

The Dalrymple Downs Picnic Races

Entertainment is pretty rare in N.W Queensland. Thus the crowds are tolerant of what is served up to them in this area. The annual picnic races on Dalrymple Downs are a good example of this. There are no weights to be carried, like the trots in Brisbane; handicaps is set by starting marks the stewards are also the handicapper, the givers of penalties & disqualifications & the only court of appeal. (Cattle graziers Tom Herrick & Tom Haggerty combine with Toowoomba a lawyer Dartie Hough— William's to make up the Panel of stewards & they run a ship that suits them & everyone else accept on occasion the Bookies who field on these races there's a good air strip in the middle of the course & many come by plane for the fun weekend. It's a very scrubby/ treed course & the biggest job in getting it ready is to slash the tropical grass down to an acceptable height. The horse stalls & infrastructure is quite rudimentary. Mulga wood frames with shade cloth over. Dun nies of the same construction everywhere & the only up market structures are the milled timber bookies stands. The course runs through Brigalow country & a big patch of standing & very dense of the same covers a quarter mile of the back straight. Quite a bit of action takes place under this cover. On three circuit races on occasion the horses & rider pull up for a breather. The jockeys hop off for a smoke or a tinkle & the obliging stewards panel there in a land rover unlimber some cold tinnies for everyone who wants one. The only rule that is well known to all racegoers is that when the race resumes the horse's will leave the brigalow cover in the same order & roughly the same distance apart as they came in. Today's big race is sponsored by the politicians who come up in huge numbers to attend this iconic event & mix with the locals. The head bookie calling the odds today is Solly Watson. There are 4 other bookies on the stands but these are all Solly's vassals. The money in their bags is Solly's & his front men just take a percentage of the day's trading

at days end. But then there's a sting on today, a very big sting. They are out to clip Tommy Waterhouses wings. Tom is of course betting on line but he's also in mobile or sat phone contact with Solly. Dartie has arranged the line of credit with Tommy Waterhouse & the combined Brains behind this race meeting are ready to rock and roll. The horse they are backing off the boards is a mid-weight grey gelding Sir Mildenhall. He's lead for the two first circuits and is now showing the effects of this pressure. They take his saddle off & hitch him to a tree with a bucket of water & net of succulent lucerne hay and from a double float parked on the spot they walk out a big upstanding grey horse together with a light bay. They are long standing stable mates. The Clerk of the course moves his saddle from his darker bay & mounts up & rides away around the course in the direction the rest of the race will be run. The new grey gets a bit agitated to see his long. Standing stable mate heading away & buck & kicks a round. Dartie pulls out a short length of plastic hose & gives the new grey a dose sedative. He has to do this as the way this horse is acting up they wouldn't otherwise get the jockey, a light built girl up & ready to go. There's a lot riding on a win for the new grey. The conspirators have backed him on line at 170 to one. O.K. Tom Herrick says, anyone for another stubbie, no? Well get into order & we're off when I ring the bell. The new grey bolts the race in & when they go back to scale the girl accidentally on purpose unclips the winner from his lead in webbing & the winner bolts madly from the enclosure to rejoin his stable mate which the clerk of course has handed over to his assistant with instructions to ride him around to the back brigalow clump. Once there both horses are loaded into a float & taken away. The grey horse that ran the first two laps, now rested & refreshed a bit is lead back on the trot by the Assistant Clerk of course.

A huge storm erupts when after a bit of backing

& forthing on the Sat phone Solly Watson lodges an appeal with the stewards.

Tom Haggerty chairs this. They have atinnie or two then signal the all clear - i.e. protest dismissed. Solly burst into the stewards shade cloth walled room. This he says is utterly outrageous & I appeal your verdict. Tom the chairman says, you just did & we dismissed it. This won't stop here Solly says, I'll go to Queensland racing & following due process he eventually does. Solly goes into the room at the Brisbane Club. There chairing the

meeting is Dartie Hough Williams flanked by Tom Herrick & Tom Haggerty. What may I ask? Solly says are you Bastards doing here. Oh says Dartie, I'm the chairman of this group, the Two Toms are here at my request to give expert' o pinions. This is a kangaroo court Solly says, I've no show of getting justice. Turn off the tape recorder Dartie says to the Secretary. This done he says to Solly. Don't get fashed about this Solly. An overseas mob owns Tommy Waterhouses operation now & as far as the Dalrymple Downs Picnic Race Committee are concerned we think there is nothing more helpful to our continued operation than a huge lump of overseas capital .Solly grins, what about a drink he says. I don't want to walk away with nothing.