

LIFE IN NEWMARKET



Tony Morris can dispense with the earplugs

Newmarket nights over for another year? Now that's music to these ears

I CAN recall a time when there were only two reasons why anyone would want to come to Newmarket. One was to see horses – at the racecourse, on the gallops, in the stables or on the studs – and the other was with the object of buying a caravan.

The caravan business flourished for a while but, once that had shut down, yonks ago now, there was only one reason. If it weren't for the horses, our little market town was no different from any other, and as we were only a dozen miles from Cambridge, which had a lot more to offer a visitor, why would anyone want to divert off the A14, the road that passed us by?

But then, for some inexplicable reason, Newmarket became the nightclub capital of East Anglia. Young folk flocked to the town at weekends, doing whatever it is that they do in nightclubs, which, from my own limited experience, is much the same as they do in pubs, but until much later.

(Well, there is the lap-dancing, I suppose. That isn't a common feature of pub life here, probably because there's a law against it, if you don't have the appropriate licence.)

Anyway, the next thing was, the racecourse got into the act. Cheesed off over the fact that it couldn't make ends meet with just the income from its overcharged racegoing clientele, it instituted a summer schedule of Friday night pop music gigs, and, as luck would have it, discovered that there were more fans of that kind of 'entertainment', prepared to pay through the nose for it, than there were for the racing.

The so-called Newmarket Nights are, we are told, a tremendous success. It just seems a shame to me that so many regular racegoers are deterred from attending by the huge influx of visitors for whom the horses mean nothing.

I went through a pop music phase myself long ago, but even when I joined the Buddy Holly Appreciation Society, I preferred racing and wouldn't have welcomed a musical distraction.

Just why people pay so much – something over 30 quid, I'm told – to be present

on these occasions, I can't imagine. My house is three miles from the July course, but I can sit in the garden and hear it all. When, once in a while, they play something that has a tune to it, I might even recognise it.

Earlier this month a group called Madness was performing. I naturally did not venture out, and had all doors and windows closed, but I still had to suffer a monotonous thumping soundtrack to my evening which persisted until about 10.45. A week later I took the precaution of booking a dinner date ten miles to the east of the town, and sped off to it past a stationary line of Westlife-bound traffic stretching back almost to the Limekilns.

This being August, the hottest ticket in town – if I may say so myself – did not involve queuing for hours for the privilege of getting drenched and suffering damage to the eardrums. The annual gathering for select numbers at Ormonde House, held to acknowledge the host's continued defiance of anno domini, passed off agreeably, once again achieving a 100 per cent survival rate, albeit with

close calls in a few cases. No names, no pack drill, of course.

There won't be another such occasion until next August – if then, I suppose I should add – and the Newmarket Nights are over for another year. So what is there, in addition to the obvious, to draw visitors to the town?

WE ARE losing another attraction this weekend, when the snooker club closes its doors for the last time. I'm going to have new neighbours on that side, with 14 flats due to go up on the site.

I already have an excellent new neighbour to the rear, with the reopening of the Indian restaurant 50 yards away, fully refurbished, under new management, serving highly superior nosh. The Haldy, in Park Lane, provides a very good reason for paying the town a visit. Just don't come in such numbers that I can't get a table when I want one.

And, of course, if you happen to be into racing, there's always the chance that you'll come across some well-known personality in the street or in one of the shops. Hang around the cigarette



Madness: monotonous thumping

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