

THE BULL

Production Notes

Friendly Cattle

Without our impressively calm and patient bovine stars, this film would never have been possible. We are exceedingly grateful to the Stoch family, who not only let us film with their tame Tafelsig Nguni cattle, but sponsored their farm and their time in helping us realize the vision of this film. Kelsey and Christian drove out to the farm two days prior to our first shoot day to work with our hand-picked bovine stars. With the help of Joshua Stoch - real-life cattle whisperer and everyday hero - they practiced positive-reinforcement training techniques to rehearse the actions we were hoping to film. During all these rehearsals, Koekie the Cow was extremely accommodating, but her calf, Nesquik, had other ideas! Without fail, Nesquik would scamper off to rejoin the herd! We were convinced that we would need to substitute Nesquik with a hand-raised bottle-fed orphan calf named Prince. On our actual shoot day, however, Nesquik behaved like an absolute star, sticking close to mom and giving us the most beautiful footage. Snapple was equally accommodating, both watching Natalie dance and staring at the fence as and when required. Working with animals always takes that much more time and effort, and our entire crew learned how to wrangle cattle, but with Josh's strong relationship with and acute understanding of our four-legged stars and the additional assistance of our brilliant professional Animal Wrangler, we were lucky enough to capture every shot we had hoped for!

Filming A Live Birth

In order to successfully capture the live birth of a foal on camera, we befriended two extremely accommodating stud farms who each had a number of mares due to deliver between September - October. We created a "Mare SOS" Whatsapp group for our Mare Unit, on which the breeders messaged us regular pregnancy updates. We had three different mares due to deliver over our main shoot dates, but all decided to hold out a bit longer. Thus we had no choice but to schedule a pick-up shoot for when Kelsey returned from the London Screenwriter's Festival. We had six more mares due to deliver. We extended our insurance. Panavision SA and Media Film Service generously agreed to sponsored us our gear... again. The first mare delivered on the day Kelsey flew back to Cape Town. The second mare delivered over a public holiday when all the gear houses were closed. Four more left, one in Malmesbury and three at a farm in Franschoek. All were extremely overdue, but were yet to show signs of being close to delivery (restlessness, sweating or wax on the teats - horse lingo for dripping milk). We waited on the edge of our seats for three days...

Finally, on Friday, the breeder made a call. "Come out on Saturday. One must surely drop on Saturday night." The first one came with no warning at 5am on Saturday morning while we were all asleep in Cape Town. The second lay down in the middle of her pasture and started delivering in the early afternoon, as we were preparing to leave Cape Town for the hour drive out to the stud farm. One mare left, an extremely friendly and experienced brood mare named "Size 'Em Up". We arrived at the farm late afternoon Saturday, determined not to miss her delivery. Because horses can go into labour so quickly - and healthy deliveries can be as fast as 15-20 minutes - there was no way we were going to risk leaving the farm. We were on "mare watch" 24-7. Sizie kept us waiting for five days. The breeders generously allowed us to take over their home. We slept on cushions and spare mattresses piled on the living room floor. We wore the same clothes. We kept our ARRI Mini built at all times. Our wonderful producer, Benike Palfi, was in charge of grocery runs and ferrying folks to-and-from Cape Town as we swapped crew in and out. (Because not all of us could actually sit and wait.) And there we were! We watched Sizie, and she watched us...

Late on Wednesday night, the wait finally paid off, and Sizie gave birth to a beautiful colt. She was a glorious 18 days over her due date. Natalie Walsh delivered the foal on film, with the breeder standing by just off camera to give instructions and ensure that all was going well. It was one of the most powerful, moving events any of us have ever been privileged enough to capture on film. To our knowledge, the only other production to have successfully filmed a mare foaling was the 1994 feature film adaptation of BLACK BEAUTY directed by Caroline Thompson. According to an article in Horse and Hound magazine, Thompson "brought in a total of thirty pregnant mares to stay at the Buckinghamshire location. Finally, as one mare gave birth to a black foal, he began to be born crooked. Filming paused in a panic whilst trainer Petersen helped to turn the foal around. As he did so, he dabbed some white makeup on the baby animal's face and then Black Beauty was born on film." We are extremely proud to have accomplished the same feat.