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'I'd rather have a goddam horse.

A horse is at least human, for God's sake.'

J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*

THE START

Chasing foxes and servants can only keep a man entertained for so long. During the late 18th century, with no French Revolution to remove their heads and duels falling out of favour, English aristocrats increasingly occupied themselves by seeing whose horse was the fastest.

Speed was of the essence and, by mating their mares with exotic imported stallions – namely the Byerley Turk, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Arabian – aristocrats found themselves galloping faster and faster. Eventually, in 1780, they reached Derby.

They would have reached Bunbury but when the Earl of Derby and Sir Charles Bunbury tossed a coin to decide what to call a new race, at Epsom, Derby won. Over a century later, if Bunbury had still been alive (he wasn't) he might have been consoled by his appearance in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. As it was, he was consoled by winning the first Derby with a handsome chestnut called Diomed.

The important thing to remember is that every

thoroughbred horseracing today is a descendant of either the Byerley Turk, the Darley Arabian or the Godolphin Arabian. The bluffer might usefully, and nonchalantly, remark, 'Of course, there isn't really much difference between any of them. They all come from the same three stallions, historically.'

This should be enough to spark off any attendant bloodstock expert and, while he or she delivers a long and complicated monologue, all that is required of the bluffer is to adopt a knowing and superior air, nodding occasionally.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

If a horse seems to have a lot of body near the front, it is worth speculating in approving terms on the likely size of its heart and lungs. Just as a car with a 2000cc engine is more powerful than a 1000cc version, so the size of a racehorse's heart affects its performance.

A big heart, known in racing as 'an engine', is a good thing. The two greatest Flat racehorses, arguably of all time (because there's always an argument), Secretariat and Frankel, both had exceptionally large hearts. Secretariat's heart weighed about 21lb, well over double the average. Like Frankel, he had 'a tremendous engine'.

Yet, with a racehorse, the heart of the matter is not so much the heart as the legs. It doesn't take a degree in anatomy to figure out that they have a fundamental design flaw.

Having started off, in the proverbial mists of time,