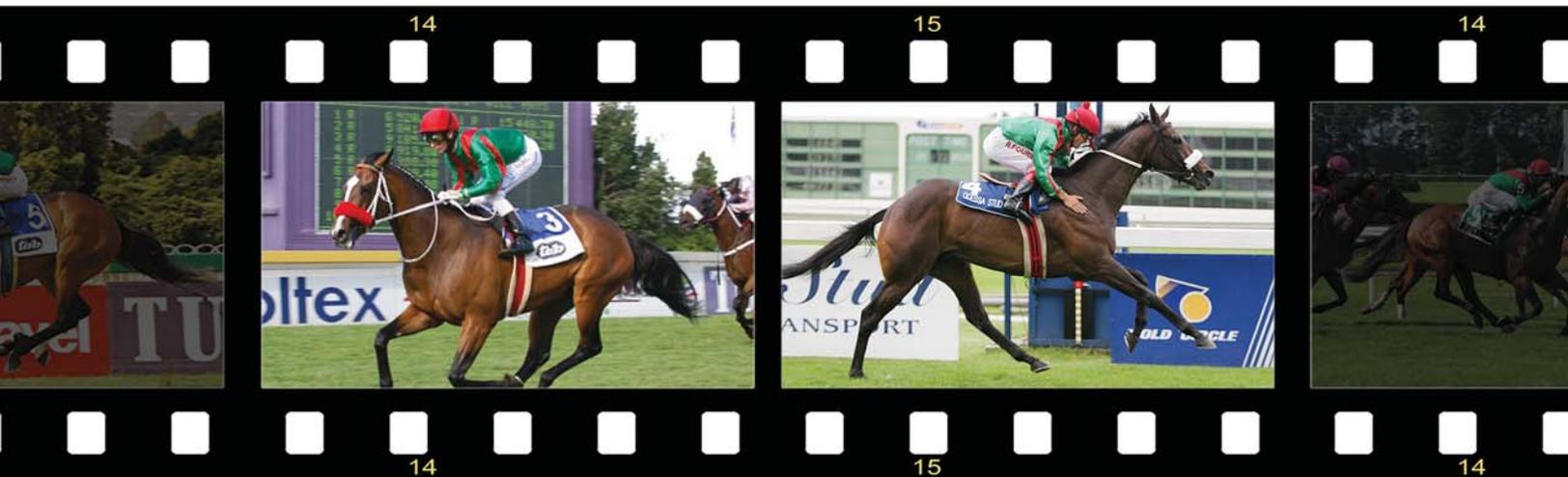
Sophomore Sprint Stakes - Listed

CHIQUITA

Bauhinia Stakes - Listed

EBONY FLYER

Lady's Slipper Stakes - Listed
unbeaten in 2 starts at 2, 2010



Africans know how to turn out tough, healthy horses.

For many years, the center of the South African breeding industry rested in The Karoo, a vast, largely uninhabited desert-like area south of Johannesburg. Many top breeders have since moved their bases to other areas because of their convenience and proximity to the top stallions, but a significant number of breeders, trainers and own-

ers still send their horses to The Karoo to be raised.

There, horsemen like Gary Player and Graeme Koster let the young horses romp in endless paddocks and enjoy nature at its best. Koster is fond of telling the story of the time he tracked a pack of 54 yearlings and found that it had traveled more than 20 miles in the course of a day through his enormous farm.

“You can never give a horse ability,” he said. “A horse either has it, or they don’t have it. But there’s one thing you can change, which is the strength of bone, the strength of their tendons. A good athlete can’t be locked up in a room and at the age of 21 come out and start running. Our horses have been running from a young age and stretching their ligaments. That’s what we try to do with our horses. We try to go back

Racing in South Africa

It’s an all-too-familiar story.

For decades, horse racing enjoyed a monopoly in South Africa when it came to gambling. The sport was healthy, and perhaps a bit complacent. That all changed in 1996 when the National Gambling Act legalized casinos and created a national lottery. Horse racing was in trouble.

“The industry lost 25 percent of its turnover overnight,” said John Stuart, the director of international marketing and operations for Phumelela Gaming and Leisure, Ltd., which owns five of the country’s 10 racetracks. “Essentially, it was bankrupt.”

Stuart said that South African horse racing was on its way to extinction. Fortunately, that led to decisive action to reinvigorate the game.

“Before, there was little cooperation and collaboration,” Stuart said. “Everyone just did their own thing and there were a lot of problems with egos.”

In an effort to take the sport into a new era, the South African tracks were consolidated under just two banners, with Phumelela left to run five tracks, and Gold Circle, which owns five tracks in the Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal areas, essentially controlling the entire industry. Tax breaks were negotiated with the government. South African owners were brought in, put on the Phumelela board and given an ownership interest in the company.

With a new, better structure in place, track owners began to work on how they could increase betting and give their customers a better experience. At the time, South African horseplayers were, for the most part, allowed to bet only on South African racing. That, for obvious reasons, wasn’t working.

“Turnover was declining, and we had to look at how we could better fight our competition, the casinos,” Stuart said. “Those guys could put in a one-armed bandit and give their customers instant gratification. We realized we had to do something to return the customer to the betting shop. Our punters were falling asleep because there was nothing to do between races.”

So Phumelela and Gold Circle introduced their customers to simulcasting. The typical South African racing card is set up so that a race from Europe falls in between live races from one of the local tracks. The companies have also worked to export their races to bettors in other countries.

Phumelela also takes bets on sporting events, with a portion of the revenue going to the racing industry.

With all the new wrinkles, the horse racing industry survived its darkest times.

“There was no way it could have survived the way it was,” Stuart said.

During the 2000-2001 racing season, South Africa had 112 group races worth a combined 26.9 million rand, or about \$3.6 million. Those same races now go for about \$7.5 million.

Many believe that further consolidation of the South African racetracks would be a step forward, and it may happen. With Gold Circle suffering through financial problems, Phumelela may be in a position to take over all the country’s tracks.

South Africa’s 10 racecourses are spread around the country. Turffontein in Johannesburg hosts the G1 Summer Cup. The big race in the Cape Town area is the G1 J & B Met. Durban’s primary event is the G1 Vodacom Durban July, which was first run in 1897 at its present home, Greyville, in the major city of Durban.

In a typical year, there are about 435 race meetings, and 3,750 total races.

Mike de Kock is the country’s top trainer, but he has competition. Sean Tarry is always among the leading trainers in South Africa and Herman Brown, like de Kock, has made his mark outside his native country. The Brown-trained Jay Peg won the 2008 G1 Dubai Duty Free.

South African jockeys have also prospered outside South Africa. Douglas Whyte, born in South Africa, is recognized as the outstanding jockey in Hong Kong.

to the natural ways.”

Like Koster, Player is based in The Karoo, and his horses will also have the run of huge paddocks. He says that is an asset, as is the environment.

“I’ve got the best water in the world here,” he said. “There’s no pollution. Our paddocks are bigger than most people’s stud farms. We’ve got the best stuff in the world for them to graze on. It’s called sweet veld. I came here because this is the best place in the world to raise horses.

“It would be hard for someone reading this in Kentucky to understand that. They’d say, ‘what kind of crap is he talking about?’ But we have assets that no one else in the world has.”

Even horses that never go anywhere near The Karoo are raised in ideal conditions. There is ample sunshine year-round in South Africa and little humidity.

There’s also something to be said for South African ingenuity. They know they can’t compete without trying



Horsephotos

Barry Irwin of Team Valor International

harder than everyone else or outsmarting them. That’s one of the reasons why de Kock has experimented with such things as treadmills, and Goss is building a school he hopes will churn out some of the brightest racing minds in the world. Goss says that the Al Mak-toum School of Management Excellence will be a state-of-the-art center for edu-

cation, and its students will leave the program ready to become industry leaders.

In time, South Africans figured people would start to catch on to what was happening in their country. Among the first to do so was Barry Irwin, who heads the Team Valor International operation. Always willing to scour the globe to find a good racing prospect, Irwin was told of a horse available in South Africa named Delta Form (Aus) (Marsday {Aus}).

He purchased the horse for about \$200,000, and it proved to be a terrific buy. Delta Form came to the U.S. and won the GII Del Mar H. in 2002 and finished third in the GI Turf Classic at Belmont and the GI Hollywood Turf Cup.

“At that time, nobody was paying much attention to South Africa,” Irwin said. “Mike de Kock hadn’t come on the scene yet, South African racing was pretty far under the radar, and the prices were low.”

Irwin would later buy Ipi Tombe, who

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was, he says, the best horse Team Valor ever owned. With her success, he was sold on what South Africa had to offer.

Irwin has been a presence in South Africa ever since, racing there and buying at the sales, concentrating primarily on fillies.

“The goal is to buy a horse that is good enough to come here,” Irwin said. “When I first went down there, I told my guys that if we could find one horse out of five that we can bring here, it will be worthwhile from a financial perspective. It’s been better than that.”

Irwin and Team Valor have found numerous top horses in South Africa. Irridescence (SAf) (Caesour) won the G1 Queen Elizabeth Cup in Hong Kong, beating Ouija Board (GB) (Cape Cross {Ire}), and finished second in the 2007 GI Beverly D. Captain’s Lover (SAf) (Captain Al {SAf}) won the 2009 Taylor Made Matchmaker S. at Monmouth. Gypsy’s Warning (SAf) (Mogok) won the GIII Eatontown S. at Monmouth this year and finished third in the GI Beverly D.

“That guy Irwin is as sharp as a tack,” Player said. “He was the one who caught on, and give him credit for that. You can buy a champion here today for a lot, lot less than you can in America. I hate to be specific, but I’d say it’s about 10 times less. And then you can take it back to America or some other country and make a big profit.”

Irwin might have been among the first foreigners to start mining South

Africa’s fertile racing industry, but others soon followed. There is now an Arab influence in South Africa, with Sheikh Hamdan buying and racing there, as well as Sheikh Khalifa. Sheikh Khalifa is the cousin of Sheikh Hamdan and Sheik Mohammed. Teaming up with de Kock and Malherbe, Sheik Khalifa has become one of the major forces in South African racing. He is so committed to South Africa that Malherbe said he had all but disbanded his Australian operation. His top horses start off in South Africa before finding their way to Dubai.



John Slade of Maine Chance Farm

“Sheikh Khalifa had limited success in Australia,” Malherbe explained. “In the meantime, he noticed Mike de Kock coming to Dubai and how well he was doing. He bought one in training with de Kock and did well and soon realized this was a great place to be. He has expanded to 30-odd mares, and buys yearlings here and all over the world, which we bring to South Africa to be raised because it is a cost-effective way to do things. Everything can be done cheaper here.”

South Africans are delighted that Irwin and some of the top Arab-owned racing stables have discovered their country, but they can’t understand why more haven’t followed their lead. They figure it has something to do with the rest of the world having the wrong ideas about South Africa.

“If we could fix our quarantine story and our export protocol, then the rest of the world would know about us.”

John Slade

“Why aren’t more people coming here? Because they think South Africa is a jungle?” Player asked. “Go to the best schools in America and no one will have heard of Johannesburg. If I tell someone in America that I have the best ranch on the planet to raise a horse

they'll say this guy has lost it. South Africa? Where the hell is that?"

Ignorance may be a factor, but a bigger one is surely African horse sickness. It is the bane of the South African breeding industry's existence, and a serious impediment to outside investors coming in.

"If we could fix our quarantine story and our export protocol, then the rest of the world would know about us," said John Slade, who manages Maine Chance Farm for owner Andreas Jacobs.

To get out of South Africa, a horse must spend an inordinate amount of time in quarantine. For instance, for de Kock to get to Dubai and start racing in January, he must begin the process in August. It begins with 60 days in quarantine in South Africa in what has been determined to be a horse-sickness free zone. After a horse goes through that period, there are some countries that will take them, but not Dubai. De Kock next sends his horses to England, where they spend still another 30 days in quarantine. Only after that can they go to Dubai.

At times, the situation has been even worse. When there is an outbreak of African horse sickness in the country, no horses can leave, sometimes for as long as two years. Bring a horse to South Africa, like a shuttle stallion, and the fear that they will be stuck there for an extended period of time is always in the back of your mind.



Stallion Black Minnaloushe at Maine Chance Farm

That's exactly what happened to Silvano (Ger), one of the few shuttle stallions ever to come to South Africa. Jacobs owned the German-bred Arlington Million winner who was Germany's Horse of the Year in 2001, and he brought him to Maine Chance Farm. When there was an outbreak of horse sickness in 2004, he was stuck. That actually turned out to be a boon for South African racing, as he went on to become one of the country's top stallions. Not having shuttle stallions has put South Africa at a big disadvantage to a place like Australia, which gets top Northern Hemisphere sires to come over for their breeding season.

Everyone in South Africa believes some sort of safeguards need to be in place to see to it that the disease doesn't spread to other countries, but they argue vehemently that the regulations and restrictions are well beyond reasonable.

Slade is among those who say the real blame lies with the South Africans themselves.

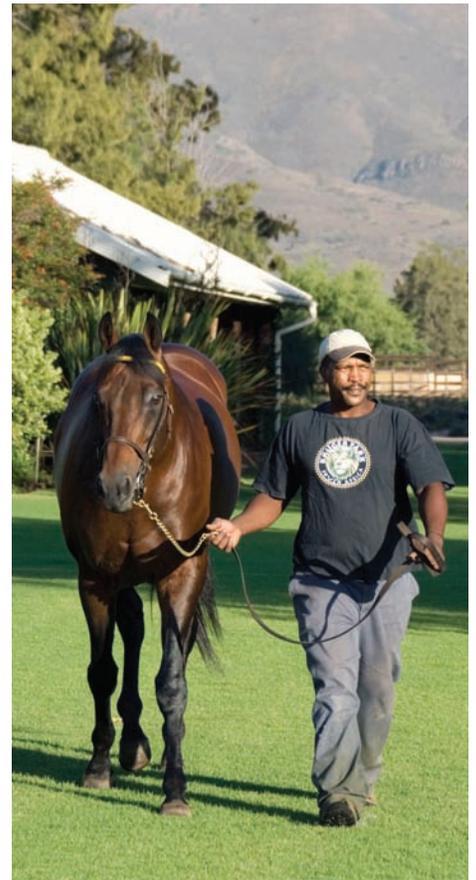
"We wanted to get back into the international arena so badly that we put these restrictions on ourselves," he said. "To please everybody, we put huge restrictions on ourselves. We promised to do this and do that and we went too far. They put these restrictions in that are too significant. We should have just said, 'cut the crap.'"

Even the name of the disease, Slade says, is a big problem.

"It's unfortunate that African horse sickness is called African horse sickness instead of something else," he said. "It's not just in Africa, it's all over the world. It's the word 'Africa.' If we could just get that word out. That name scares people. If it were called something else, I think we'd be fine."

De Kock's take?

"You can send a stal-

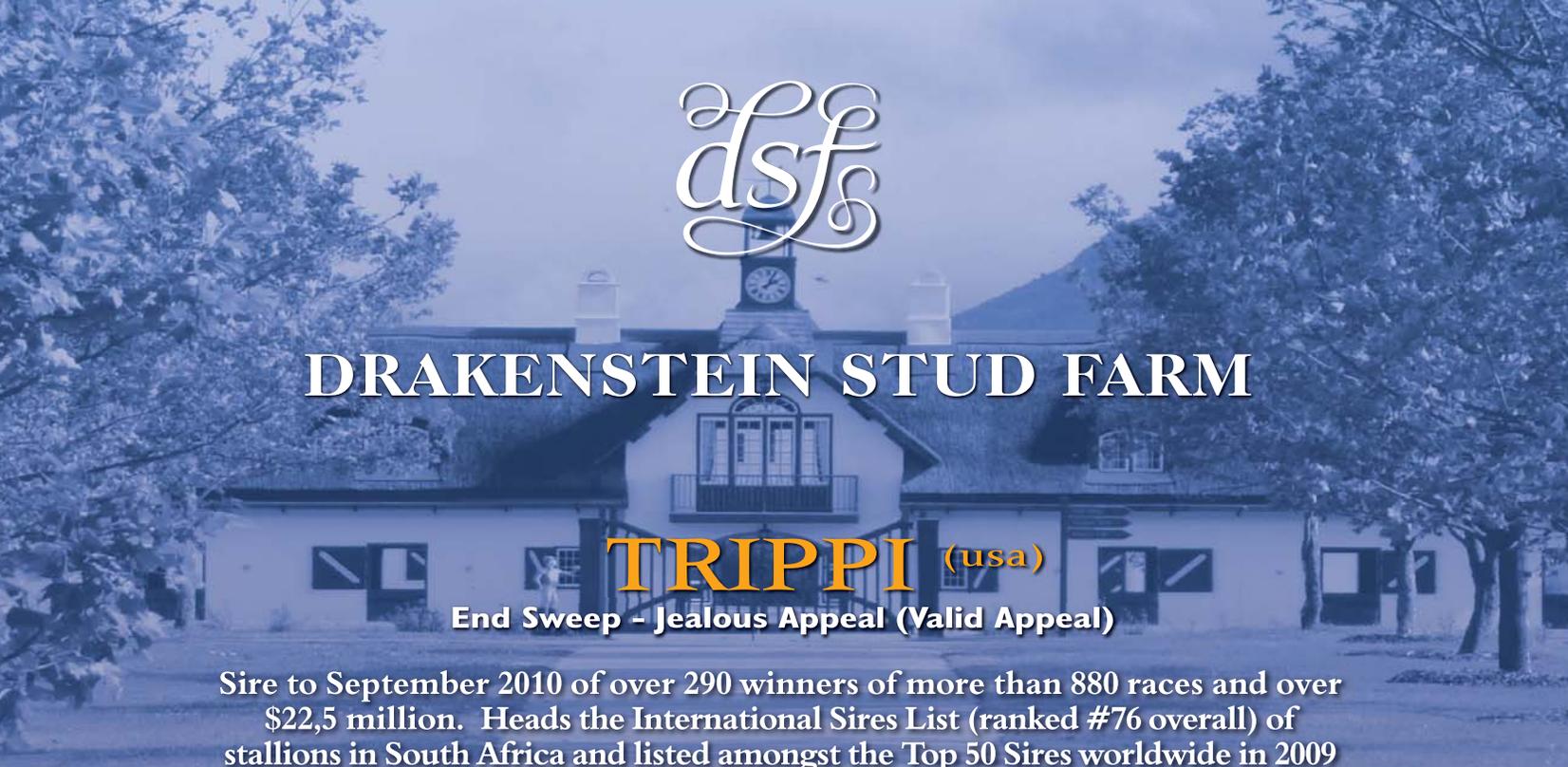


Silvano (Ger) shuttled to Maine Chance Farm, where he was trapped by an outbreak of African horse sickness

lion down here and I can't guarantee you it's going to get out," he said. "That's not good for business. That is the one and only thing that is holding us back as a country, the movement of horses.

"I'm of the opinion that we're not doing enough ourselves. We need to kick our own asses. I understand African horse sickness because I live in Africa and have to deal with it. But if I'm some guy in America, I don't know what's really going on. If I hear about this big, bad disease and I have to decide whether or not to let horses come in from South Africa I'm going to err on the conservative side. We have not been aggressive enough in educating the rest of the world about African horse sickness and the lack of risks involved in bringing a horse out of here."

One hope is that someone will find a cure for the disease. The other is that the impediments involved in bringing horses out of South Africa will become



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TRIPPI (usa)

End Sweep - Jealous Appeal (Valid Appeal)

Sire to September 2010 of over 290 winners of more than 880 races and over \$22,5 million. Heads the International Sires List (ranked #76 overall) of stallions in South Africa and listed amongst the Top 50 Sires worldwide in 2009



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- Psychedelic (Champion)
- R Heat Lightning - 2yo f - Gr1 Spinaway Stakes, USA 2010
- Jealous Again - 2yo f - Gr2 Queen Mary Stakes, UK 2009
- Trip for A.J. - 3yo f - Ms Brookski Stakes (L), USA 2010

a lot less strict. Either way, South Africans say, if that happens, their racing industry will explode.

In the meantime, they still want foreigners to come in, and for more South African horses to travel the world. With what has been happening lately on the world stage, they are brimming with confidence and remain convinced that South African racing remains a largely undiscovered jewel.

Their key selling point is the cost of doing things in South Africa. It costs less to buy a horse, to raise a horse, to train a horse. Everything is cheap.

"Our horses are undervalued and that's the reason why people should be buying here," said Gaynor Rupert, who owns Drakenstein Stud. "If I try to buy in the U.S. or U.K. for the same kind of money people spend here, what am I getting? Here I can buy a double Group 1 winner for one million rand, and that's not much more than \$100,000. Where in America could you ever buy a horse of that quality for that amount of money?"

At this year's Emperor's Palace National Yearling Sales in April, South Africans were proud that new records were set for the highest prices ever paid in the country for a yearling. Yet, by American standards, the amount of money that crossed the table was modest. The record was first set when a colt by Singspiel (Ire) went for 3.6 million rand. That record held up only as long as it took for trainer Geoff Woodruff to pay 4 million rand at the same sale for a son of Jet Master. At current exchange rates, 4 million rand equals \$553,000.

De Kock said it costs his owners about 84,000 rand per horse to keep them in training throughout a year. That is \$11,600, or about one third what it costs to campaign a horse in the U.S.

Purses aren't huge in South Africa, but neither are they pitiful. At the tracks in the Johannesburg area, the average

purse per race comes out to about \$13,000. The G1 Durban July H., one of the country's most prestigious races, is worth about \$350,000. But the real payday comes after a horse proves itself in South Africa and then goes on to win in Dubai, Hong Kong or the U.S.

Some South Africans say more Americans should do what Irwin has done--to buy South African yearlings, race



Bold Silvano wins the 2010 G1 Durban July, one of the country's most prestigious events

them at their home tracks until they are three or four, and then plan on sending them to the U.S.

Others argue that it makes as much sense to simply race in South Africa, particularly in the Cape Town area, which is one of the world's great spots during the Northern Hemisphere's winter months.

South Africans want more foreign investors and for the horse sickness problems to somehow go away. They also want more black South Africans to become involved in the sport. That hasn't been happening, and they see that as a problem.

The economic demographics of the country changed dramatically with the fall of apartheid in 1994. The new government instituted a program called Black Economic Empowerment. The program requires most South African companies to include black ownership. That has helped shift some of the country's wealth from whites to blacks and has created a population of upper-class blacks, some of whom are fabulously

wealthy. Virtually none, though, seem to have any interest in horse racing.

"The movement of wealth from whites to the previously disadvantaged is happening at such a rapid rate that it is a problem for racing," Slade said. "With our black empowerment program, money is going to well-connected blacks and it is moving to a small group of black elites. They are extremely rich and they are not coming into racing. To be into racing in this country, you have to have some knowledge of the sport and the blacks just don't have it. We haven't helped ourselves. We haven't seen to it that we have enough people of color in management positions."

White South Africans within the racing industry were delighted that President Jacob Zuma attended the Durban July

H. this year for the first time and saw that as a sign that blacks may be about to awaken to what the sport of horse racing has to offer.

But, as with most things when it comes to South Africa and the sport of racing, the people behind the industry figure the lack of black involvement is one more problem they will find a way to solve. These people believe in their sport, themselves and their horses.

They just want the rest of the world to see what they see.

"We have a small country at the bottom of the world, and we've always tended to look at things in Europe and America as bigger and better," de Kock said. "That's changed. "I have been out there in the world and have competed against the best trainers in the world. They have beaten me and I have beaten them. I don't see any reason anymore why we should have an inferiority complex. I believe in our product and I believe it's only going to get better. There's something special going on down here."

South Africa Diary

By BILL FINLEY

Monday, Aug. 16:

After a 15-hour nonstop flight aboard South African Airlines (excellent airline; free drinks in coach), I arrive at Johannesburg Airport where Eamonn Cullen, the marketing manager for Bloodstock South Africa, meets me. A country music-loving Irishman working in South Africa, he will be my escort across the vast country for the next several days. I am in good hands...I think.

It would help if I could understand him.

Eamonn: "Will be der by tree turdy."

Translation: We'll be there by three thirty.

Eamonn: "Den yer man fixed me up wid some berd, terned out she was a boony boiler."

Translation: Then he fixed me up on a date with a young lady. She was a psycho."

"Boony boiler" translates to "bunny boiler," which Eamonn explains is from the movie *Fatal Attraction*. For obvious reasons, there was no second date.



Eamonn Cullen and Gary Player

We hit the road and begin the long drive to the stud farm of golf great and South African icon Gary Player. Player's farm is in a region called The Karoo. It's a desert-like area that goes on forever. Basically, there's nothing there. To think that Player lives in an area like this is unfathomable. Where does he go when he runs out of milk or toilet paper? Believe me, there are no 7-11s in The Karoo.

Player is an amazing man. At age 74, he is energetic and fit and looks 55. Case in point: Driving through his farm, we come across a car stuck in a ditch. Seems like the driver and



Impalas

passenger, three lost souls who probably don't have a rand among them, are wasted. Player jumps out of his jeep, scolds the trio in some sort of language I don't understand and then pushes their car out of the ditch. I doubt the tipsy trio has any idea who he is or the bizarre scene they created.

Sorry, can't see Tiger Woods getting out of his car to come to the rescue of the unwashed masses. (Well, maybe if one of them were hot...?)

Player, like virtually everyone I will encounter, is a wonderful gentleman. The South Africans are the most hospitable people I have met, and they love to ply their guests with good food and drink. My waistline is already expanding.

Player, like the majority of white South Africans that I meet, is a great admirer of Nelson Mandela. They are quite aware that Mandela spared them from the sort of turmoil and violence that might have ruined their lives if anyone else had taken over after apartheid fell. Life remains good, and they know they have Mandela to thank.

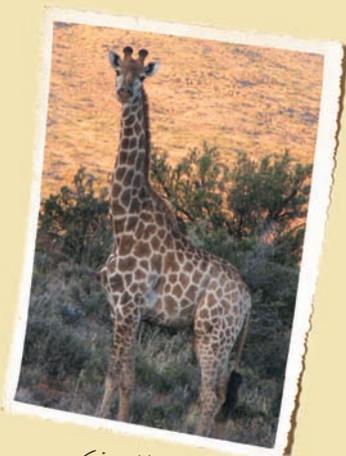
Stay the night at Player's house.

Tuesday, Aug. 17:

Am beginning to understand Eamonn's speech, and he is growing on me. He's your typical Irishman: fun-loving, outgoing and a little mischievous. But what's with the music? He loves Johnny Cash, Merle Haggard and Hank Williams Jr. An Irishman driving across South Africa belting the words to "Country Boy Can Survive" and probably longing for a longneck bottle of Lone Star beer...it gets no stranger.

After another long, long drive through more of The Karoo and endless miles of nothing, we arrive at the horse farm and game farm of Graeme Koster.

Graeme drives us through the game farm, where we see a bounty of animals, among them a trio of giraffes. Camera in hand, I walk toward these majestic animals and get to within 20 feet of them. Quite a thrill.



Giraffe

Graeme treats us to a braai, which is a South African barbecue and social occasion. We feast on lamb and good wine. Graeme insists that I drink a John Deere. Fortunately, I have been warned.

A John Deere is a noxious looking thing, and a tradition in the Koster family. It is bright green (thus its name) and tastes like soda pop without a hint of alcohol. One of the main ingredients, in fact, is cream soda. They may taste weak, but have quite a bite, which is why many an unsuspecting visitor to the Kosters has sucked down a dozen John Deeres only to be airlifted to the nearest hospital. They are actually quite good, but I have enough sense to stop after two.

Stay the night at Koster's lodge, where my room includes a sign warning the guests to keep the doors closed at night to keep the monkeys out. After all, one wouldn't want to wake up in the morning with a monkey crawling across your face, would one?

Wednesday, Aug. 18:

On the road again. I have my first biltong. Biltong is a lot like beef jerky, only not as tough, and the South Africans love it. You can make it out of just about anything--beef, chicken, springbok, road kill. I neither love it nor hate it.

We finally leave the vast Karoo area and find our way toward civilization and the horse farms of the Western Cape area. Unlike the Player and Koster farms, the ones we are about to visit look much more like something you'd see in Lexington. We visit the late Graham Beck's Highlands Farm and Maine Chance Farm, which is owned by German entrepreneur Andreas Jacobs.

The final stop on the day is Klawverlei Stud, owned by John Koster, Graeme's brother. More good drink. More great food. More John Deeres. More great, convivial company and South African hospitality.

Koster asks me who my favorite all-time horse was. Emboldened by, oh, 21 glasses of wine or so, I regale him with tales of Big Red. They ask Eamonn the same question and he comes up with some Irish jumper none of us have ever heard of. Yawn.

Thursday, Aug. 19:

The road takes us toward the Cape Town area, and the farm and vineyard of the Rupert family. Gaynor Rupert runs Drakenstein Stud, while her husband, Johann, focuses much of his attention on the family's winery. Both are found on the family property. If there is a more magnificent setting in the

world, I have yet to see it.

Gaynor Rupert is fabulously, fabulously wealthy, but she is as down-to-earth as they come. These are not pretentious people and they would never dare be anything but polite and warm to any visitor.

The farm's two most prized stallions are Trippi (End Sweep) and Horse Chestnut (SAf) (Fort Wood). The 1999 Horse of the Year in his native South Africa, Horse Chestnut (SAf) conquered America in the 2000 GIII Broward H. at Gulfstream before being injured, and is a beloved figure in his homeland. After standing briefly in Kentucky, he came back to South Africa last year, a local hero coming home.

After visiting the horse farm, we are taken to see the Ruperts' car museum. It includes more than 100 cars, some of which are among the most valuable in the world. It is here that I meet an elderly couple and involve them in a conversation. Former horse breeders who are white, they are from Zimbabwe, but are now living in South Africa. They came here after President Robert Mugabe seized their land and turned it over to blacks, something that happened to most whites. I assume they were left with virtually nothing. The world is a complicated place.

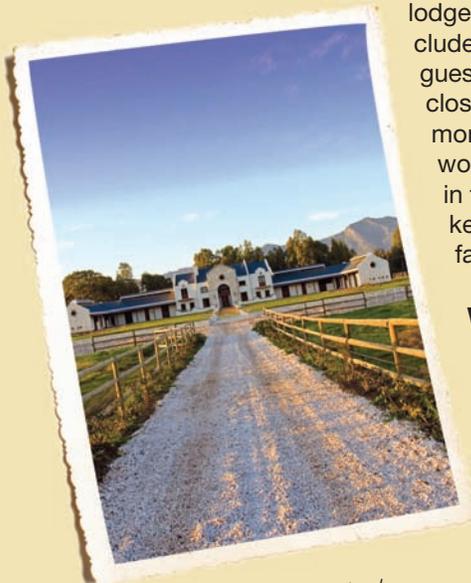
The day continues with a drive to Cape Town. I've always been told it is a beautiful, thriving place, but we get in late and I am not able to see much of the city. It is also winter in South Africa, hardly the best time to visit Cape Town. I will need to come back some day.

Friday, Aug. 20:

After breakfast with bloodstock agent Jehan Malherbe, it's time to move on. For me, that means a hassle-free flight from Cape Town to Durban. For Eamonn, that means a 19-hour drive. He has no choice since he is committed to driving his



Horse Chestnut



Klawverlei Stud



Mares and foals at Summerhill Stud

own car across the country. I actually feel sorry for the guy...that is, until he hints that maybe I should drive and he will get on the plane. Yeah, right.

A driver for Summerhill Stud, who takes me to my next destination, meets me at the Durban Airport. Along the way, we stop and visit the sight where Mandela was captured some 47 years earlier.

Owned by Mick Goss and the biggest breeding farm in South Africa, Summerhill Stud is still one more magnificent place. What sets it apart is that the property includes a small luxury hotel, Hartford House. I spend the night here and eat a meal that, I kid you not, must have included eight courses and three bottles of outstanding wine. Gluttony is good.

I am feasting and sleeping in a palace while Eamonn is slugging down Red Bull, eating a Wimpy burger at midnight on the highway and sleeping in some dump. Poor, poor Eamonn.

Goss's wife, Cheryl, is in Spain, where she will be eating at El Bulli, widely regarded as one of the world's best restaurants. I am impressed. Some 300,000 people try to get into El Bulli every year, and only 8,000 actually are "accepted" to eat there. Cheryl Goss, evidently, is a serious A-lister.

What I like most about Goss is his enthusiasm. South African racing is lucky to have him.

Saturday, Aug. 21:



Mike de Kock

An understandably exhausted Eamonn arrives at Summerhill and resumes his duties as my tour guide and chauffeur. We head for Johannesburg (nobody calls it that--it's Jo-berg to the locals) and the discussion turns to the big rugby match to take place later that day. The Springboks are playing the All Blacks.

I know that the Springboks are the national team of South Africa and that the sport is wildly popular here, especially among the whites. I also know that most of the players are white. But the All Blacks? If the

white guys on the Springboks are playing a team of all black players, has this country really come that far when it comes to racial issues? I am confused.

I ask Eamonn this racially sensitive question and he tells me that I am an idiot. The All Blacks are the New Zealand national team. The name apparently comes from their uniforms, which are, you guessed it, all black. We watch the end of the game at Eamonn's house. Frankly, I have no idea what is going on, but, from the best I can tell, the Springboks had a big lead and choked in the end. All of South Africa is in mourning.

The evening continues with a visit to the house of trainer Michael de Kock. The words "Nad al Sheba" are prominently displayed on the wall surrounding his house. That is what he calls his house. Why?

"Because the bloody Nad al Sheba races paid for the

place," Eamonn explains.

De Kock is a gregarious sort who never stops enjoying himself, despite the pressures of his job and the workload it involves. If there is a stuffed shirt in South Africa, I still haven't found him.

Sunday, Aug. 22:

Eamonn takes me to a crafts fair where I can buy gifts for the kids. Of course, I have to buy them vuvuzelas as a World Cup souvenir. Already imagining the noise an 11- and a nine-year-old can make with one of these things, I know I will regret this decision.



Mary Slack

Still in Jo-berg, we visit the home of Mary Slack, the racing-mad daughter of Harry Oppenheimer. Harry Oppenheimer was the chairman of Anglo America Corporation and De Beers Consolidated Mines. Am attacked by Slack's five dogs, who spend the next two hours licking me. Thankfully, I like dogs. Nice lady, Mrs. Slack.

Monday, Aug. 23:

It's time to go home. We have lunch with a friend of Eamonn's who works in the mining business and then head to the airport for the long flight back to JFK. I would think Eamonn couldn't be happier to be rid of me. There are married people who have spent less time together. But I think my Johnny Paycheck-loving Irishman is actually going to miss me.

For reasons I still don't quite understand, the flights can make it all the way from New York to Johannesburg without stopping, but must refuel on the way back. The 18-hour trip includes a pit stop in Dakar, Senegal, but they don't let you off the plane.

Tuesday, Aug. 24:

It is good to be home. I need a good night's sleep and a meal that contains fewer than 10,000 calories and doesn't include copious amounts of alcohol. But I will miss South Africa and the people who made this a most memorable journey.