

# L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Racing Festival

EVE CARR

“Come on, *Vardy*, move yer bloomin' arse!” Well, maybe I didn't ACTUALLY here somebody yell those words but the racegoers at the L'Ormarin's Queen's Plate were certainly extremely vocal. And what a gripping finish to the big race – second and third place were so very close, with *One World and Rainbow Bridge* battling it out to the end.

However, I digress. The L'Ormarin's Queen's Plate is about so much more than the “big race”. Right from your arrival you can sense that this is a very special race run at a very special racecourse – and not only because of its wonderful views of Table Mountain. Kenilworth Racecourse also has a hugely important conservation area at its centre which has at least nine seasonal wetlands and is home to some 11 species of amphibians, including the critically endangered micro frog, the endangered Cape platanna and the Cape rain frog. Reptiles residing in this magical habitat include the parrot-beaked tortoise and the rare Aurora house snake while there is also a small mammal community, which includes the newly discovered Brant's climbing mouse. There are also more than 300 indigenous plant species of which 34 are threatened with extinction. A plant species, the cinnamon sambreëltjie (*Hessea Cinnamomea*), was recently rediscovered in this area – it had not flowered for more than 70 years! Add to this the fact that at least 80 bird species reside in or frequent the reserve, including the rare peregrine falcon, and you will understand why I call it “special”.

The racecourse is capable of hosting thousands of people in its various venues and function rooms meaning that there is something to suit everyone's taste and pocket and the organisers certainly utilised every area on the Saturday of the event. The outdoor area, part of which was aptly named “The Style Village”, allowed racegoers access to bars, food concessionaires, car displays and so much more. The remainder of this outside area was taken up by “The Paddock Sites” and “The Stud Club”, a marquee overlooking the track with more exclusive benefits for racegoers. In its main building there is the Peninsula Room, the Kenilworth room and the Somerset Room all of which were geared to different tastes for this event.

No wonder, then, that the organisers of the L'Ormarin's Queen's Plate choose this venue to host the running of this prestigious event, a race first run in 1861 with a prize of five hundred sovereigns and a silver plate donated by Queen Victoria.

The race was first sponsored by L'Ormarins in 2005 and has grown in strength and splendour since then, with much other than horses to interest its guests! I hesitate to generalise but it seems to me the men were flocking to the vintage car display hosted by the Franschoek Motor Museum (a Bugatti valued at FOUR MILLION RAND – what's that all about?), while the women, after a little stint at the Beauty Bar, were more interested in the carousel and the fashion!

And was there FASHION! Guests mostly adhered to the blue-and-white code, with the blues ranging from the palest periwinkle to midnight, which all stood out beautifully against the lush green of the grounds. “Hats off” to all those who took so much time and trouble with

their outfits! And were there HATS! Ranging from the teeniest, tiniest fascinator, through flat discs, to humungous feathered and flowered creations so elaborate that the wearer was practically smothered by them. Parasols also abounded which hopefully provided some relief from the, at times, scorching sun. Of course, the Cape Doctor also made its appearance and must have had those hats and parasols rockin' and rollin'!

Punters (like myself!) who are not too au fait with ratings, weights, odds, etc and who find themselves fascinated by the names of the horses instead would have had an excellent time choosing horses by the themed occasion:

Taking the first race on the card for example – *Lilac Sensation*– there is controversy as to whether Lilac is a shade of blue or purple but let's stick with blue. And, incidentally, the Mum's name was *Spring Lilac*!

Then in Race 6 we have *Queen Supreme* – get that connection??

And then if we push it a little bit and move on to *Flowerscape* in Race 3 which I see as having two connections – flowers were of course in plentiful supply and the racecourse is situated in the Cape.

As background to the main event, it is interesting to note that throughout its 159 year history, the going of the track has always been described as good – bearing in mind that the race has been held as early as 26 November (1955) and as late as 13 March (2004) although for the past ten years it has been held around the second week in January. The race has, on numerous occasions, been won by the same horse in two consecutive years – *Black Cap* (1950 and 1951), *Sea Cottage* (1966 and 1967) and *Politician* (1978 and 1979), to name just a few. Another horse to win the race twice was *Jetmaster* in 1999 and 2000. What is particularly interesting is that his progeny, *Pocket Power*, is the only horse to have won the race four times (and consecutively), namely in 2007 (although the race was held on 30 December of the previous year) through to 2010. The only other horse to come close was *Legal Eagle*'s three wins in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

This year the main race was substantially delayed and, although some racegoers could see the smoke from a nearby bushfire, most were unable to see the drama being played out at the starting gate which also contributed to the delay. In light of that it was interesting to read the official report of the delay:

“The start was substantially delayed due to *Twist Of Fate* (A Domeyer) casting his left front shoe en route to the start, *Pack Leader* (M Winnaar) casting his right front shoe on two separate occasions at the start, the bridle of *Do It Again* (R Fourie) breaking and having to be replaced at the start, the bridle on *Hawwaam* (A Marcus) slipping and having to be refitted, and a bush fire in close proximity to Kenilworth Racecourse, which created concerns regarding visibility on the course.” However, the race was finally run and the rest, as they say, is history!

Good on yer, *Vardy*, you sure moved yer bloomin' arsel!