

FIRST-TIMER SURVIVAL GUIDE TO THE GOLD COAST

Story by David Bernsen

LADEN WITH DANGEROUS locales such as the Daintree Rainforest, and The Great Barrier Reef, Queensland has been known to be a bit out there.

At times Mother Nature has unleashed her fury upon northeastern Australia with a full slate of cyclones, monster waves, flooding, fire, and drought.

The most venomous snakes in the world! Home to the deadliest spiders on earth! Saltwater crocodiles, and Great White Sharks!

Yes, this pristine, and beautiful land with endless beaches to the east, jungles to north, and desert to the west, is dangerous.

However, a strange phenomenon occurs at the beginning of each year.

A strange conflagration of man and beast from all over the world begin to flock toward a tiny spot in the most southeast corner of Queensland where people eat bugs and drink a toxic libation marked only by XXXX on the side of a can.

They come by land, by sea and by air.

It is a cornucopia of nationalities and social strata. All drawn together by a

common thread...worship of the horse.

Fearlessly the masses methodically descend on perhaps the most perilous of all Queensland settings...the Gold Coast during the Conrad Jupiters Magic Millions January Yearling Sale and Carnival!

Even for the most experienced of veterans, January on the Gold Coast, and what is just referred to as 'Magic Millions' can be risky business, but for the first-timer it can be death defying.

First and foremost, the most hazardous thing you can have near you on the Gold Coast is a sport coat. As a rookie to Magic Millions in 2003, I experienced first hand the inherent dangers of misjudging the need; let alone the actual donning of a sport coat.

While co-hosting a get-together at Palazzo Versace on Opening Night of the Yearling Sale for our online sales initiative MMSalesRing.com, I suspected something was up with the sport coat thing as I was basically the only one (other than the dapperly dressed Richard Ulbrich) wearing a sport coat.

That included my co-host David Chester, the Managing Director of Magic Millions.

My suspicions were proven to be right on that same night at the Lobby Lounge Bar in the Surfers Paradise Marriott following our event. A place that I quickly learned was the 'in place' to assemble each night prior to dinner, parties, clubs or whatever is on the agenda.

Upon arrival to the Lounge, I ran into Sydney horse owner-breeder Dean Fleming, who right out of the barrier promptly fired up...

"Mate what's with the sport coat? You are on the Gold Coast."

After about the third, maybe it was the fourth, similar comment, I elected to check my sport coat with the concierge. This is where the trouble began as I was heading back into the Lounge; sans sport coat with Diet Coke in hand, when I encountered the 'trap'.

You need to understand the Lobby Lounge during Magic Millions is transformed from a quiet place to have a cocktail, into a fairly crowded networking command central for horsemen and women from the four corners of the world.

It is also loaded with precarious obstacles such as the 'trap'.

The main lobby of the Surfers Paradise Marriott is one of those very open high-ceiling type of establishments with marble floors. To get into the Lounge you must navigate between two fountains, each with perhaps a 20 centimetre raised edge around them.

When entering the 'trap', there is no escape.

Upon re-entering the Lounge, a fellow with an Afrikaner accent, who seemed to have reached his cocktail quota, was exiting backwards shouting something to some mates. With a keen eye, my decision was to fade a few steps to the right to avoid a collision.

Unfortunately, my keen eye was on the South African and not the edge of the fountain. In full stride, my shoe stuck under the corner of the 20-centimetre edge of the fountain. Fortunately, during my days at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas I learned that when falling with glass in hand, toss the glass.

As glass was flying, I was heading for a three-point landing; one elbow and two knees. Not wanting to let on that it hurt a bit, I popped right up and headed directly into the Lounge accompanied by John Vincent of Tyreel Stud, who commented something to the effect of, "that was one of the damndest things I have ever seen."

Unflinching, I proceeded to get on with an evening of socialising in the Lounge. While my arm ached a bit, the Surfers Paradise security asked if I was all right and if I could file a report. I told the gentleman I felt okay but that my elbow was a bit bruised.

He pointed out that he was asking about my knees not my elbow, which I then noticed blood seeping through my pants.

Nevertheless, I forged ahead and throughout the evening my arm seemed to sore up more and more, and after mentioning it, James Bester eloquently lectured me that the culprit was not the South African, liquor, or the fountains, it was the sport coat.

No sport coat, no need to check it.

SURVIVAL TIP #1

No Sport Coats.

SURVIVAL TIP #2

Avoid the 'Trap'.

I must say that the Surfers Paradise Marriott handled the matter extremely well, especially in light of the fact that when I arose the next morning I could not move my arm. Upon reaching the Magic Millions sale it was decided a trip to Pinjara Hospital would be wise.

Pinjara Hospital is a very nice, clean and affordable private facility just a short drive from Magic Millions. I was examined and diagnosed efficiently; although it was pretty clear what the problem was when I could not turn my arm whilst being x-rayed.

A busted elbow...just what you want to drag around the Gold Coast the entire week at Magic Millions.

SURVIVAL TIP #3

In medical emergencies, visit Pinjara Hospital.

Deciding to opt out of the doctor placing a cast on my arm, it was back to the sale and back to business and business included buying and selling horses.

Time is a precious commodity at Magic Millions. There are a lot of horses and a lot of things going on social-wise, racing-wise, buying-wise and selling-wise and it is

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below MICHAEL RODD and REGIMENTAL GAL;

middle The PARADE RING prior to the Conrad Jupiters Magic Millions 2YO Classic;

right YEARLING PARADE AREA at the MM Sales Complex



ROSS STEVENSON



imperative to be prepared on the horse-trading front. Morning can arrive very quickly at the Gold Coast, so it is strongly advised to complete as much of your sales research, inspections, and etc. prior to arrival to Magic Millions.

The Internet can be an invaluable tool for augmenting your sales catalogue. In addition to the Magic Millions website, there are some new and exciting online tools. I would draw attention to two services; the catalogue updates service from Equineline offered through MMSalesRing.com and the Sirecam Yearling CD service (part of the Australasian Turf Monthly, Sirecam and MMSalesRing.com marketing alliance).

The Equineline service provides not only a catalogue update, but also has the capability of running international pedigrees on each yearling. I would suggest that before sorting out a 'short-list', buyers should run both an update and an international pedigree so as not to miss any potential purchases. Then prior to arriving at the sale, run one more update. Since the sale begins on Thursday, any relevant enhancements from progeny performances will have already been completed.

The Sirecam Magic Million Yearling Sale CD is something that is relatively new. Chances are a complimentary copy will be available prior to the sale. Several studs are participating by presenting their sales drafts on the CD. While it will not replace a visual inspection at the sale, it can help eliminate certain horses on obvious physical characteristics, but more importantly, allows you to quickly move through a sales draft and spot an athlete that may not have cut the mustard in the catalogue.

In short, the Sirecam Magic Million Yearling Sale CD can help assist buyers in finding the diamond in the rough without stepping over it.

SURVIVAL TIP #4

Get your horse work done early.

Combined with the activities relating to the sale, there are a lot of logistics such as dinner bookings, and transporting yourself to, from and throughout the Gold Coast.

Traffic to the Gold Coast airport can be surprisingly bad, especially on Monday and Tuesday morning, so you might want to consider Brisbane as an alternative. A trickier proposition is moving throughout the Gold Coast. Remember that Jupiters Casino and Gold Coast Hotels are a fair distance apart so allow for some extra time.

If not lucky enough to utilise the Magic Millions drivers (for something other than ambulatory services for broken elbows), the use of taxicabs is a strong tip. Although, it seems that there is some sort of "bandit" limo outfits all over the place that cost about the same. Grabbing one on the fly can shorten your wait for a cab, and afford more luxurious transport for larger groups.

While the Magic Millions driving pool is primarily made up of a colourful group of local policemen on holiday, there are plenty of their compadres canvassing the Gold Coast for over-served car pilots.

It is very hard to bid on a horse from a jail cell.

SURVIVAL TIP #5

Take a taxi!

There are heaps of great restaurants in the Gold Coast. There are also heaps of people trying to eat at them. Unless you have a burning desire to eat fast food and room

service, booking early is the ticket. Way early.

A personal favorite is Shuck.

Located on the corner of Tedder and Woodroffe Avenues, Shuck is kind of a semi-secret with a strong menu. Shucked Oysters, Black Lip Mussels, Sand Crab Lasagne, Scallop & Crab Risotto and Brown Bellied Mud Crab, Shaw and Smith Sauvignon Blanc...IT'S ALL GOOD!

To the foreigner, Moreton Bay Bugs are a really strange looking ocean critter that reminds one of a bizarre version of a Louisiana crawfish. But broil 'em and add anchovy butter at Shuck and they are DAMN GOOD!

The Sebago Chips are the best I have ever had in Australia.

Finding a place to eat on Sunday night after the sale can be a little dicey, but Shuck is open and fully licensed.

It just might be a place to try more than once. I know I will.

SURVIVAL TIP #6

Eat bugs at Shuck.

After dinner each night, a re-congregation seems to take place in the Lounge at the Surfers' Paradise Marriott. It can be both entertaining but a bit dodgy. The later it gets, the more frequently three phrases are overheard, like microwave popcorn that begins slowly with a pop here and there, and then rapid fire popping, and finally no more popping.

Casino - Melba's - Strip Joint - Casino - Strip Joint - Melba's - Strip Joint - Casino - Melba's - Casino - Melba's - Strip Joint - Casino - Melba's - Casino - Melba's - Casino - Casino - Melba's

I call it the "Gold Coast Popcorn Syndrome".



MAGIC MILLIONS

SURVIVAL TIP #7

Escape the Lounge before Popcorn Syndrome kicks in.

On general principles there is little upside in a Gold Coast strip club at 1:00 AM.

Unless you have a strong aspiration to damage your hearing, stand in long lines for a drink, watch someone throwing up in a bathroom, and observe a zillion guys under the age of 25 standing on chairs doing some kind of tribal dance, all in a hot, sweaty environment, I would suggest not venturing upstairs at Melba's at 2:00 AM, let alone at 4:00 AM.

I could never understand why Damien Oliver said to join him there for a drink, until his agent Bruce Clark pointed out the downstairs, a rather nice, open-air sports bar, with the added bonus of watching the circus performers heading upstairs.

SURVIVAL TIP #8

There is a Downstairs at Melba's.

On the other hand, Jupiters Casino is another story.

For some reason (maybe from those University days in Vegas), gambling in a casino late at night always seems like a good idea. Remembering a few simple things when playing at Jupiters can make your late night gambling expedition more fulfilling and less dangerous...

*The Lobby Bar is better than the Atrium Bar.
Liquor sales stop on certain nights without notice.*

Back a "hot player" playing blackjack (just lay your chips behind theirs).

Most importantly, the Queensland Liquor Act says you can be fined \$1,875 AUD if disorderly or intoxicated in the casino.

Finally, if you have had a bit to drink and are driving (via taxi) to Jupiters and see a giant Frankenstein head about 11 metres tall on the left side of the street just before reaching the casino, don't worry, there is one there.

SURVIVAL TIP #9

Late Night: NO to strip joint – YES to Casino.

Of course, smack dab in the middle of the Yearling Sale is the Official Conrad Jupiters Magic Millions Raceday on Saturday at the Gold Coast Turf Club.

It is a great day of racing. Colourful, fun, less formal, with great races featuring the running of the Magic Millions Sales company incentive races - the Conrad Jupiters Magic Millions \$1,000,000 2YO Classic, \$1,000,000 3YO Trophy & \$400,000 Magic Millions Cup races.

When it comes to tips; a general rule of

thumb can get you through the day...

Do not listen to anyone from Sydney at the races (unless you happen to see Tony Brassel which is very unlikely). However, you can in fact listen to Victorians. These are Queensland races so listen to Queenslanders.

If all else fails, just back Michael Rodd.

His brilliant ride on Regimental Gal in last years' Magic Millions 2YO Classic was one of the best I have seen.

SURVIVAL TIP #10

Just Back "Hot Rodd"

One of the more popular sale sessions is conducted Saturday evening following the races. It can be loaded with an air of excitement as the racing crowd mixes with the sales crowd.

Make your dinner booking late and stay on your toes, and be patient as the 'Saturday night invasion' introduces a large number of younger novices whose conversion is vital to the long-term success of our industry.

SURVIVAL TIP #11


On Saturday Night patience is a virtue.

Yep, the January Magic Millions Carnival on the Gold Coast can be hazardous to your health.

As a first-timer I dodged being a casualty and emerged as only wounded with a broken arm. Inasmuch, sharing a few Survival Tips to other first-timers will immerse me in good karma for 2004.

Good business karma, good sales karma, good holiday karma, and good punting karma.

But for you rookies, remember this...

Leave the sport coat at home and the most dangerous part of your journey will be behind you. 

Editor's note: The Great Barrier Reef - a dangerous locale?



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As an owner-breeder, his Carondelet Farm bred Breeders' Cup Champion and Eclipse Award winner ARTAX, and owns stakes in a number of Australia and American stallions.

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