



So... how did the Japanese do it?



Japanese racing fans buy soft toy replicas of their favourite horses.

At 08:40 South Africa time yesterday, around 8 hours before the running of the postponed Sansui Summer Cup, 17 runners lined up for the 2017 Japan Cup over 2400m, worth somewhere in the general area of 80 million rand. The day before, jockey Ryan Moore won six races in the warm-up programme.

The huge first prize was won by the prosaically named Cheval Grand (ridden by Hugh Bowman of Winx fame, flown in) by Heart's Cry, a son of the immortal Sunday Silence out of a mare by Arc winner Tony Bin. Rey De Oro (by leading sire King Kamehameha, a Japanese bred champion son of Kingmambo) was second (Christophe Lemaire based in Japan) and the legendary Yutaka Take rode the superb Kitanas Black, the favourite, in third.

Kitanas Black (by Black Tide, a full brother to the magnificent Deep Impact) has won a stack of big races including last year's Japan Cup and two Tenno Sho (=Emperor's Prize usually translated as Emperor's Cup). More revered as classic races than the "newer" Japan Cup, there are two Tenno Sho. One in the Spring over 3200 metres and one in the Autumn over 2000 metres.

Note the reverence for classic distances.

Thousands of young fans of the main Japan Cup contenders will have queued for entry overnight to a course with a capacity of 220,000. An enclosed area is provided for them to put down padded ground-sheets on which to sleep and, in a country where you can buy almost anything from a vending machine bar a car, they are not short of supplies.

Tokyo Racecourse, one of the four "big ones", is in Fuchu, 20 km from the centre of Tokyo but still well within Metropolitan Tokyo-Yokohama which is home to around 26 million people.

That is some catchment area, especially when horse racing in Japan ranks right up there with baseball, football, rugby and sumo in *(to page 2)*

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popularity, at all teen and adult ages.

Around 5,000 people travel to Paris for the International Holy Grail – The Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. 8,000 when Deep Impact ran. Twice as much is bet on the Arc in Japan as is bet on the Arc in France but both in Paris and Japan racing, fans often retain winning betting tickets as souvenirs i.e.



Sunday Silence, dominated the Japanese industry.



Kitanas Black 2016 Japan Cup Winner and Horse of the Year - 3rd yesterday.



A painting in the author's house of Montjeu overhauling El Condor Pasa in the '99 Arc.

do not cash in.

The quirky Orfevre was twice second in the Arc, sparking a mixture of howls of “nearly syndrome” and the sheer excitement of the competition. The same had been expressed by Japan collectively when El Condor Pasa in 1999, four lengths clear, was run down by the superb Montjeu in a great renewal of the Arc.

So how did all this develop? And how has it been sustained through 20/30 years of almost continuous recession?

During The Economic Miracle of the 70s and 80s, employment for life created a level of security in salaries that allowed the patronage of many pursuits such as international tourism, non-stop shopping, attending concerts by the world's greatest rock, classical and opera stars, eating in the best place in the world to eat (any cuisine) and packing out sports arenas.

But not horse racing. Then and for decades before, the world of the thoroughbred was a Yakuza world. The province of organised crime gangs.

The Yakuza were very visible but of limited threat. If a gang boss was catching a Bullet Train from, say, Osaka to Tokyo, hundreds of gang members would fill the platform to bow him away. You had to push through them to get onto the train. A gang member who might run a string of ladies of the night would apologise, bow and get out of the way, offering a business card if helping with your luggage. Ironically, the Yakuza were amongst the first to render assistance after the devastating 2011 tsunami.

(Trivia break: Bullet Trains are Shinkansen – the dam of Alado's Grade 2 winner of the Selangor Cup).

Many Yakuza have had a little finger ritually severed and all of them, when stripped of their white shirts and black suits, are covered below the neck line in densely patterned tattoos. Simply put, you wouldn't want your daughter to marry one and in other businesses, you did not mention your horse racing passion.

In the late 80s, the Japan Racing Association decided that this was no state of affairs for modern times. They made two brilliant moves.

Firstly they identified the people with the most disposal income: OLs. Eh? “OL” is an example of Japan's penchant for importing foreign language ex-



pressions then contorting them. OL means Office Lady which then meant uniformed young women acting as clerks-cum-green-tea-makers in open plan offices arranged in banks of desks (with one or two OL's on each bank). They would be unmarried and living at home with their parents. And loaded.

For them, stars were created. Sports stars, like baseball heroes or the Meiji University Fly Half playing in front of 75,000 fans chanting in unison against Waseda or Tokyo University. What sports stars? Young good looking jockeys.



Kitasan Black's trainer Hisashi Shimizu owner Saburo Kitajima a well known singer and jockey Yutaka Take.

Yutaka Take was around 19. "Poster Boy" may not have been an expression at the time, but that is what he became. Now at more like 49 he is one of the world's best known jockeys, but then he and a few others packed out the main racecourses in Tokyo (Fuchu), Kyoto (the beautiful old capital - Gr1 Tenno Sho, Kikuka Sho, Queen Elizabeth II Cup), Hanshin (Osaka - Gr1 Takarazuka Kinen, Oka Sho etc) and Nakayama (Tokyo - Gr1 Arima Kinen, Satsuki Sho etc).

Then they admitted to a stagnant gene pool and

took the first steps to being – today – the routine producers of several of the world's top rated racehorses.

Mr & Mrs Breeder were invited to buy new broodmares in the UK for their own account BUT the JRA (or sister quango the JBBA) would (a) pay the transport to Japan and (b) arrange a waiver of the statutory 8% import tax) PROVIDED THAT Mr & Mrs Breeder took one existing mare out of the stud book.

This act was never a shooting job. Japan is a nation of expert enthusiasts. The ten thousand opera fans in Tokyo who packed every recital and performance were more knowledgeable than was reasonable to believe, even if not representing the whole nation. Same with horses. Therefore, the multiplicity of "sport horse" people in a populous nation got an injection of thoroughbred blood for nothing.

The schemes soon spread to USA sourcing when Sunday Silence came in 1990. No single stallion has ever refreshed and dominated a wealthy, experienced breeding industry as this son of Halo, a 2 out of 3 Triple Crown winner at 2000 metres. His son Deep Impact was/is as good, and there are dozens of sons of Sunday Silence carrying on the good work.

Shadai Farm offers a fat brochure of 60 or 120 share opportunities in more or less everything they breed. They are always oversubscribed. Brilliant – if the industry governing body has created the customer base by working like fury to create it.

What is the governing body in South Africa? - tt.

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