



*Mondays* with DAVID ALLAN



## Buy A Racehorse? Nah.. Buy a second-hand bike!

*"Dad...! Dad....! How much is a racehorse? Can I have a racehorse? Can I? Can I?"*

Dad dodged the question. But a few days later, he accidentally landed on a broadcast site on DSTV that neither he nor anyone whom he knew would have gone to on purpose.

It looked like a lunch party with a sale going on at the same time. Soon he realised that they were selling horses. Then something caught his eye: the price of what he later learned was "a yearling".

Now this Dad is a really nice Dad. His daughter was only play-acting when taunting him with present-related questions, not really expecting anything much, just a very nice day and a little present.

But this Dad had decided to buy his daughter a road bike. Probably pre-owned but that made sense for all sorts of reasons, including getting a good one.

But these horses? Most of them were cheaper than the bikes he had researched on-line.

Like most people with a bit of a mechanical bent,

Dad would have a rough idea of the cost of producing a bike on a production line. Frames made by the thousand; saddle posts and saddles; handlebars and grips; wheels with tyres to be fitted, brake assemblies and pedals; and what in my day were likely to be 6-speed Benelux gear cogs and a double clanger in the front to make it 12.

Bung it all together on an assembly line and Bob's your Uncle.

Now, these horses. You can't exactly start with a fuselage and buy in the legs, neck and head with fully operating eyes, mouth, ears, nose and throat, then adorn with a mane and tail and offer a variety of colours and markings to be chosen in the showroom or on a website. *"Can I have a little white sock on that leg please?"*. *"Yes of course, Sir, and how would Sir like our forehead markings...?"*

The process is somewhat different. It involves physical and genetic analysis, financial projection and budgeting, enormously skilful and **(to page 2)**

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caring animal husbandry, scientific and sensitive assessment of the likelihood of conception achieved in a potentially brutal coming together as well as by timely transport to and from; then care through gestation and the wonderful or shattering process of birthing.

The resultant creature has forelegs that evolved from the equivalent of your and my fingers, bearing a lot more weight than fingers pro rata, and requiring eyes-on singular focus from the first staggering steps at an extraordinarily high level of expertise, way beyond taking up the slack in a chain that slips off the bike's double clanger.

For the sales yearling, there is a highly professional delivery process which has to end up at a special establishment capable of "winding down" a revved up living breathing sentient being weighing 400+ kg that has just been quite intensively prepped to spend time in an eye-poppingly different environment. It's a bit different with a bike which goes in a shed. But they sell some yearlings for the cost of a bike.

Dad Googled and found a Price List for the Bloodstock South Africa KZN Yearlings Sale, held on Thursday and Friday last week. He is a Johannesburg resident, mad about sports – including cycling of course – and it was during his planning of the weekend's sports viewing that he came across that broadcast site with lunch and a horse sale.

His TV focus was on the Football World Cup Quarters – England v. Sweden then Croatia v. Russia; on Wimbledon; on Formula 1 Qualifying and the Grand Prix; on several rugby matches at home and abroad, on cricket and....well...you know. He had heard of the Vodacom July but it did not impact on him. After all, horse racing is just about betting and Dad certainly does not take his paid-for seat at a rugby match and wonder on whom to bet for first try.

**Let me interrupt the Dad narrative to say that the figures at KZN yearlings were up year on year, so Good Luck to the sales company and main contributors.**

But Dad soon discovered that 70% of the yearlings offered made R 75,000 or less. That can't possibly make sense, he thought. Actually 23% made zero or 15,000, sometimes less than zero being put on the market then paying commission. To be fair, some of the zeros had failed to meet reserves but most were low, and only one higher than 75,000.

75,000 was random. He might have picked R130,000 – maybe break even with a modestly priced stallion, the cost of raising and a contribution to the mare? Pick a number. Pick that one and Dad would find out that only 15% of the horses offered made R130,000 or more. 15%!



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*Excellent initiative - could be an article in the general sporting press re Owners' Benefits.*

He is not stupid. He worked out that this is a so-called "Regional" sale, but a horse is a horse and production is production. A vendor of five horses will do better with some than others. But only 15% making R130,000?

A recent good session of this KZN sale – a very important fixture to hang onto and regrow when our "upsides" kick in – was in 2015. The 2018 renewal showed a nearly 30% drop in median and 21% drop in average. Recovery from last year is very good, but we are not at sustainable levels - yet.

Sires that had winners on Vodacom July Day sold some for buttons, but the sales company had inspected, therefore the only logical conclusion is that there were fewer buyers than horses. That doesn't compute and must at all costs be reversed.

Some buyers say "It's our turn now". That is *schadenfreude*. If the hard core of South African mid-range sporting owners – whose value is immense - gets too used to acquiring horses for buttons or on free leases, we are all in serious trouble. Racing needs mid range horses – many of which will beat the expensive ones – therefore the industry must create stronger buying otherwise....no mid range horses to buy.

Critical press – not unkind but well-intentioned (and sometimes South African as well as "foreign" generated, overseas) includes the comment "It's all about the punter in South Africa," often while being hosted superbly by a racecourse as owners.

This is a sport and in sporting South Africa, a lot more Dads and Mums need to be connected to the joys of association with a whopping great elegant athlete that will try his or her guts out for them. Whether they punt as well or not. - **tt**.

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SA +27(0)21 828 9288 | SA mobile +27(0)72 740 9061  
UK +44(0)1252 646611 | UK mobile +44(0)7774 697640  
davidallan@allanbloodlines.com | www.allanbloodlines.com



*LAUDERDALE, bought by AllanBloodlines for R40,000, wins the Grade 1 Thekwini Stakes... but with only twice the buyers might have cost triple.*



*WE'll never know whether five-year-old It's My Turn would have won Saturday's Durban July or whether he would've finished unplaced. We can't say for sure, therefore, whether the handicappers did owner Fred Crabbia a favour by leaving his horse out of the final line-up to contest his second choice, the Gr3 DSTV Gold Vase in which the gelding was generally considered a shoe-in, and duly arrived. But Fred and wife Manuela (left) were very happy to lead It's My Turn into the winner's enclosure after the Gold Vase, won by 1.25-lengths and the owner said: "Well done to Jane Thomas (pink dress, right), who did a fantastic job in getting It's My Turn right, and also to Emma (Rourke, right), who runs my whole stable." Trainer Dean Kannemeyer commented: "He was the class horse of the race and was given a peach of a ride by Anton Marcus. We grabbed this opportunity with both hands and I'm happy to have my whole team here today. Well done also to Willem Engelbrecht for breeding him, and it's great for his sire Dynasty!" Marcus said: "There's no better medication than a winner!" (Photo: Gold Circle).*