

From A Game of Polo with a Headless Goat

Emma Levine travelled throughout Asia researching and filming unusual sports. In this passage she writes about a donkey race in Karachi.

We drove off to find the best viewing spot, which turned out to be the crest of the hill so we could see the approaching race. I asked the lads if we could join in the 'Wacky Races' and follow the donkeys, and they loved the idea. 'We'll open the car boot, you climb inside and point your camera towards the race. As the donkeys overtake us, we'll join the cars.' 'But will you try and get to the front?' 'Oh yes, that's no problem.'

The two lads who had never been interested in this Karachi sport were suddenly fired up with enthusiasm. We waited for eternity on the brow of the hill, me perched in the boot with a zoom lens pointing out. Nearly one hour later I was beginning to feel rather silly when the only action was a villager on a wobbly bicycle, who nearly fell off as he cycled past and gazed around at us.

Several vehicles went past, and some donkey-carts carrying spectators. 'Are they coming?' we called out to them. 'Coming, coming,' came the reply. I was beginning to lose faith in its happening, but the lads remained confident.

Just as I was assuming that the race had been cancelled, we spotted two approaching donkey-carts in front of a cloud of fumes and dust created by some fifty vehicles roaring up in their wake. As they drew nearer, Yaqoob revved up the engine and began to inch the car out of the lay-by. The two donkeys were almost dwarfed by their entourage, but there was no denying their speed — the Kibla donkey is said to achieve speeds of up to 40 kph, and this looked close. The two were neck-and-neck, their jockeys perched on top of the tiny carts using their whips energetically, although not cruelly.

The noise of the approaching vehicles grew; horns tooting, bells ringing, and the special rattles used just for this purpose (like maracas, a metal container filled with dried beans). Men standing on top of their cars and vans, hanging out of taxis and perched on lorries, all cheered and shouted, while the vehicles jostled to get to the front of the convoy.

Yaqoob chose exactly the right moment to edge out of the road and swerve in front of the nearest car, finding the perfect place to see the two donkeys and at the front of the vehicles. This was Formula One without rules, or a city-centre rush hour gone anarchic; a complete flouting of every type of traffic rule and common sense.

Comment [YA1]: A strange and eye catching title, with the first section as something which we can relate to, a civilized game of Polo and the second portion a barbaric and savage image. The stark contrast between the two piques the reader's interest

Comment [YA2]: An immediate start to the action – fast pace speech is used to reflect the wild and exciting nature of the race throughout this paragraph

Comment [YA3]: Creates a sense of adventure and excitement – easy for Western readers to relate to as this refers to a famous cartoon series where characters raced with crazy cars

Comment [YA4]: Portrays the adventurous and wild nature of the participants

Comment [YA5]: Confident tone of the driver – again suggesting his exotic nature

Comment [YA6]: Wild, unpredictable and energetic nature of the men.

Comment [YA7]: Strange, unusual and slightly comical – reemphasizing the exotic and quirky nature of Pakistan

Comment [YA8]: Description used to recreate the experience as well as the stretched out lull in tension where nothing happens to create her sense of disappointment and a sense of potential anti-climax.

Comment [YA9]: Very calm tone, there is no sense of urgency or excitement – this contrasts with the next paragraph making the excitement there seem more extreme

Comment [YA10]: Shift in tone – excitement begins

Comment [YA11]: Big noise that builds up excitement and mounting tension

Comment [YA12]: Aural imagery used to intensify the sense of building excitement

Comment [YA13]: Slow building of action and excitement

Comment [YA14]: A pause used to emphasize their speed

Comment [YA15]: Surprisingly fast

Comment [YA16]: Great excitement as well as a sense of instability at the "perching"

Comment [YA17]: Informative brackets to emphasize the informative nature of the extract

Comment [YA18]: Very wild image created through the use of the triad

Comment [YA19]: Creates a sense of great skill and proficiency for Yaqoob

Comment [YA20]: Contrast with "edge" to accentuate the sudden increase in speed

Comment [YA21]: Comparison to emphasize how chaotic the situation is

Our young driver relished this unusual test of driving skills. It was survival of the fittest, and depended upon the ability to cut in front of a vehicle with a sharp flick of the steering wheel (no lane discipline here); quick reflexes to spot a gap in the traffic for a couple of seconds; nerves of steel, and an effective horn. There were two races — the motorized spectators at the back; in front, the two donkeys, still running close and amazingly not put off by the uproar just behind them. Ahead of the donkeys, oncoming traffic — for it was a main road — had to dive into the ditch and wait there until we had passed. Yaqoob loved it. We stayed near to the front, his hand permanently on the horn and his language growing more colourful with every vehicle that tried to cut in front. ...

Comment [YA22]: Reinforces his youth and excitement

Comment [YA23]: Reinforces the exotic nature of the race

Comment [YA24]: Creates a wild and animalistic sense of the race – there is a sense here that Pakistan is chaotic, anarchic and adventurous

Comment [YA25]: Metaphor used to reinforce Yaqoob's daring

Comment [YA26]: Simplistic and joyful with great certainty. It is short and there is no doubt

Comment [YA27]: A humorous image is evoked in the reader endearing us to Yaqoob and his enthusiastic participation in this event

The road straightened and levelled, and everyone picked up speed as we neared the end of the race. But just as they were reaching the finishing line, the hospital gate, there was a near pile-up as the leading donkey swerved, lost his footing and he and the cart tumbled over. The race was over.

Comment [YA28]: Triad of action used to emphasize excitement

Comment [YA29]: Increase in tension

Comment [YA30]: The but implies that something is wrong and there has been an interruption

Comment [YA31]: Unpredictable and dangerous, creates an impression of great speed

Comment [YA32]: Short and definite, the race ended suddenly and all the excitement and tension has been lost.

Comment [YA33]: The short sentence structure has been carried on and carries a foreboding tone.

And then the trouble began. I assumed the winner was the one who completed the race but it was not seen that way by everyone. Apart from the two jockeys and 'officials' (who, it turned out, were actually monitoring the race) there were over a hundred punters who had all staked money on the race, and therefore had strong opinions. Some were claiming that the donkey had fallen because the other one had been ridden too close to him. Voices were raised, fists were out and tempers rising. Everyone gathered around one jockey and official, while the bookmakers were trying to insist that the race should be re-run.

Comment [YA34]: A triad of anger reinforces how angry the people are and how likely violence is likely to erupt

Comment [YA35]: There is an image of an overwhelming tide attacking the two men suggesting the anger of the crowd

Comment [YA36]: The sudden shift from excitement and daring demonstrates the seriousness of the situation and how unpredictable Pakistan is

Comment [YA37]: Their concern for her safety once again reveals that, while perhaps a little wild, Yaqoob and Iqbal are basically good at heart

Comment [YA38]: Creates an image of them being engulfed by the crowd, a hostile image.

Comment [YA39]: Short and certain, no explanation is given. Creating a sense that the situation does not allow for any negotiation

Comment [YA40]: Driving sensibly in comparison to previously

Comment [YA41]: A sense of adventurousness and recklessness is created of the two

Comment [YA42]: The two conflicting viewpoints highlight the cultural differences that separate them from her

Yaqoob and Iqbal were nervous of hanging around a volatile situation. They agreed to find out for me what was happening ordering me to stay inside the car as they were swallowed up by the crowd. They emerged sometime later. 'It's still not resolved,' said Iqbal, 'but it's starting to get nasty. I think we should leave.' As we drove away, Yaqoob reflected on his driving skills. 'I really enjoyed that,' he said as we drove off at a more sedate pace. 'But I don't even have my licence yet because I'm underage!'

Comment [YA43]: The final paragraph provides reflection on the excitement and exhilaration of the days events and is calm in these recollections.

They both found this hilarious, but I was glad he hadn't told me before; an inexperienced, underage driver causing a massive pile-up in the middle of the high-stakes donkey race could have caused problems.

Emma Levine

Recreate the experience of the donkey race

Excitement and energy of participants (Freedom, adventurous and a little wild)

Chaotic anarchy

Exotic, strange and unusual nature of the race

Sense of danger at the end