



TWO BIRDS IN THE HAND: Julian Fincham of Stella, North West, with a pair of Jacobin pigeons

Setting the two-tone for an entire weekend

In which **Oliver Roberts** attends an agricultural show in Pretoria and learns about bulls' scrotums and basic fondant techniques, then admires some chickens and beats a hasty retreat from the Little Miss Cupcake pageant

Photographs: **Raymond Preston**

A BULL'S scrotal circumference is determined using a kind of tape measure that has belt-like buckles on it. The tape measure is applied to the widest part of the scrotum and pulled gently, gently around the scrotum, just so.

If you've never seen a bull's scrotum up close, I can tell you that it looks very much like a human scrotum does the instant it has emerged from a hot shower or bath, ie hanging down as far as the scrotum's hideous epidermis is physically capable of stretching, and really very dangly. Except with a bull, because it weighs like 1000kg, its scrotum is logically more than 10 times the size of a human scrotum and pretty much resembles two newborn humans being carried upside-down inside a furry tarp.

A bull's scrotum (I'm aware that I'm repeating the word "scrotum" a lot but I think it's a rather nice word both aesthetically and aurally and I'm not sure when I'll ever get the chance to use the word "scrotum"

this often ever again), yes, you might be thinking, for what purpose might a bull's scrotum be measured? Well, sometimes bulls are entered into competitions where they are judged on a number of criteria such as average daily gain and feed conversion ratio¹, and their scrotums are measured along with all these other criteria because scrotal size is an indicator of fertility².

I am privy to this information because I attended the Jacaranda Landbouwkou (Agricultural Show) in Pretoria and watched something called the ARC Platinum Bulls Competition (37th edition). Other important things I learnt during my two days at the show include: the proper way to prepare goat meat; basic fondant techniques; how to cultivate proteas; how to milk a cow and shear a sheep³; how to line dance; how to spin and weave; that Afrikaans really like to eat rusks and make jam; that many a farmer appears to have dangerously high cholesterol levels; and that once a certain type of woman reaches a certain type of age she has her hair



SAY HOMEMADE CHEESE: Cheerleaders of the Blue Bulls Babes

chopped horribly short at the back and only ever wears huge floral blouses and her upper-arms get very fat and wobble in a manner resembling the wobble of milk tart.

Except for the milking and shearing, the rest of the above demonstrations/thoroughly informative events took place in

Hall G of the Tshwane Events Centre, which is where the Landbouwkou was happening. Hall G was where I ended up spending most of my time and it was witness to spectacles absurd and depressing and kind of obscene: a dance demonstration in which a plump Afrikaans girl in Converse sneakers danced all sweetly and

seductively with a thin black fellow while some very Calvinistic-looking people in the crowd watched with low-key disgust (absurd); the dire turn out at the subsequently echoey talk on basic fondant techniques (six people, including an elderly man in a faded black suit who'd clearly been forced there by his wife — depressing); and the Little Miss Cupcake pageant during which frumpy mothers choreographed their six-year-old, make-up-wearing daughters into strutting and posing coquettishly (and vicariously) with hands on hips in order to seduce the judges⁴ (kind of obscene).

And there is nothing like a show or a fair to prove that a lot of very overweight people have nothing to blame for their condition except their own diabolical enthusiasm for gorging crappy food at any given opportunity. Fried mini-donuts, pancakes, boewewors rolls, vetkoek, pies, super high-fat biltong, chip 'n dip — it was all there in Bacchanalian abundance, and in front of each stand was a queue comprised two-thirds of



LED BY THE NOSE: Prize-winning Romagnola beef on the hoof. The breed originated in Italy



PUFFED UP PIGEON: An Old Dutch Capuchine bird



UNIFORM APPEARANCE: Two men gauge the meat



PRE-PRE-PUBESCENT: Little Miss Cupcake contestants prepare for the judges

people who were a mere Cadbury's 99 Flake away from achieving true obesity.

Still, at least there was the poultry, pigeon, rabbit and turkey display in Hall B. Here, all enmity I felt toward the Miss Cupcake mothers and over-eaters was assuaged by the once-off spectacle of chickens being shampooed and blow-dried for the Poultry Youth competition. On the mark sheet were 38 criteria that competitors were marked on, including: (15) Uses soft nailbrush to clean comb, ear lobes and wattles; (21) Slowly lowers bird into basin with no splashing; (28) Keeping head from immersing in water (sic); (33) Not holding hairdryer too close to bird (sic).

And unless you have attended an agricultural show you have no idea (a) how impossibly attractive a girl whose sole purpose is to judge poultry competitions can be, (b) what an exhibition hall filled with hundreds of chickens, rabbits, pigeons and turkeys smells like⁵, and (c) just how many species of chickens there are⁶ and how you can be moved to describe a chicken as "beautiful".

Six songs that you will always hear played over a crackly PA at events like this: *Unchain My Heart*

(Joe Cocker), *Take On Me* (A-ha), *You Can Call Me Al* (Paul Simon), *Mustang Sally* (The Commitments) and *Old Time Rock and Roll* (Bob Seger).

Hall G, Friday, heralded the appearance of Renier Janse van Rensburg, AKA The Pancake King. Before a rapt audience, he told the story of how he was fired post-1994 from his position at the Bryanston Post Office (insert not-so-subtle allusions to the evils of the new ANC regime et cetera here) and was without work until his pal Sol Kerzner, whose letters Janse van Rensburg used to sort through and deliver "personally", got him a temp job flipping pancakes at Sun City.

Much inspiration followed and within a few years, Janse van Rensburg had set the all-time world record of having 50 — that's right, ladies and gentlemen, 50 — frying pans on the go at once. Now he has an official website and travels the world making pancakes in multiple pans, hosting pancake weddings and repeating the story in which he tells everyone that Sol Kerzner is his good friend.

Two events that were listed on the show programme but were mysteriously (and for me, very disappointingly) cancelled: Die

Blouse Blou Bui competition on Friday afternoon, and Saturday morning's Devoted Inspirational Talk. My inquiries into the reasons for both these cancellations were met with shrugged shoulders and a barrage of Afrikaans⁷.

And four events that weren't listed on the program but did happen: a girl asked her mom to take a selfie of her with a sheep; one of the miniature horses had chronic diarrhea all over the entrance to Hall H where the miniature horses were being stabled; I saw a boy of school-going age pushing his newborn in a pram while wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "I THINK I COULD FALL MADLY IN BED WITH YOU" on it; and during Little Miss Cupcake, a woman with a microphone referred to photographer Raymond Preston and me as "versaggewers van die Rapport", so the entire hall thought we were reporters from the Afrikaans Sunday newspaper literally just there to cover Little Miss Cupcake.

Raymond and I, we left very

shortly after that. **LS**

¹ According to the judge, these two criteria are, "economically highly important traits, and we want to select bulls that eat less and grow more, and as a bull's performance increases in growth, we want its feed conversion ratio to become less. This is indicative of a biologically efficient bull".

² The winning bull's scrotal circumference was 55cm.

³ Despite my numerous annoying requests to those in charge of the milking/shearing activities I was never allowed to milk/shear on my own, I merely saw these two actions demonstrated repeatedly and therefore believe I could milk/shear if a situation ever arose that required me to do so.

⁴ I must admit that I momentarily warmed to one of the judges, the current Miss Northern Gauteng and probably a former Miss Cupcake herself, because of the sweet, tender way in which she looked at the girls posing on the ramp. Also, there were so many cupcakes and cupcake-related activities in Hall G (including a cupcake auction and cupcake castle

building) that I inevitably sat on and squashed a half-eaten vanilla cupcake that had been haphazardly left on a white plastic chair.

⁵ Manure, urine, general avian/lagomorphian panic. In comparison, by late Saturday, Hall G, which had no air conditioning, had developed a permanent waft of clammy human bottoms, cupcakes, kiddies' perfume, cheese and chutney snacks, and sheep (which was odd because as far as I'm aware the sheep never left Hall I).

⁶ Among others in Hall B were the following species: Pekin Frizzle, Silver Leghorn, other Leghorns, Schright, K-Shamo, Roscomb, Silkie, Japanese Chabo, Brahma, Blue Orpington, Modern Game, Phoenix, Silver-Laced Wyandotte, Venda. Some had laid eggs in their cages, though I wasn't sure if they were actual freshly laid eggs or for display purposes only.

⁷ My Afrikaans is very limited so I always spoke to anyone I had to speak to at the show in polite English, and they, strangely, and I thought somewhat antagonistically, always answered me back in Afrikaans so I didn't really understand what they were saying.