Chapter 7

High Horses

Horses, Class and Socio-economic Change in South Africa[1]

'Things are in the Saddle and ride mankind.'[2]

In the first half of the twentieth century there was a seismic shift in the relationship between horses and humans in commercial South Africa as 'horsepower' stopped implying equine military-agricultural potential and came to mean 746 watts of power.[3] By the 1940s the South African horse industry faced a crisis. There was an over-production of horses, exacerbated by restrictions imposed by the Second World War, which rendered export to international markets difficult.[4] Farm mechanisation was proceeding apace and vehicle numbers were doubling every decade.[5] As the previous chapter has shown, there were doomed attempts to slow the relentless mechanisation of state transport. As late as 1949 the Horse and Mule Breeders Association issued a desperate appeal to the minister of railways and transport to stall mechanisation and use animal transport wherever possible.[6] Futile efforts were made to reorientate the industry towards slaughtering horses for 'native consumption' or sending chilled equine meat to Belgium.[7] Remount Services had been transferred to the Department of Agriculture, a significant bureaucratic step reflecting the final acknowledgement of equine superfluity to the modern military. As the previous chapter discussed, the so-called 'Cinderella of the livestock industry' had to reinvent itself to survive.[8]

A new breed of horses thus entered the landscape of the platteland: the American Saddlebred.[9] Unlike the horses that had preceded them, these creatures were show horses. The breed was noted for its showy action in all

paces, its swanlike neck with 'aristocratic arch' and its uplifted tail. These horses could not be used for ordinary farm work; they were largely stable based in the show season and taken out of their stalls only for exercise and shows. A Saddlebred was the consummate leisure horse. It was the 'ultimate showhorse' – the 'peacock of the show ring' – and a highly visible marker of disposable income.[10] As a conspicuous signifier, the Saddlebred provides a useful method of tracing and understanding social transformation in a rapidly changing South Africa. This chapter offers an interpretation of the socio-cultural symbolic role of this animal in the South African platteland milieu. It explores the introduction of the Saddlebred to South Africa from the United States and the rise of the Saddle horse 'industry', predominately in the Afrikaans-speaking, agrarian sectors of the then Cape Province and Orange Free State. Analysis of breed discourse provides insights into the role of status symbols, and the reasons for and manner of their acquisition in upwardly mobile Afrikaans-speaking rural communities in South Africa, particularly from the late 1940s and through the 1950s.[11] The discussion includes the material socio-economic context of their acquisition and the cultural impetus for their rise in popularity and wide geographic diffusion. Oral history provides evidence in which Saddlebreds were conspicuous in the narratives of rural success[12] as significant signifiers of status in a group of upwardly mobile rural whites, who were predominately male and Afrikaans speaking.[13] In addition to the material context, the elite – and, to an extent, internationalist – rhetorical space that the American Saddle horse inhabited is analysed by contrasting it with the self-consciously egalitarian and ethnically unifying discourse surrounding another horse, also used by primarily Afrikaans speakers, the Boerperd.[14]

This chapter in the history of horses seeks to contribute to an area that is perhaps neglected in southern African historiography: the 'cultural web of consumption', with an emphasis on 'things' and their meanings. Just as Schlereth contended in his study of American rural consumption in the period of rapid capitalist transformation before the First World War, historians of rural life usually neglect material accumulation and particularly the display of that which Mumford called 'the good life'.[15] Insights drawn from international scholars of consumption patterns, particularly in their focus on consumption as a social category, are useful in writing this part of South African history. Of course, there was not only a linear, top-down model of cultural influences.[16] Equally, it would be incorrect to see only one cause for consumption – 'status striving'

– and ignore the multivalent forms of meanings inherent in the process of consumption.[17] To do so would be ungenerous to the complexity of human desire and our ability to appreciate new forms of beauty.

Creating the community

One result of historical shifts in labour on consumption patterns has been the reorganisation of human–animal relationships so evident in the previous chapters. While some have intensified and some disappeared, other new forms of associations have developed as a result of structural societal changes. This chapter traces the development of a new breed of horse valued for its show form rather than its productive capacity. Indeed, the training methods imposed on this new type of horse could be highly complex and technical. Most Saddlebreds are born with the usual equine gaits: the walk, trot and canter, and an inherent ability to learn the special gaits (stepping pace and 'rack'). To prepare the Saddlebreds for the show ring, a specialised regimen of 'fetlock chains', 'side reins' and 'overchecks' could be imposed. Highly technical corrective shoeing was often utilised to modify pacing, altering the geometry of equine form.[18] These processes entailed considerable purchase costs and necessitated substantial financial investment and technical skill, even a special farrier and a trainer (both for horse and rider). Tails were washed and underwent a monthly 'set'. But to initially 'set' the tail, the lateral ventral sacrocaudal muscle could be cut to create an arched, liberated tail. False tail wigs might also be added for show purposes.[19]

As will be discussed, stratification within the horse industry was reflected by the symbolic status (and symbolic 'identity') attached to different breeds, with the differential value attached to breeds reflected by several economic markers (like sales prices and stud fees), as well as the value attributed by different sectors of society. As Clatworthy has shown in the North American context, the Saddlebreds are valued for aesthetic reasons, with 26 per cent of respondents mentioning the 'love of beautiful horses' and only 3 per cent mentioning money or profit.[20] They have differed from racehorses – which have also been, of course, symbols of affluence – as these have been notionally an investment and often generated income, while even the best show Saddlers did not 'make money' for their owners. The Saddlebreds were thus arguably used to demonstrate and enjoy wealth, rather than to acquire it. A sardonic joke circulated in Saddler

circles: 'How do you make a small fortune from these horses? Well, you start with a large fortune.'

The American Saddlebred horse can be traced to horses shipped to North America from the British Isles in the seventeenth century. By the time the first horse shows were held in Kentucky, Virginia and Missouri in the early 1800s, horses called 'American Saddlebreds' were exhibited. In 1891 the American Saddle Horse Breeders' Association and a Saddle horse registry were established. Horses became a major commercial commodity in Kentucky in the mid-nineteenth century, with Kentucky Saddlers shipped to the eastern market, throughout the south of the United States and, finally, the international market, including South Africa. The American Saddlebred horse was first imported into South Africa in 1916 by Claude Orpen, an upwardly mobile sheep farmer from Barkly East.[21] Orpen became known as the father of the 'high class saddle horse breeders in this country'.[22] Following Orpen, Stephanus Phillipus 'Fanie' Fouché from Rouxville became known as the other 'father' of the Saddle horse in South Africa,[23] importing his first stallion in 1934.[24] The Second World War temporarily halted the importation of such horses.

After the war, however, a growing network of rural notables connected by kin or business began to import American stock and buy them from one another. As one breeder argued, the 'purely working horse' was becoming 'something of the past'.[25] With the expanding use of motor vehicles, a niche was necessary for a different kind of horse, suitable for showing rather than basic transportation and farm work.[26] Horse breeding would have to reinvent itself to stay financially viable in a mechanising world. Commentators argued that horse breeding could only be considered an economic proposition if it began to cater 'for the luxury and sporting market of the show ring'.[27] Equally, as horses were thus no longer utilitarian, they could be mobilised as status symbols. Certainly, the big studs appear to have become increasingly well known to the public.[28] When imported horses arrived, excited rural crowds gathered.[29] In 1948, when Fouché imported the stallion Edgeview King, an enthusiastic throng gathered at the railway station to see 'The King' arrive. Over the month after his arrival, 300 people visited the famous 'Edgeview King' and would watch the novel training process.[30]

Pioneers such as Fouché and Taillefer Retief imported stock even during the difficult years following the Second World War.[31] Simply importing from America, as opposed to Europe and the United Kingdom, was evidence in itself

of conspicuous consumption. For example, importing a horse from America cost one buyer £500, whereas Thoroughbred stallions could be imported from England freight free in terms of a government agreement with the Union Castle Mail Steamship Company.[32] There was much more bureaucracy involved in American imports, with strict disease control measures that relaxed only gradually.[33] From the late 1940s there was intense discussion in the rural press, precipitating what one observer dubbed the 'Cult of the Saddle horse'.[34] By 1947 generally high prices (progeny of imported American sires varied from £150 to £800; with imports at £500–£2,000 for a stallion and £250–£1,000 for a mare)[35] and occasional freakishly expensive horses (like Retief's £3,000 import)[36] won publicity at agricultural shows.[37] Early 1940s discourse on the Saddle horses had still emphasised the 'usefulness' and 'hardiness' of the creature,[38] but such qualifiers were rapidly abandoned and by the late 1940s these horses came to represent a clear demarcation between 'productive' and purely 'consumptive' activities. Two opposing camps formed between largely Afrikaans-speaking male proponents and critics of the Saddler. Thus from the late 1940s there ensued a vigorous debate in the agricultural press, the content of which offers a window into deeper currents of ideology.[39]

In the early 1940s a few breeders had called for state-controlled, centralised horse breeding to take the process out of the hands of amateur farmer breeders who experimented on 'alchemistic' lines. There were even suggestions that punitive fines be levied against owners of registered mares who bred from non-registered males.[40] But these were largely unheeded and programmes proceeded under the private control of a few wealthy farmers.[41] By 1942 there were six (male Afrikaans-speaking) breeders who had pure registered American Saddlers.[42] This small but growing number of aficionados, reacting to critics, reiterated that importations were privately and not publicly funded. As noted earlier, changes in the post-war horse breeding industry meant that breeding could only be considered an economic proposition when it supplied the 'luxury' market of the show ring.[43]

In 1942 local notables established a (non-breed-specific) society, the Saddle Horse Breeders Society of South Africa.[44] The society was not intended to promote a particular breed,[45] but rather for 'any European breeder or owner of high class saddle horses'.[46] The idea was to recover the 'good name' that South African horses used for riding purposes 'held 60 years ago in India and other Countries' in order to boost the export industry.[47] With the enormous loss of

equine life in the immediate aftermath of the war (a million were lost in France, three million in Russia, and one-and-a-half million in Poland)[48], the idea was not to promote show horses, but to capture a slice of the international draught, military and transport market.[49] The initial notion was to use government support, particularly the Department of Agriculture, to smooth the bureaucratic path.[50] Government assistance in importation was militated for and received.[51]

The American Saddle Horse Breeders Society of South Africa that formed seven years later in 1949, although a subsidiary of the Saddle Horse Breeders Society of South Africa, had quite a different motive and modus operandi. Its members were from the wealthy rural elite, predominately wool-farming Afrikaners, with a few English-speaking rural notables, who formed the association with the specific purpose of promoting this show breed.[52] The society established inspectors, judges, horse shows and ultimately a 'World Cup', initially between South Africa and America. The association also made gestures towards genteel philanthropy, with funds for polio and other 'deserving funds'.[53] Members used individual capital investment to promote their cause. There was a drive to avoid state control and establish strictly private ownership of the breeding process.[54] There was an initial attempt to form the society without affiliation to the state-sanctioned Stud Book Association (Act 22 of 1920).[55] In 1952 Philip Myburgh, after a six-month international tour to study the breeding of Saddle horses – the first South African farmer to go abroad for this purpose – suggested annual horse shows on American lines.[56] Central to his argument was the idea that America was 'a century ahead of the rest of the world' and South Africa was 'the second greatest saddle-horse breeding country in the world', while Britain had 'low' breeding standards. Myburgh maintained, with some truth, that post-Second World War horse values had plummeted; 'pessimists raised the cry that the horse was a thing of the past' and would soon vanish from the platteland. The declining interest in the horse during the next few years had resulted in 'the disappearance of the mediocre and poorer class of horse, and there was a limited demand only for the very best the market could offer'. As a result only 'top-line breeders' could survive financially. Supporters agreed on the need for a centralised national annual show and wanted to let spectators and readers of the rural press in on 'the intensity of the struggle between, say, the winner and the runner-up of the five-gaited championship … or that the third horse may have been the favourite of the crowds, drawing all the applause'.[57] In 1954 the first American Saddle Horse Championship was held at Middelburg

in the Cape. The show attracted 7,000 rural spectators and an elite group of breeders and owners.[58]

In this changing rural milieu the first horse textbook for the South African market was published in 1949. It was written by P.J. Schreuder and F.B. Wright, both in the state's Agricultural Education and Research division.[59] As discussed in the previous chapter, Schreuder was a recognised expert, vocal in the discursive space provided by the growing rural press. As director of Agricultural Education and Research, he facilitated the importation process[60] and actively advised investment in American Saddlebreds, plugging both the American and show horse angle.[61] It was Schreuder in particular who urged showing horses as a solution to the crisis in the horse industry.[62] He noted that it was 'quite obvious that a breed with such a high status in the livestock economy and the social and agricultural life of the great American nation can certainly contribute [to the South African context]'.[63] He celebrated it as a 'distinct and exclusive American breed', with 'beauty, fineness, good manners'. Simultaneously, he gave a cursory nod to the politics of autochthony by suggesting that these horses' ancestors' blood flowed in the South African Hantam, or Cape horse. Schreuder further urged that the 'SA American Saddler Society' take advantage of the Pedigree Livestock Act by urging compulsory affiliation to the national Stud Book to maintain breed purity.[64]

Localists erupted, demanding to know why South Africans should simply be 'copy-cats' of America, and whether Dr Schreuder was 'employed by the Union government or by the government of the United States'.[65] The impassioned nativist defence contended that many unadulterated South African horses with 'not a drop of American blood' were five-paced (i.e. exhibited the special 'show' gaits).[66] One critic even suggested that an 'indigenous' horse of his who had pacing ability had been owned previously by Claude Orpen and had covertly contributed to Orpen's purportedly 'pure' American Saddlers:

> We had the riding blood in this country, but the Americans hypnotised us with motor cars in 1912, and while we were still under the effects of Uncle Sam [they] built up, perfected and sold us an article, the ingredients of which we had had for years.[67]

Sceptics dismissed these animals with their 'beautiful names' and specialised equipment in favour of local Boer stock.[68] A debate on gaits[69] ensued, with

some critics contending that the fifth gait was 'nothing new', that riders of so-called *strykloopers* of the Sandveld area near Piquetberg (Piketberg) 'beat the American Saddlers at their own game'.[70] Others defended local horses by taking the entirely opposite tack and damned the fifth gait as 'artificial and distinctly American'.[71] Detractors likened saddlers to 'wooden toy horses seen in shop windows to amuse children' and their high tail action was compared to baboons' bottoms. Localists asked: 'Why cannot we breed a South African saddle horse distinct from any other country?'[72] 'A true South African type, South African bred and South African reared horse is the only horse for the future South Africa.'[73] They urged a shift away from expensive American importations and a return to public interest in the 'indigenous' 'Hantam' breed, which 'could be created into a distinct South African breed', using the ways of our 'forefathers'.[74]

Antithetically, the opposing clique emphasised both internationalism and modernity, defending the 'proud' American Saddler for the 'modern horseman'.[75] Promoters argued that 'America lives today in an age of mechanization, of radar and television, of jet propulsion and the atom bomb, but in spite of that the pet interest of the average American is still the horse'.[76] Breeding horses and embracing modernity were thus, they argued, compatible ideals. They defended the 'world-famous breed' from base attack by the 'ignorant' and uncultured.[77] Moreover, to escape the parvenu stigma, this group eschewed the vulgarity of mere usefulness. Aficionados affirmed that it was 'undoubtedly a pleasure horse for the rich man',[78] and because a 'show-horse is not a work-horse', what was required was a 'perfection of paces, not hardiness'.[79] Supporters mooted the idea of ambitious breeding schemes.[80] They celebrated the fact that for 'sheer spectacle no other breed touches it',[81] that it was 'flashy';[82] that it was, in fact, an equine 'film star'.[83] Others described it as the 'epitome of elegance and refinement … it displays breeding and brilliance in every line'.[84] This was also summed up in the metaphor of carriages: 'Having owned [other breeds], the difference between them and the American Saddler … is almost the same as that between a springless Scotch-cart and a light rubber-wheeled well-sprung buggy.'[85]

The cult of the Saddlebred

By the early 1950s saddlers had won 'tremendous popularity in South Africa',[86] with public followings for famous Saddlers.[87] They were popular crowd pleasers

A 'show-horse is not a work-horse'
Source: Kaplan (1974, pp. 4, 8)

in pageants and parades.[88] By 1956 South Africa was the largest importer of American Saddlers.[89] Prices soared.[90] As noted, breeders and owners had established a registered Saddle Horse Breeders Society of South Africa and Rhodesia, and by the late 1950s there was a widening dispersion of Saddler blood in South African riding horses.[91] There were requests in the press for recommended literature on judging and training American Saddlers.[92] Reflective of this new focus on equine theatre, farmers were being advised by the rural press on how to show their horses and how to 'take better horse photographs' rather than on mundane issues of drought or transport.[93]

This notion of display had been discussed by Veblen, who was among the first to recognise (and offer social satire on) both the consumptive ethic and the social transformation in which the symbolisms attached to consumption began to take centre stage. He noted that in the United States, Saddle horses 'at their best serve the purpose of wasteful display'[94] and described the importance of acquiring the 'correct' taste, which 'is a taste for the reputably correct, not for the aesthetically true'. This explains the need for trainers and inspectors to teach (and then patrol) what was 'reputably true'. The trainers and judges, set up by the society, worked directly with the farmers to teach them to appreciate this new equine aesthetic – what in the American context Veblen dubbed, sardonically, the 'pecuniary canon of beauty'.[95] The correct form – for both horse and rider – had not only to be taught, but, moreover, had to be taught to be appreciated. As Veblen noted in another context, 'the canons of taste have been colored by the canons of pecuniary reputability'.[96] The Saddle horse suited this aim: the slow gait and rack, for example, could take a horse over two years to master under guidance from a trainer.[97] In similar vein, films like *The Horse America Made* and *The American Horse* were shown at farmers' associations and by the American Saddle Horse Breeders Association.[98] Platteland eyes needed to be schooled in the appreciation of a new form of equine beauty and to be taught to read this new morphological language.

Gaited communities?

The simple explanation for the 'cult of the Saddle horse' was the wider availability of greater disposable income. This, however, offers us a simple facilitatory model: they did it because they could do it. However, there were secondary causes that warrant attention. The 'wool boom' of the 1950s, triggered

by the Korean War, when wool sold for 'a £ for a pound', had two significant effects in this context.[99] Firstly, it led to the accelerated creation of wealth among rural Afrikaners. Per capita income among Afrikaners was less than 50 per cent of English speakers in 1946, but rose to 80 per cent by the late 1970s, while the gross value of all farm products rose by 67 per cent in the decades between the 1935 and the 1960s.[100] Secondly, it turned some elite Afrikaner eyes to the United States (in that country's role of Britain's replacement on the world stage) as part of their consumer revolution. Dubow and others have described how, although there was perhaps a Malanite nationalist narrowing of outlook, there was in the same period among other sectors a sense of internationalism – of a more confident looking outward.[101] As O'Meara points out, with Smuts signing the UN Charter in San Francisco, 'many white South Africans felt an almost American sense of boundless possibilities in 1945'.[102] As F.E.J. Malherbe, professor of Afrikaans at Stellenbosch, noted: 'The city Afrikaners have taken off their velskoens [sic] for good … and take their fashion cue from London and New York – even Paris.'[103] One observer noted: 'Afrikaners have become a hamburger-eating and cola-imbibing people':[104]

> we are already four-square in the American era in South Africa … In some ways the most shameless habits, first popularised in America, are slavishly followed by South Africans, and no less by Afrikaners … South Africa, previously culturally attached to Western Europe, is becoming more and more a protégé of America.[105]

In the post-war landscape, the United States had adopted the new symbolic role of world leadership[106] and the realm of the everyday in some South African circles was becoming Americanised:

> When a former President of the United States, Mr Harry Truman, had himself photographed in a gaudy picture shirt … it did not take long to be become *de rigueur* in the country of the Voortrekkers. Every day we see Afrikaans children with these piccanin shirts, abounding with American place names or pictures, which seem to familiarise the wearers more with these names than with the names of places, plants and animals of their own country.[107]

By the late 1940s and early 1950s the 'countryside' was arguably more a state of mind than a place – and it could be bought. In a series of *Huisgenoot* articles, Wim Hartman depicted the 'new [urban] Afrikaner' with only a thin connection through nostalgia to platteland life.[108] Afrikaners involved in agricultural occupations dropped from about 30 per cent in 1946 to only 8 per cent in 1977, while those in white collar employment increased from 29 per cent to 65 per cent.[109] This process of urbanisation, often equated contemporaneously with modernisation, was ameliorated by shrouding it in traditionalism, a nostalgic *ubi sunt* motif.[110] While the urbanised poor struggled to keep their identification with a rural golden age, the more affluent could simply purchase a reconnection with the land.[111]

For those still connected (either emotionally or materially) to farming, the popular rural press was growing and facilitating an expanding communication network. The *Farmer's Weekly* (started in 1911) and *Landbou Weekblad* (1919) created a virtual community and helped disseminate the idea that the American Saddler horses were symbols of cosmopolitanism and living emblems of a newly arrived class.[112] Moreover, regular shows and the show circuit itself acted as an agency of change, much as they did – although far earlier – in rural America in the last decades of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1938 and 1940 the Colesberg Agricultural Show was used as an occasion for breeders to come together. These agricultural shows certainly afforded opportunities for commercial exchange, but additionally they created both the sense of a 'community' and the space for spectacle. The district show became the major event of the year in rural areas, with the horse displays perhaps the greatest attraction for spectators.[113] Shows provided this opportunity for theatre and thus for public self-aggrandisement, which created, in turn, a market for status symbols, which was pivotal in the production of desire.

A brief demographic analysis of key members of the 'Saddlebred community' reveals the interconnectedness and profile of that community, which explains why the trend successfully reached the tipping point. The core elite were mainly Afrikaans-speaking wool farmers, men of influence and upwardly mobile. There is some indication to suggest that many were United Party supporters and they were open to the inclusion of a few wealthy English-speaking neighbours.[114] There was a close relationship between the coterie of early breeders, with most – individuals such as Orpen, Fouché and Retief – engaged in large-scale sheep farming. Such men usually had some local influence. Claude Orpen from Barkly

East, for example, whom we have already met as a key figure and opinion shaper in the early process of American Saddle horse acquisitions, was also a member of the International Wool Secretariat and chairman of the Cape Woolgrowers' Association. William Maré 'Pouerra' Moolman from Somerset East was a member of the executive committee of the Somerset East/Cradock Agricultural Shows.

The intimate web of linkages stretched even further. 'Fanie' Fouché (from Rouxville in the south-eastern Orange Free State) knew Orpen and noticed his horses while moving sheep through his land. Johannes Hendrikus Viljoen van der Merwe (from Richmond in the Cape) used Orpen and Fouché stock. Taillefer Retief (from De Aar on the Richmond road) knew of Fouché's stock and first bought stock from Orpen. Bert Wyer Henderson bought stock from Fouché; P.J.A. van der Merwe (from Richmond) bought stock from Fouché and Retief. Retief purchased from Fouché, and then imported from the United States. From 1944 onwards J.H. van der Merwe (West Front, Britstown) bought from Fouché and used a dam bred from stock owned by Claude Orpen.[115]

Little serious attempt had been made by these affluent men to revive 'traditional' pre-industrial Afrikaner sports and leisure pursuits.[116] For this wealthy sub-group, the Saddler movement provided a space where man, horse and power formed an axis that pivoted on display, predicated on upward mobility and competitiveness. In recreational activities identified with male social status, it afforded an arena for the display of individuals' power while remaining reliant on elite networks and kinship patterns and the rural 'virtual community'. Women were arguably equally competitive, but in a gender-stratified society sought to impress in other networks, particularly through the transformation of the domestic realm.[117] Thus, conspicuous leisure was effective as a social strategy in small, highly personalised reference groups such as the rural communities described here. They converged at nodal events such as district shows and in sharing an imagined community created by the rural press.[118]

'History' vs 'modernity'

The upsurge in this kind of spending by upwardly mobile Afrikaners was arguably driven by the need to clarify social difference. Consumer culture is more than the 'leisure ethic': it is an 'ethic, a standard of living, and a power structure'.[119] Oral history shows that Saddlers were seen popularly from the

1950s as a mark of success, of having 'arrived'. As Giliomee notes, '[i]f Afrikaners were beginning to capture capitalism, capitalism was also capturing more and more Afrikaners'.[120] Identity was shifting with the changing material context and was to manifest two distinct ideological approaches to 'history', as opposed to 'modernity', which are discussed below.

By the 1930s Afrikaners were still predominantly working class, with very few wealthy businessmen.[121] By 1935 Afrikaner income was only 60 per cent of that of English-speaking whites and there was not yet a robust middle class.[122] In this context, the *petit bourgeois* culture brokers wished to win workers away from the incipient left wing and incorporate them into the volk to mitigate dangers of international labour solidarity.[123] There had long been economic differentiation in the Boer population, yet there was a strong sense of community predicated on what O'Meara dubbed a 'Calvinist, petty-commodity-producer *Weltanschauung*'.[124] Growing socio-economic differentiation could be papered over by nostalgic affirmation of a shared rural past, which was, as O'Meara and others point out, validated by appeals to the symbols of this 'shared' history.[125] There was, as a result, an intensification of a long-standing trend from the 1930s onwards towards embracing history in order to validate identity.[126]

Analyses of the culture of (Afrikaner and other) nationalism have largely focused on this more familiar process, i.e. on the ways in which memory and 'history' constructed community/ethnic/national identity.[127] Yet, as illustrated by the American Saddler aficionados, identity could also be focused on 'modernity' and consumerism. Identity could be as much coupled to current gratification and future dreams as it could be rooted in recollections of the past.[128] This was because 'modernity' made the quest for 'quality of life' a central one for the new *bourgeoisie*. On a larger, national scale, modernity came to be judged by the consumptive capabilities of a nation.[129] As in the United States, the post-Second World War middle class was the backbone of this consumer revolution. Household durables and consumable items improved in quality and exploded in variety, with household success represented by amassing these products – and, more than success, their 'identity' as well.[130] As Marcuse noted of the rising elite in the American context: 'The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split level home, kitchen equipment.'[131] Consumerism revolutionised desire and brought new cultural influences. Although the United States was not South Africa's chief

trading partner or source of investment capital, post-war American consumer icons had growing appeal to South Africans of various classes and ethnic groups. White children played 'cowboys and Indians' (rather than 'Boers and Zulus'), and country 'n western styles percolated into local Afrikaans music.[132] '[A]lmost every Afrikaans magazine … found it indispensable to incorporate a film column, largely devoted to the caprices of Hollywood stars.'[133] Even the agricultural press was saturated with advertisements for brands like Electrolux, Chevrolet and Ford; with Hollywood gossip[134] and with trips to America for trade or pleasure.[135]

Consumption patterns in the developing Afrikaner middle class were in transition and the changing social order meant new theatres for consumption. Conventionally, Afrikaners had seen commerce as unsavoury – the realm either of the low-status *smous* [travelling trader][136] or of the exploitative 'Hoggenheimer',[137] and social commentators, like those serving on the Carnegie Commission, had noted – and even lamented – the widespread lack of 'acquisitive spirit' shown by Afrikaner farmers in the 1920s and 1930s.[138] Now, however, there was a revolutionary transformation in public mentality: consumption is good. Just as in America, consumption became linked to the notion of 'freedom'.[139] Van Onselen has shown that the boom of 1939–49 precipitated changes in the Afrikaner 'economic metabolism', manifested in a more aggressive political stance when farmers who had been dependent on 'English' banks, grain traders and property speculators found 'themselves able to transcend the constraints of populist politics and in a position to embrace a new and far more ambitious vision of Afrikaner nationalism'.[140] This political and psychological change – a new appreciation of commerce – was so palpable that within decades the Afrikaans press commented on the new generation of Afrikaner Hoggenheimers.[141] Increasing links with the international business world during the emergence of Afrikaner capitalism provided the major globalising impetus in Afrikaner society in this era[142] and, as Du Pisani has argued, the mood of sectors of Afrikaner elite capitalism had turned from its early impetus of saving the volk towards the consumer pleasures of individual success.[143] With increasing political dominance and economic might, anti-capitalist elements of nationalist rhetoric were increasingly discarded. One critic noted bluntly: '[Afrikaners] tend to be snobbish as soon as material wealth is accumulated'[144] and 'I am noticing that the inferiority complex which bedevilled Afrikaner actions for so long is fast disappearing.'[145]

Evidence of the pervasive and revolutionary nature of this injection of materialism may be found in widespread discussion of the nature of luxury and whether consumerism compromised the national character with its seductive appeal. There was much soul searching in magazines like *Die Huisgenoot* by *sedebewakers* (supporters of traditional values) into the social implications of prosperity for Afrikaner identity, with jeremiads against consumerism: '*Word ons Afrikaners te ryk*?' (Are we Afrikaners becoming too rich?).[146] One commentator noted hyperbolically of the 1950s:

> The farmer plays billiards, 'does' Europe on a Cook's tour, buys a new car when the ash-tray of the old one is full, goes deep-sea fishing and puts stinkwood parquet flooring in his shearing pen. There is the barbarism of super-duper parsonages, the expensive, vulgar modern church buildings in a beautiful platteland dorp, the struggle to surpass last year's tithes with another thousand.[147]

A growing consumer secularism was very visible by the 1970s, predicated on sport, leisure, travel and increasingly fractured Afrikaner ethnic unity.[148] The papering over the cracks between the classes and the deliberate cross-class mobilisation evident in the 1930s (through events like the Eeufees – centenary festival – for example)[149] had changed. Equally, racial intrusions into the sport were patrolled. Evidence of exclusion is found anecdotally: in 1976, Gerrit van Schalkwyk, for example, wanted his senior groom, Willem Tieties, to ride a particularly spirited horse at the Tulbagh Show. Tieties was asked by the organisers to leave the ring as no coloured exhibitors were allowed. Van Schalkwyk's daughter records, with irony: 'the fact that hand classes [in which horses were led rather than ridden] were almost always showed by "Coloured" exhibitors seemed not to register.'[150]

Developments (like the saddler movement) provide evidence of the way identity could be predicated on class, not to include but rather to exclude. While many culture brokers reclaimed the poor whites for the volk, others distanced themselves.[151] Thus, an upsurge in consumption was arguably driven by the need to clarify definitively uncertain social status by the accumulation and display of material things.[152]

This fits a Veblenian model of the need of the leisure class to spend money in a way that 'serves the purpose of a favorable invidious comparison with

other consumers' – i.e. to spend money in a way that makes other people feel poor. This 'growth of punctilious discrimination' as to 'qualitative excellence' shows off not only capital accumulation, but is also designed to demonstrate knowledge, discrimination and taste. There is a fine but significant distinction between feeling rich and feeling upper class. The 'specialised consumption of goods' as evidence of 'pecuniary strength' had begun to work out in a more or less elaborate system, '[s]ince the consumption of these more excellent goods is an evidence of wealth, it becomes honorific; and conversely, the failure to consume in due quantity and quality becomes a mark of inferiority and demerit'. Simply put, status and money were connoted by close proximity.[153]

Money and modernity met in a nexus of this new identity. South Africa could enter the competitive realm of an imagined America acting as metonym for modernity. During the 1956 National American Saddle Horse Championship in Beaufort West it was widely reported that a visiting American judge said 'emphatically and persistently that the American Saddlers in South Africa could hold their heads high in the company of the best which America could put on show'.[154] Local observers argued that 'horse-breeding was not only of agricultural but also cultural value; it is not only a national industry but a link of international relationship' and 'can often succeed where diplomats and politicians fail'.[155] An important part of the symbolism of consumption was to signify success in furthering the aims of the modernising project. In other words, consumption could be used as a yardstick for the 'modern' nation's success; it represented the reality that the nation had attained greater control over its fate by improving productivity'.[156] This is vividly demonstrated in the Saddle Horse milieu by inviting Americans to judge shows and devoting a great deal of press space to their affirming commentary on South Africa's own domestic-bred horses as validation. There was particular emphasis on celebrating that 'our' horses are 'as good' as America's and, later, much celebration at actually being able to export American Saddle horses to America itself.

Horses for dis/courses

It was precisely against this 'Americanisation' that a very different group of Afrikaner breeders initially reacted.[157] The realm of 'everyday life' provides evidence of popular nationalist politics, where 'ordinary pursuits' were given a 'distinctly ethnic character'.[158] Localists started asking: 'Nevertheless … if the

American nation were able to create [the Saddler] out of the basic Oriental and thoroughbred blood … why should [South Africa] … not be able to create an equally magnificent South African horse – the Boerperd?'[159] There was an assertion of the need for breed status:

> Is the name [Boerperd] only the *nom de plume* used for all horses that cannot be called American Saddlers, Arabians, Thoroughbreds or Hackneys? Are the Boerperd classes at agricultural shows meant to contain all the part-bred American Saddlers who fear they may be outclassed in their own division … [?][160]

From the 1940s, and gathering momentum thereafter, the 'Boerperd' (literally either 'farm horse' or farmer's horse or 'horse of the Boers [or Afrikaans speakers]', a significant but lost etymological distinction) was not seen as simply a category for any animal rejected from other breeds. There was a new desire to use a 'breeding policy' to fix the 'conformation and stamina' which made the 'Boerperd' renowned during the South African War. So in 1949, a year after the National Party victory, breed societies were created and breed management centralised.[161] The Saddle Horse Breeders Society of South Africa and Rhodesia used the term 'Boerperd' to mean simply 'farmhorse' or even the 'cross-bred section', but at other times discuss it as a 'breed' (although not a 'pure' breed) in its own right.[162] The first Boerperd trials were held in 1955 and the movement gained quiet momentum and emergent popularity. By 1973 the Boerperd Society was formed, codifying for the first time the 'breed standard' of the heterogeneous mixture of breeds, mingled over three centuries: 'Javanese' (Sumbawan) stock, American stock, Arabians, Persians, Barbs and English Thoroughbreds that had shaped the 'Boerperd' over time. Programmes were initiated to cross the affordable 'Boerperd' with the expensive American Saddler (in particular the showy five-gaited saddlers from Kentucky and Tennessee).

But in the same year, a faction, uneasy about adding more American blood, initiated schism and started breeding 'pure horses like those introduced into the two Boer Republics by the Great Trek'.[163] These 'Historical Boerperd' breeders insisted on breed purity and emphasised the quality of indigeneity. Consequently, in 1977 the society renamed the breed the 'Historical Boerperd'.[164] Meanwhile, a splinter group made a case for the use of more American Saddler blood, developing what came to be known as the Cape Boerperd.

Several themes were emphasised in the definition and marketing of the Boerperd. Firstly, history and nativist heritage were underscored (with, for example, assertions that General de Wet's famous grey Arab was a Boerperd; and slogans like 'The Horse from the Past for the Future'); they included the idea of an organic, ethnically essentialist notion that the 'Boers were good and natural horsemen'. This included efforts towards establishing the Boer commando riding style as a judgeable event for shows. For Afrikaans horse names, military victories and the names of Boer generals' horses were often used; the claims used in marketing these horses included such things as 'their ancestors carried the Voortrekkers' and they provide a link to "white" civilisation' and '[t]he SA Boerperd is as old as civilisation in South Africa'.[165] Secondly, there was an elite group patrolling the borders of the breed, an aristocracy (like the Burgers, Conradies and Grimbeecks) acting as breeders, judges and inspectors – often in overlapping roles.[166] Thirdly, there were six distinct pure bloodlines, and the register was closed to 'outside' horses. Fourthly, the horses were promoted as autochthonous and 'authentic', with the slogan '*Geselekteer en Aangepas vir Afrika*' (Selected and Adapted for Africa). The second and third traits contain a measure of irony, as they are at odds with the fifth trait, which comprised the simultaneous insistence on the hardiness, ordinariness the everyday quality, and the naturalness of the Boerperd's ancestry – the antithesis of a horse kept chiefly for showing, like the Saddler. Even the breed standard stated that the Boerperd had to be able to 'survive on the veld'. Thus boerperd with a small 'b' became Boerperd with a capital letter, because of a particular kind of identity politics.[167]

This antagonism to class stratification is illustrated by the example of a breeder/inspector who had a book printed at his own expense and recorded with relish every time a Boerperd beat a Saddlebred at a show.[168] It was the discourse of the foreign, effete aristocrat being defeated by the local, indigenous breed. He observed in his notes to the breed standard that the Boerperd is a 'racially pure horse that holds its head high'. He contended that the South African war had led to the 'mongrelisation' of most of our breeds, so 'we must take off our hats to those Boers who kept their boerperde pure'.[169] He further noted that as a judge and inspector, one must look 'first and foremost for racial purity'. Clearly, there is identification anxiety and resultant compensation, as he goes on to say:

> The Boerperd is just as genuinely South African as we are ourselves, because his ancestors also date back to the seventeenth century and like

> us grew famous for his hardiness, utility and independence. This is the heritage our ancestors left us.[170]

It is also significant that Eugène Ney Terre'Blanche – who established the right-wing commando-based *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) at the same time as the Boerperd breeders broke away – has used the Boerperd as a symbol not only of power, but of the equine-oriented Boer *volksgeskiedenis* (people's history) and organic masculine Afrikaner horsemanship.[171] In a letter he wrote to me from prison, he noted that the horses of General de la Rey and Manie Maritz (heroes of the South African War and both rebel leaders in the 1914 Boer rebellion) were both Boerperde. He also claimed that he did not really fall from his horse (referring to a much-televised shot of his horse slipping as he led an AWB march), contending that the South African Broadcasting Corporation had simply used it as propaganda, knowing that to ridicule his horsemanship was to undermine his masculine and ethnic power.[172] He – and the breeders and inspectors – emphasise the accessibility of the Boerperd. Not only has it shared an intimate history with the Afrikaner, but it can be afforded by every Afrikaner: it needs no trainer, no special farrier and no special knowledge, and can be ridden using the old Boer riding style. Horse-based commando mythology has saturated the politico-cultural realm. For example, '*Opsaal*' or 'Saddle Up! The Republic Is Coming' was a National Party slogan for its campaign for the republic.

Nooitgedacht horses

A further illustration of the complexities of breed creation is provided by another 'indigenous' breed. In 1950 a committee was set up by the secretary for agriculture, Dr C.H. Neveling, to investigate indigenous breeds of sheep, cattle, goats and so on that were of interest to Afrikaner culture brokers. This was catalysed by a letter from an extension officer, A.W. Lategan, on a distant, isolated station in the Northern Cape, who pointed out that while there was much effort towards soil conservation, indigenous animals well adapted to local conditions were disappearing. He stimulated interest in preserving livestock like the Basotho pony, Boer horses and Boesmanland donkeys.[173] The Standing Committee on Indigenous Livestock of the Department of Agriculture in 1951 bought a nucleus herd of 12 typical Basotho-type ponies. The representative

horses hailed, interestingly, not from Lesotho, but from the Orange Free State. A breeding station was established at Nooitgedacht in Ermelo (Eastern Transvaal, now Mpumalanga) to 'preserve the Basotho pony' and to develop a utility riding horse.[174] It was called the 'Nooitgedacht' pony rather than Basotho pony, ostensibly because of the breeders' admixture of Cape horse/Boerperd and Arab blood to the Basotho base.[175] Breeders prized the type for its amiability, sturdiness and resistance to disease. The ideal Nooitgedacht was a hardy, strongly built pony with intelligence and a sweet nature. A studbook was kept open for females who passed a phenotypic inspection (small Boerperd or Arab). Interestingly, the breeders permitted admixture from Afrikaner breeds, but specifically no British pony breeds were allowed. In 1967 eight subsidiary studs were set up and two years later a breed society was established in terms of the Registration of Pedigree Livestock Act (Act 28 of 1957). The society changed the name from 'pony' to 'horse' for commercial reasons.[176] In 1976 the state-controlled South African Stud Book recognised the Nooitgedacht (invented a mere 24 years before) as its first indigenous horse breed and sold it at public auctions and gave stock to preserve to the Universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch. The horses were celebrated as indigenous and autochthonous.[177] This reflects the difficulties of defining 'breed', understood as a group of animals that through selection have come to resemble one another and pass their qualities to their offspring. The point at which a collection of animals becomes a 'breed' is a human decision, not a genetic event, and their identity is at least as historical as it is biological.

Conclusions

The story of the American Saddler is more than the story of a horse; it is the story of how horses continued to find a niche in a changing South Africa. It is also a story about how horses came to mean something new in the chronicle of desire for a standard of living representative of a newly arrived Afrikaans-speaking social echelon. By the 1940s South African horse breeders faced a crisis and the industry had to reinvent itself to endure. In a time of mechanisation, when the utility horse was becoming obsolete and the horse-breeding industry had to be redesigned or face collapse, the American Saddle horse filled a new commercial niche.[178] But more than that: the Saddler filled a niche in the imagination of a people who were coming to conceive of themselves differently.

The Saddlers were symbols of a newly desired cosmopolitanism – particularly Americanism – modernity, taste, skill and wealth. Significant expense – on the right things – established a conspicuous imprimateur of class.

The increase in discretionary income in this sub-sector of Afrikaner, mainly male networks was pivotal, but there were also secondary factors. The expanding communication network played a role, with the popular rural press assisting in the creation of a community.[179] Regular agricultural shows afforded opportunities for spectacle and, of course, provided entertainment to entice customers to this arena of countryside commercial exchange, both vital elements in the process of competition, of which the Saddlebred was simultaneously icon and subject. Equally, shows were helpful in reflecting a hierarchy of expertise in an (initially) masculine rural art form.

Historians have shown how consumer items and sports, for example, were invested with ethnic identity; the 'cult of the Saddler' reflects the role of class. Past historiography on the culture of national identity has largely focused on the ways in which shared understanding of 'history' was mobilised to produce group (ethnic/national) identity, but identity could also be predicated in part on the embrace of 'modernity' and consumerism. The comparison between the supporters of the Saddle horse and Boerperde, both factions within Afrikaans-speaking society, and an analysis of their quite different discourses reflect two ways of conceptualising identity, especially in the way they mobilised consumer hunger.

Genetically, the horses were close, separated by lineages, training regimes, diet, usage and the imagination. The ways in which they were imagined were tempered by changes over time, various political currents, various agents of change and different commercial niches. The Saddle horse discourse reflects the development of a new class, with fresh manifestations of desire and a need to demarcate social boundaries. It moreover indicates a different way of thinking about Afrikaner self-identity: confident, internationalist, pro-American, elite – above all, embracing of 'modernity', the future, and not invested in the past. There is some evidence to suggest that owners were largely United Party supporters and they were clearly open to the inclusion of a few wealthy English-speaking neighbours in the project. Instead of 'Afrikanerising' the American horse, it remained more prestigious to maintain a foreign link. Saddler representations distanced themselves from history – both Afrikaner and South African – with a focus on modernity, internationalism, display and spectacle,

whereas Boerperd breeders revelled in history, classlessness, usefulness and autochthony. Boerperd discourse offered a demotic *Weltanschauung* and the Boerperd breeders refuted the notion of a horse as a *fainéant* relic of a higher class. Instead, they represented an animal that was vigorous, robust, useful, ordinary and egalitarian (within ethnic parameters). Ethnic nationalism was a good marketing tool and the Boerperd was invested with the politics of 'everyday nationalism', with a distinctly ethnic character that pivoted on cohesive, inclusive – and often nostalgic – ethnicity. Antithetically, the American Saddle horse movement was used historically not to bind the volk closer, but (quite conversely) to designate difference; to underscore not only wealth, but exclusivity. Identity needed to be packaged just like any other commodity; and, in turn, it was used to package other commodities – in this case, horses.

The chronology of breed recognition was significant: the recognition of the Boerperd followed that of the Saddle horse, rather than preceding it. The Boerperd movement and its celebration of nativism from the early 1970s was a particular intra-ethnic, class-based reaction to the elite dynamics displayed by the Saddle horse movement. The Boerperd, which required a much diminished financial outlay than Saddlers, was embraced by the economic class who championed an explicitly unifying and self-consciously classless ethnic nationalism. This suited the vision propagated by the *petit bourgeois* culture brokers, who had promoted the idea of a seamless rural Afrikaner identity unfissured by class distinction. This was resisted by some in the rising elite, who (quite literally) 'got on their high horses'.

Finally, there was an undeniably sensual side to the Saddle horse movement that should be recognised. Oral narratives evoke the remembered pleasure generated by the learned appreciation of the horses' movement, by the physical and mental skill required to ride them correctly, and by their sheer beauty.