



BLACK
FLASH

COLIN JOSS

I dedicate this book to my two sisters; to my big sister June, who was always there, but was taken far too soon, and to my little sister, Glen, who has a heart as big as herself

This is the true story of a colt branded a rogue, running wild and uncatchable... bought cheaply by a couple of greenhorns, they turned him into an irresistible force in harness racing. He would go on and capture the hearts and imagination of people all over Australia, bringing 10's of 1000's of fans through the turnstiles. Developing a cult like following, he would go on and win 19 races in succession. Following his win in the Australian pacing championships, ulf thorensen, triple world drivers champion, would describe him..." Satinover is not just the best horse racing in the world, he is the best horse i have ever seen!" His ongoing rivalry against the mighty pure steel became legendary.

INTRODUCTION

“C’mon mate, you’ve been up on this float more times than I have brushed a fly”, I groaned as I impatiently brushed the flies from my face. He wouldn’t budge. With his forelegs halfway up the ascent of the tailgate, Bob could now see over the top of the tall fence that surrounded the Byford Trotting Track. The last race of the day was being run, and Satinover’s eyes gleamed in total concentration, a transfixed stare. It wasn’t the arrogant look of a fighter looking into the eyes of his opponent before the bell rung; he didn’t roar or give out that high pitched stallion squeal; his brow was furrowed, eyes thoughtful; what was he thinking? Was it like a father reminiscing, looking at a park where he used to play with his now grown up son. Hearing the laughter and reliving the sight of his boy gathering the football and awkwardly kicking; a memory cherished? He stood like a statue. The horses in the trial were at best described as battlers, RO class pacers (Pacers that have never won a race), competing for their ever-hopeful owners in a \$500.00 Gymkhana race, that at best, if won, may pay for their feed for the following month. Horses “The Black Flash” could have nearly lapped when in his prime. The field rounded the last turn and the drivers got busy urging their charges on, over the final stages of the race, yelling, reining up, and all but the winner, swearing and grumbling under their breath in defeat as they crossed the finish line. The float park is on the bend past the winning post and we watched as they finished, exhausted from their efforts, some breaking gate as they slowed, others pulling up quickly, impatiently glad it was over. Other horses still wanting to fight on, their drivers required to restrain them down as they entered the back straight.

Satinover’s stable name was Bob. Dad had named him after his late brother Bob, who was known as “twinkle toes” for his speed around the dance floor. He gathered himself; somehow growing larger, arching his neck, flexing his muscles. Only now, would he walk the remaining few steps into the float; but it wasn’t a walk, it was more of a bustle, his body, previously fitting into one side of the float with ease now seemed to fill it. He pawed lightly with his off fore, his only leg which didn’t carry a white sock. “You’ve still

got the swagger mate," I grinned as I pushed the back up behind him, Bob was remembering...

A Committeeman had rung me previously to ask if it was possible to parade him for their fundraising Gymkhana day. I committed gladly on the condition that his new owners, The Murdoch Equine and Veterinary Centre would release him to me for the day. They agreed, thus giving me the opportunity to bring him to my new stables, my home which he had helped pay for, retiring to stud before I shifted in. It gave me the chance to reunite and spend some precious one on one time with my old buddy, he was in his twenties now, an old horse, but the fire was still there; it was always going to be there. He still loved to rear high in the air, almost vertically to show off, and show off he did.

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CHAPTER ONE – OLD FRIENDS

THIS IS A TRUE STORY

I remember the day as being warm with a gentle breeze blowing, one of those days where you could smell a hint of summer, caressing all your senses. Murdoch Veterinary Centre had given permission for me to pick Satinover up when I wished, which gave me ample opportunity to spend plenty of time with him.

I had finished working my team of horses by mid-morning, so after a quick cuppa I drove the float over to pick him up. I hadn't been to see him for almost a year, but I watched his ears prick up as he recognised my float. He came cantering over as I opened his gate. I felt like I was meeting a lost friend, having a precious day to enjoy the joys that can only come with the closeness of two beings, who know each other well. Bob; looking as gracious as ever, came over, his coat was gleaming, his eyes bright, ears pricked and alert, sauntering around like a much younger animal. I gave him a cuddle and he pushed his head into my arms as he had done countless times, all those years ago. He had had a life of human interaction that was attentive to his every need. Admired by staff and student vets, his condition evidence of how well he was looked after. A resident stallion, an asset used each year to teach the trainee vets how to serve mares. Make no mistake though, this asset was treated as all champions should be...like a king! He waltzed up the float, sensing excitement in the air.

He was mostly infertile now; his sperm count had dropped with age, making him a perfect candidate for teaching. He hadn't lost his spark though, enjoying his job immensely even occasionally getting it right and a little ½ bred foal would emerge into the world. They were invariably handsome, and it would take no time for them to be snapped up and taken for a life amongst the hacks and show horses around our great state. He was allocated his own reticulated paddock, which was situated near a fairly busy road. For years, I would have people, at times complete strangers, approach and ask me, "there is this beautiful black stallion which roams a paddock at Murdoch... would that be your old champion by any chance?" He had his own large tree in the paddock plus a shelter, but it was the tree where he would spend most of his time, dozing, enjoying the memories of a life, well spent.

Climbing into the cab of the car, Satinover shuffling away in the float, excited to be going on an adventure, I shook my head. Plenty of time, we had all day, and I intended to make this day special for both of us before heading over to the Gymkhana at 2pm. We were heading to the one place that Satinover thrived.... the beach!

The beach was at the back of the old South Fremantle Power Station, where we had spent countless hours together, there were some years when we never missed a day, even braving the cold wet, windy days, we would drive down and I would ride him, strolling along the water's edge, allowing the froth from the waves to splash up over his joints. On fast work days I would get my stable rider Jerry to take him for a gallop along the sandy stretch on the far side of the groin. He would come back foaming with sweat, and I would take him for a swim, his body creating its own steam as we immersed ourselves in the water. Sometimes on very hot days, instead of a gallop, I would ride him bareback; with the water wither high, accompanied by another stable horse. We would race through the water, the bay was a couple of hundred metres long, and we would race from one end to the other, wade back, and repeat the process four or five times. Being the competitive individual, he was, he would know when the race was about to start, and he struggled to contain himself. He was unbeatable, ploughing through the water like a jet ski, creating a bow wave behind us. He loved that beach; I think he felt he owned it. I wanted him to enjoy it one last time.

As we approached the sandy car parking space, I could feel him shifting in the float. I could feel his excitement, calling out expectantly, wanting the joy of fresh salty air. I unloaded him and together we walked up the rise and stood on the atoll above the beach. The Black Flash was heart pumping to watch, he firstly got down and stretched his forelegs into the sand, growling, finally screaming, a high-pitched stallion screams again, and again. He reared vertically, thrashing his forelegs through the air. This was his beach! He was back!

The lead wasn't long enough and I momentarily lost control of him, although I wasn't concerned, I waited till he calmed, grabbed the end of the rope and walked him calmly down to the water's edge.

We were like two children, playing in the surf, I cupped my hands and showered him with water, he would raise his forelegs and make almighty splashes, and we brushed alongside one another. I hadn't brought a bridle, so I clipped up the lead to each side of his halter, making a makeshift bridle. Sliding onto his back, we waded up and down the bay a few times. I was still amazed at the strength he still had in his legs, and the sleekness and muscle power over his shoulders and withers. He was in great condition; the staff at Murdoch had kept him in fine fettle. Finally, we walked from the surf and he rolled in the bright white beach sand, first one way then the other. In his younger days he would roll completely over, get up and do it again, and again as the sand would cascade from his body. Giving an almighty shake, sand would spear out from his lush mane into a fine stinging mist. Different trainers would take their horse's home, washing them down to remove the salty sand from their skin. I could never understand why; horses have a natural inclination to roll after getting wet, and what cleaner beautiful sand could you find for them to roll in, than pure beach sand. After he shook himself, his coat gleamed,

that shiny velvety black. My mother had named him, because of his pure black satin coat all over, hence Satinover. He lay there watching me intently; I'm certain he was thanking me, I nodded my acknowledgement and replied "thank you my friend".

Time had escaped us; it was time that we headed home for a break, some lunch and get ready for his next adventure, the fundraising Gymkhana; this time with a longer lead rope.

It was a good 150m walk from the parking area to the stall I had chosen, on the corner, away from the bustle of carts coming in and out. It felt a long walk, dancing and prancing the whole way, calling out making his presence known, I was glad for that longer lead rope. He settled in the stall quite well, calmly watching the goings on biding his time, to put on a performance. I could feel the pent-up energy as I walked in the parade ring prior to entering the track. He was no longer an old horse trying to regain his youth. He was Peter Pan and invincible. A crowd was gathering, only enhancing his excitable state. It was a relief to finally be advised that I could enter the track

When I paraded him down the front straight that day, in front of the crowd, he spent most of his time walking on his back legs, rearing high over the top of me. I could hear people yelling "look out". I never bothered to look back, I didn't need to. I certainly wasn't afraid, like any true old friend that one may not have seen for some time; a certain trust remains. We'd travelled a long mile together. He was his own identity, not an animal to be controlled to calmly walk beside you. He walked as the champion of his younger days, rearing high reminding the crowd who he was.

"The Black Flash", as the press had named him, enjoyed the day, he preened and strutted and was genuinely interested to be back at a race track after all those years. After a couple of hours though, he buried his head into my belly, he'd had enough, it was time to go home; just not before he watched that one last race.

What was he thinking that day?

It had been so long since I had trained him, years, and I had forgotten what it was like to be in his presence, he was so proud, almost haughty, but like most champions (the human kind), I have been fortunate enough to meet over the years, he had a certain containment, a quiet but moulded strength, born from achievement.

On his return to Murdoch in the late afternoon, he was happy to be home, happy to be released to his lush paddock and his tree. I thanked the staff and on leaving, I felt inspired. I had just spent a day with equine royalty.

