

Living The Dream

L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Racing Festival

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This is L'Ormarins Queen's Plate Day, a day when dreams can come true (or maybe not)! The horses are leaving the parade ring for the first race now. There they go, cantering past the Grandstand – gleaming coats, streaming tails, effortless strides. Magnificent! It's their day too, and they know it, this is what they were bred for.

I sigh and sit down on the couch – “Well, Tellytrack is the next best thing if I can't be at the races”. The excitement begins to set in.

It's also BLUE and WHITE day, as it was yesterday, at the start of the two-day Festival. So many beautiful shades of blue – for the ladies gorgeous, stylish dresses, hats and fascinators; cool suits and jackets and ties for the men. Everyone has entered into the spirit of the occasion. There are blue and white flowers everywhere: lofty agapanthus, bright, plump hydrangeas and could that be an archway of wisteria? Even the 'lead horse' and rider look so smart and match the theme.

The camera rolls around to the giant LQP letters where people are posing, having fun, looking relaxed. So much preparation has gone into this world class and one-of-a-kind day of racing. Gaynor Rupert and her team have created something splendid.

The horses are in the starting stalls. This is the Drakenstein Stud Farm Work Riders' Maiden Plate over 1000 metres. I'm keeping a watch on Lilac Sensation, in the blue silks with white square. Soon the fillies come flying down the straight.

“Go, go, go!” shout my husband and I. Lilac Sensation, ridden by Sivuyile Kusa, wins beautifully. This must be a filly to watch out for in the future! An unusual result about the race is that the horses came past the post in their allotted numbers: 1, 2, 3 are 1st, 2nd, 3rd and on down to number 8.

In Race 2, the Tattersalls Juvenile Plate, of the eight two-year olds, four are having their first run, two have run twice and two only once and none has won a race. This could be interesting. The commentators are definitely not sure which one to pick but Eric the Red seems to be slightly favoured. In the end, Eric the Red powers home to win very smartly.

Races 3 and 4 are won respectively by Namaqualand and Chimichuri Run, both trained by Sean Tarry and both are sons of Trippi, Drakenstein Stud's very successful sire. Chimichuri Run faced really strong opposition from the likes of top sprinters, Kasimir, Pacific Trader and Bold Respect' but he stretched his neck out and won bravely.

Belgarion, trained by Justin Snaith and ridden by Richard Fourie, is a hot favourite for Race 5 and duly obliges with an exciting run down the centre to win easily.

Even from here, the excitement for the next race is tangible: the first Grade 1 race, the Cartier Paddock Stakes, for fillies and mares is coming up. This is the race that the great Oh Susanna won in consecutive years, (in-between winning the Met) and there are again some high class performers now. Front and Centre is the worthy favourite but, following close, is Mike de Kock's import, Queen Supreme. Snapscan, Silvano's Pride and Miyabi Gold are popular choices. As the horses speed down the track, 200 metres out, Queen Supreme takes charge and trounces the field! We hope she continues on this bright path.

While waiting for the 'big one', the LQP, I have done some research.

The LQP is a race of champions. Not only that, it is South Africa's oldest race day. It was first run in 1861 and since 2005 has been sponsored by L'Ormarins, and thus the blue and white theme, representing Drakenstein Stud. Today is the 159th running and it has been dedicated to the late, great Dr Richard Maponya. This is the race that has seen winners such as Do It Again, 2019, Legal Eagle (3 times), Futura, Variety Club and Pocket Power (4 times), probably one of SA's greatest equine competitors of all time.

In August 2014 the LQP was, for the first time, featured in a Premier English Equine occasion when the LQP Stakes was run at the Glorious Goodwood Festival. This was a wonderful inter-continental exchange and, hence, Race 5 on the card today is the Glorious Goodwood Peninsula Handicap.

Back to the racing! Now for the 'big one' the LQP Grade 1. What an exciting line-up: ten great competitors. Who will cross the line first? Will Do It Again 'do it again'; will Soqrat get the better of him this time; can Hawwaam, the favourite, stroll through them all; Rainbow Bridge or Vardy; or a surprise?

"Oh no!" The audio feed has gone off – Fiona, Grant and Stan are talking but.... I switch to the Supersport channel – same problem. Hawwaam is going down early.

"Audio is back!" Vardy looks good as he canters down. They all look good!

At the start. "What now?" There's a fire in the distance. The horses are milling around, one has shed a shoe, and then another horse needs re-shoeing. They're getting over-excited down there. There's a problem with Do It Again, his head is tossing up and down, the jockey is still off.

We're waiting – 20 minutes late - some horses are truly wound up now. There's a lot of smoke coming over the track.

At last, they're all in; they're racing! In the blink of an eye they enter the straight. Do It Again and Soqrat move onto the rails, One World is prominent, Hawwaam races in the centre but flying past them all comes Vardy! Vardy wins effortlessly, followed by One World, Rainbow Bridge and then the rest. Well done, Craig Zackey and A N Marcus!

The highs and lows of the race are there for many today. On a lighter note, to quote the Racing Post report about the LQP: "Vardy had better luck than his famous footballing namesake, whose Leicester City side was surprisingly beaten 2-1 at home. Vardy, the horse, is a son of Var – and Leicester had a goal ruled out by VAR in their closing minutes". Racing Post 11/01/2020.

The last three races soon follow on, won respectively by Doublemint, Cabo Da Cruz and Skidoo.

So the 2020 LQP Festival comes to an end. It's been another wonderful and successful two days of racing. Soon the 'after party' will begin. Congratulations, Gaynor Rupert, you are truly 'living your dream'.

In conclusion, one might wonder why a 72 year old, retired teacher, living in Pretoria, would enter a writing competition about the LQP Racing Festival. Well, it's all about 'living the dream':

Having grown up on a farm in northern Limpopo and with a sister who was fanatical and very knowledgeable about horses, I dogged her footsteps as we rode all over the countryside.

My sister, Frances Outram, was able to 'live her dream' of owning a stud farm, unfortunately for a few short years only, at Connington Farm in Natal. Our love of horses must have been passed on in the genes to my sons: one, an Equine Vet in New Zealand, and the other, a Racing Manager. So I can now 'live my dream' vicariously through my sons and their passion for the thoroughbred horse.