

Yes, it's schmaltzy, very schmaltzy, but with strong performances by Toni Collette and Damian Lewis the odds are that you'll love it.

Six years ago I found myself gripped by the overwhelmingly likable documentary *Dark Horse*, which told the amazing true story of Janet Vokes, a former whippet breeder and pigeon fancier from the depressed Welsh village of Cefn Fforest who organised a community syndicate to buy a racehorse. The drinkers at Jan's local chipped in a weekly £10 sub and their horse, symbolically called *Dream Alliance*, wound up winning the Welsh Grand National, basically making it the Seabiscuit of the valleys.

I predicted at the time that this would be remade as a fiction feature with Imelda Staunton as Jan and Jim Broadbent as her hangdog husband Brian. Well, actually it's Toni Collette and Owen Teale, with Damian Lewis playing Howard Davies, the local tax accountant and breezy man-of-the-world whose dangerously addictive love of horseracing inspires Jan. The resulting movie may be a bit schmaltzy – actually, a lot schmaltzy – but I couldn't help enjoying it: like *Chariots of Fire*, only with horses. That comparison, however, may be down to *Chariots* cast member Nicholas Farrell here playing the shrewd professional trainer Philip Hobbs.

This movie gets a real gallop on, due to the sheer warmth of its performances. Collette, that perennially excellent actor who utterly inhabits every part, gives us a wonderfully approachable Jan: shy, yet tough and determined. Lewis is robust and yet very sympathetic as the rakish Howard who has come very close in the past to losing his shirt to the sport of kings. And it is a treat to see Joanna Page as Howard's wife Angela and a cameo for Siân Phillips as Maureen, a local woman with a passion for Tunnock's Tea Cakes.

My only slight quibble is that the film's title, *Dream Horse*, sounds like something chosen by an algorithm. Why not stick with *Dark Horse*? Well, no matter. It's a winner.

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