

The David Allan Column

## For Whom The Bell Tolls



THE report in the daily *European Bloodstock News* of Thursday's Bloodstock SA Cape Yearling Sale highlighted "dramatic downturns". A median price that calculates to £2,500 jarred in the international news medium with – higher up the page – a list of several 4 and 5 year olds being bought for over one hundred times that price in the jumping market. Not apples with apples, but eye catching.

On Saturday's first session of the CTS March Sale, 13 yearlings were withdrawn. leaving 87 for sale. 58 of them – two thirds - are recorded as having made 60,000 rand or less – perhaps half of the sort of money that a breeder/vendor needs to make the books look at least bearable.

One third (29) made the minimum bid of 20k or were "not sold" which in this atmosphere mostly meant "no bid". Whether prices are buy backs or not – not always visible – is not the point. The point is the level of trade.

Back at BSA, their figures exclude declared buy-

backs which is a transparency created overseas, ironically to deter stallion people from ramping up prices thus falsely increasing the published indicators. In last week's case, it was their exclusion that improved the stats.

This is not simply a matter to hold against sales companies, however compelling the argument for rationalising the programme. The Saturday horses were inspected and a generally decent bunch, some very decent. The fact is that there are insufficient buyers in the South African racing industry and sport. However much the operators/betting interests want to see full fields, somebody has to own those full fields and that is what is lacking.

Why? 1 in 310 people in Australia owns a piece of a racehorse and trainer/owner/manager communication is brilliant. **(to page 2)**

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## DAVID ALLAN

Racing in the UK is the second biggest spectator sport, admittedly because of 7 days a week racing at many venues in a small country but even so. There, the 50 year battle between bookmakers and owners is resolving itself excitingly with enlightened initiatives from the BHA, owners and others. Government recognises Self Help within racing when they see it.

**In South Africa, trainers carry an enormous burden compared to elsewhere. At the same time, they have a power to decide that far exceeds most “elsewhere”- which is a long story but surely they would benefit from more support.**

Trainers in SA not only have to train, rising at 4 or 5-something a.m. then communicate with owners, managers and other industry needs in the time between morning and afternoon stables, but they are expected largely to FIND the owners, establish their financial bona fides, then keep them happy. Tough job. The current malaise at sales results from that resource being stretched through no fault of the trainers. They ought to have help.

There is a layer of people on whom the global sport and industry relies strongly from both the selling and buying perspective. Bloodstock Agents. Or Consultants as is often preferred these days. (Before going on, may I say that “Bloodstock Agent/Consultant” is part of what I/we do within a broader management and investment portfolio. But the buzz at a vibrant sale gets us through many 16 hour days rarely seated).

The focus of long established sales companies is on the agents. Sales companies rarely know for whom purchases are made with obvious exceptions. Agents create the business for the sales companies. They generally take financial responsibility with the sales companies and the sales companies are not fiscally interested in who is the end user/buyer.

The agent is credited in all publications and publicly thanked by the sales companies. The agents beat the bushes for owners and know every

relevant catalogue inside out. The agents bring overseas business as well.

Sales companies shape their policies through liaison meetings with the Federation of Bloodstock Agents, as well as with the TBA for breeders and with the various consignment companies who account for over 30% of yearling selling, let alone all the other ages and types of horses. Another 30% are sold by foal pinhookers, often over 50%, another activity that makes the world go round.



Owners mostly use agents to make their purchases and are introduced to trainers by their agents or managers. Now with the plethora of syndicate opportunities, industry manuals that used to say “First find a bloodstock agent” now extend that wording but the syndicate managers are more or less the same animal – and they will probably use an agent and spotters themselves, as will most trainers if owners go to them first.

Usually it is all a cheerful, hard working collaboration between professionals. Owners of great experience and scale may have their own managers who will probably use an agent to help inspect and analyse.

It's not perfect. It is still difficult to find enough owners. The post-recession atmosphere still pervades. But in South Africa we do not have that automatic layer of people. And we do not seem to have an industry body that will tour the country promoting racing as a sport, industry and career.

Trainers have minimal industry back-up in this task – unless you count betting advertising but if it were all about punting, there would be many fewer horses owned in some racing jurisdictions. Next to none in Dubai and many fewer in the UK.

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Just as the unfathomable SA import quarantining of horses, particularly costly months long exile for pregnant mares, seems to date back to something decades ago, so do other rules and impressions. "This is how we do it in South Africa" is often fair enough and very attractive. But racing and breeding are global. We all need help. None of us can "do it all myself". A layer of entrepreneurs like agents/consultants beating the bushes, plus the development of pinhooking markets with clear financial plans for investors would accelerate the inflow of funding.

Relying more on the long established John Freeman and John Kramer, or Kerry Jack building a career, or Green Street Bloodstock's initiatives or that bloke David Allan who always seems to be here, would be a wise investment allowing them to expand business and create employment, as well as offering a major service. Without business or industry input, they can't "do it all by themselves". In addition, one organisation or another could surely fund a pop-up exhibition stand and (good young) staff to tour the country introducing the thoroughbred to the population.



*Donne. Involved in Mankind.*

"No man is an island" wrote John Donne in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century (or woman, he should have added). Right now, plenty of breeders and trainers are feeling lonely. Donne went on "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee". - tt

### **TRAINERS: Do consult vets before "Robaxin"**

The National Horseracing Authority have issued a notice to trainers in respect of Methocarbamol, a muscle relaxant used to treat skeletal muscle spasms, with some effect on the central nervous system.

Methocarbamol is locally available as a human tablet preparation of commercial name "Robaxin". Methocarbamol is a substance with an Asian Racing Federation screening limit and as member of this federation, the NHA has adopted this limit. The NHA suggests that trainers consult a veterinarian with regards to suitable withdrawal periods. - tt.

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