



## Luxury? Blood for booty...

If you want to confuse the patrons of the front bar at the Royal Hotel, ask them to define 'luxury'. I'd bet my best gumboots that there wouldn't be a stampede. The best you could hope for would be maybe a grunt, meaning, "What's this dropkick smoking?"

But persist and eventually some wag will volunteer a Brazilian model with legs up to her nostrils and an appetite for horizontal dancing. Another might suggest a lifetime supply of beer in one end and a catheter out the other. A third, a secret fishing hole full of really, really stupid trout.

You notice, however, the absence of conjunctions such as 'chauffeur-driven', 'diamond-crusted', 'single-malt' or even 'chocolate-coated'. Those boys just don't get it. And as a result, they don't get it either: not the fishing hole, not the single malt and certainly not leggy Irina from Rio.

Why? Because they don't expect to see luxury in their lifetimes. Because they're not aspirational. They're not striving. Say "Rolls" and they think silage. Say "Chanel" and they think irrigation.

They're talking lamb, not Lamborghini; Massey, not Maserati; crop dusters, not chartered jets. And they're trading in completely the wrong type of stock market.

The richer side of my family owned a rather large brewing business\* over the other side of The Ditch. Aware of their poverty-stricken rellies draining cows for a living in Australia, the New Zealand mob would regularly send parcels of second-hand clothes for the kids.

My mother would recall the excitement these generated. She and her siblings would rip open the packages to reveal their treasures. Out would spill scarcely worn dresses in

rich colours and textures: velvets, lace and satins. It was unbelievable largesse for kids sometimes lacking shoes.

My grandfather – who chose to make a living from milk instead of beer – would take these clothes and rip them up for udder cloths right in front of the stunned children.

Luxury is, after all, only attitude.

Rich people eat lobster. Maybe some Coffin Bay oysters, and chuck in some scallops, too, mate. Ta... and a couple of dimmies. Don't give a thought to the poor souls at sea hauling in those crustacea in all weathers.

Extravagantly smelly cheese might be on the menu. I suggested that to Grant Davies, the chairman of Murray Goulburn, over lunch recently and he said: "Cheese shouldn't be a luxury – it should be something you eat every day." If you knew how hard those dairy folk work, you'd be eating cheese daily, too.

And premium wines? Shiraz is swell, but what about the vigneron fighting frost and financial meltdown?

All those hallmarks of luxury involve hard yakka by some unseen workforce and, in the case of consumer goods, probably sweatshop sloggers in Asia. How can we sleep straight in our beds at night knowing some poor soul has sweated blood for our booty?

I'll tell you how we'd sleep: on satin sheets, in a sprawling king-sized bed, in a Presidential suite overlooking Lake Como high in the Swiss Alps, with a companion who makes you weep with desire.

That's how.

*\*Actually, a very large brewing business. If only I could inherit it by absorption. ●*



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