

The David Allan Column

The familiarity factor: Horses in the lives of future owners



Everyone knew the “Express Dairy” cart that delivered milk to London suburbs.

“May I?” asked Anne. She meant “May I touch her?”

“Of course you may. Come here with me”.

Charlie and Anne are about thirty, both with steady jobs, often with anti-social hours. Both enjoy sports but they didn’t have one in common – not one to watch together on a regular basis. Charlie’s football meant shelling out a chunk of cash for 90 minutes of action and a traditional pie and a pint. Anne’s was more tennis and athletics which she got mostly from TV.

In the summer, with bright sunlight until ten, live sport together might mean an evening at Wimbledon in the first week – a cheap entry ticket after 5pm and superstars playing doubles a few feet from the watchers– or a cricket ODI but that was about it. Trips away for the weekend were often cancelled for work, or lack of motivation actually to do it.

The couple’s sets of parents would sometimes go racing. “Racing” for them does not need the prefix “horse”, not like “motor” or “ski” or “greyhound”. To one generation, a horse is a very familiar creature. To the next, not much familiarity at all. A narrower band of potential owners.

When the parents were very young, they knew Silver and Scout (The Lone Ranger’s and Tonto’s clever steeds), Trigger (Roy Rogers), and Champion the Wonder Horse “like a streak of lightning flashing ‘cross the sky”. Black Beauty was obligatory, sometimes heart wrenching reading as a child. Showjumping’s equine stars were household names and racing was on both channels, graduating from black and white to colour on Grandstand, one of the country’s most watched programme. **(Cont. p2)**

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DAVID ALLAN

Horses were everywhere. As small children, Charlie and Anne's parents would emulate their own parents and rush out on school holidays to greet the milk horse, as popular as the milkman although not in the comedy context of illicit relationships with housewives.

Kids would "do a milk round" behind the horse – later on the electric floats - for a few shillings, improving their maths by memorising how many pints of what "top" went to every house on the round. Expressions such as nosebag and horse manure (for the garden or allotment) were everyday words for urban as well as rural dwellers. Devotees of Steptoe & Son knew all about "the 'orse".



David Broome on Mr Softee, the Ice Cream Horse.

Charlie and Anne's parents would be taken as little children in North London to the enormous RSPCA Home of Rest for retired working horses. Coal horses pulling coal sacks for delivery to houses—contributing to smog. Dray horses pulling beer to openings in the pavements to "Roll out the Barrel" down to the cellars below the pub. Plough horses. And the pit ponies, by now used to sunlight, much loved by many who would queue every Sunday with their bags of carrots to tour the old fellows, brought in from their paddock for the weekly open day.

Urban familiarity with the horse would be multiplied by encounters that continue today: police horses staring massively down on generally benign humans, thrilled by the proximity, even today politely queuing with children to go up close to them; the Household Cavalry on guard and at every day of pageantry from the Opening of Parliament to the Trooping of the Colour.

Gone sadly is the Van Horse Parade in Regent's Park where Shires and Clydesdales pulling all manner of brilliantly turned out commercial vehicles would be seen by small children, including Charlie and Anne's parents, sitting on their Daddy's neck in the large crowds.

The horse was a familiar creature, always helping humans, nearly always well-behaved, sometimes being a hero. Our windows blew in when in 1982 IRA nail bombs killed four cavalymen and seven horses in Hyde Park, and seven bandsmen playing in Regent's Park. Nothing detracted from the loss of human life for a second, but the "collateral damage" of the horses reinforced the horror.

Not born at that poignant time, Charlie and Anne in their city lives had few encounters with horses. Until one day, a neighbour came back from a "Racing Roadshow", enthusing about the idea of owning a racehorse. The context had included the 100,000 people or more employed because of the racehorse; spacious venues that accommodate sedentary fine dining or picnicking or joining that swirl of a racing crowd from parade ring to watching them go down, then have a bet or not then grab a spot on the stand or lawn, then back to the Winner's Enclosure to welcome them back.



Hintlesham Racing's SA silks, winning in January.

The training experience ranks high on "Why are you a racehorse owner?" surveys. Early mornings on the gallops, often with staggering views; complex meaning in what is going on; breakfast with the trainer and getting close with the horse and the people who look after him or her.

Charlie and Anne thought about the idea. "We could do this together". Get out and around the country for a purpose. Meet new people with an instant **(to p3)**

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DAVID ALLAN

common interest. They shopped around for a syndicate and looked at our Hintlesham Racing which operates in the UK and South Africa. Our fixed costs attracted them, as did the detailed communication and hand-holding. The plunge was taken.

There are two great bonding moments. Naming the horse and meeting the horse. A club horse may be named by the managers, but a syndicated or wholly owned horse may be named at a convivial lunch.



Hintlesham partners with an Investec Trophy at Epsom.

That first meeting can be a special moment. Proving that men can multi-task, I deftly kicked open the lower latch and pushed back the bolt on the filly's stable door. She obligingly made room for her visitors. A couple of gentle shoves and she was properly displayed, in turn herself displaying that great characteristic of these beautiful creatures, accommodating humans and exercising their own curiosity.

Of course, amateurs should never go in alone, but the look on their faces as they take in the bulk, the gleam, the character and the special awareness is rewarding.

“May I touch her?” “Of course you may. Come here with me”. –tt.

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