

Pictures do make perfect



**ANNE
LANG**

Recently, I took some friends to the races. They were not newcomers to southwestern tracks, but it had been a long time between visits.

The day went predictably. Everybody won a little, lost a little more, and generally had a merry time in the true spirit of the occasion.

Feeling restless by the ninth race, I decided to wander down to the paddock area, intending to watch the day's feature from the apron. One of my friends opted to join me.

Well, the sudden, up-close perspective blew her away. She reacted like an excited kid to the entire spectacle, gasping with delight at the synchronization of the saddling activity, the colorful pageantry of the post parade, the thundering stampede of horseflesh running hellbent for the wire, and the ensuing commotion as disheveled jockeys hopped off their wheeling mounts just a few feet from where she stood.

Those images were all she talked about on the ride home. Not the Oaklawn simulcasts, the efficiency of the window clerk or the quality of the margaritas.

The mental photographs snapped at the rail will remain etched in her mind long after the souvenir program has been discarded. Those images are the magnet that will draw her to the racetrack again.

Capturing racing's most vivid images on film has earned California photographer Katey Barrett a distinguished reputation over the past 20 years. She's maintained her position at the leading edge of contemporary equine photography for her unique use of light—the primary element in her photos that depict an exquisite contrast of infinitesimal details frozen against backgrounds of blurred activity.

Not all of Barrett's pictures are pretty ones. She's witnessed more breakdowns than she'd care to count, but the file where she keeps the shots of horses struggling to stand on shattered legs is kept firmly locked away.

Tragedies do occur in front of the public, and we can't always prevent racetrack patrons from recording a few unpleasant mental pictures. But see what happens when you show a potential racing fan Barrett's close-up of a gleaming boot heel nudging a glistening bay coat; dawn sunlight filtering through a flying mane, or the chaos of the grandstand reflected in a thoroughbred's eye.

They'll likely be intrigued by a subtle message that will lure them to the track, to see for themselves if the implied magic portrayed in Barrett's visuals really exists—perhaps wondering if a visit would stimulate the other senses as well.

A racing insider can look at Barrett's photos and say, "Oh yes, I recognize that moment." And maybe they'll forget the pressures of their job and acknowledge the extent of satisfaction that can be found within the vast tapestry of tiny moments structuring their day.

Indeed, it's up to racing's insiders to try to share those feelings with the uninitiated—the untapped fan base we're all so afraid of losing to other forms of entertainment and wagering.

The average racing patron doesn't have easy access to photos by Barrett and other accomplished equine photographers, whose works primarily appear in industry trade journals. So if we can't find a way to stick those magazines under their noses, maybe we could compensate by taking our friends down to the rail, to let them get some pictures of their own.

No cameras necessary.

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