

MONACO

Lunch with Big Ron

There's a treat in store for soccer fans with long lunch hours, expense accounts or generous hosts. The first in this year's schedule of celebrity lunches, held at the lush Café de Paris on Monaco's Casino Square, features the larger-than-life figure of Ron Atkinson, a man whose 45-year career in football has taken him from player to manager, from commentator to sports pundit, and included the rare double of both Cambridge and Oxford United.

Big Ron, as he is known to the tabloids, has made a speciality of confident and unarguable commentary box forecasts the likes of: "Either side could win it, or it could be a draw" and "They have nothing to lose but the match". However, guests at the lunch are more likely to be looking forward to a selection of his lively reminiscences of the many famous, and less famous, people he has worked with over the years.

The Monaco celebrity lunches are organised by Kevin Marsh's company Azur Productions, which specialises in entertainment events. Although these are widely used by members of the financial community networking informally with clients and colleagues, they are also open to small groups and individuals – though numbers are limited and advance booking is essential.

The occasion starts with cocktails at noon, followed by a three-course gourmet lunch around 12.45. The guest celebrity then has about an hour to entertain the audience before the event ends at 3pm – except for those wishing to continue in the cash bar afterwards.

Details and tickets, at around €80 each including the meal, aperitifs, wines and liqueurs, from www.AzurProductions.com.

Website for Côte d'Azur

Looking for information on the Côte d'Azur? The non-profit website, www.amb-cotedazur.com, is an extremely useful potential companion. If you wish to post information or comment you can email the editor at alice.barker@amb.cotedazur.com and it will appear on the website's notices page.

VAR VIGNETTES

Short cut

from Martin Hills



ALPES-MARITIMES

from Charles Davey

Luxury at sale prices

January saw the second annual Cannes shopping festival, a unique event in which over 700 boutiques offered their winter collections at discounts of 30-50%.

Customers who spent more than €200 were invited to a show by the major fashion houses.

These, including Gianfranco Ferré, Jean-Paul Gaultier, Christian Lacroix, Missoni, Hugo Boss, Escada and Christian Dior have taken this opportunity to present their spring-summer 2005 collections.

The Ville de Cannes and the Palais des Festivals see this as an ideal event to fill the annual lull in the tourist and business trade. The ten-day event included a daily *son et lumière*, outside the Palais des Festivals from 6pm until 1am, a series of galas and balls at smart hotels, and the British Luxury Council's gala at the Palais des Festivals itself.

On the programme were exhibitions of dietary and beauty products and sportswear. The event, advertised on local English radio, appears to have been a success, and a third Festival des Remises is planned for January 2006.

Catch 22 for clean-up cops

The environmental 'police' force *Allo Mairie* + clears rubbish away from the highway and other public places. Introduced two years ago, it employs more than 30 personnel, and promises to clear rubbish within 48 hours of notification.

However, the scheme has caused some local residents and businesses to take even less care than before – why dispose of your own rubbish, when if you leave it on the pavement the local council will take it away within 48 hours?

Residents of Nice may have the same mindset: one local official feared that the introduction of a dog licence to fund cleaning away excrement might result in more canine mess

on the streets. The logic: dog owners would feel they did not need to do what they were already paying someone else for.

Fortunately, those who discard their rubbish in a public place frequently leave clues to their identity, often in documents such as envelopes. The environmental police routinely search for such clues, and gradually offenders are being embarrassed into taking their civic duties more seriously.

PROVENCE - ALPES - CÔTE D'AZUR

ADN tests seek old lady rapist

There is a sense of fear in *Vence*, where four old ladies have been subjected to violent sexual attacks in the last three months.

The police investigation has made little progress. In the last month, however, 200 residents of the town were called to the local police station to provide DNA samples (mostly a scraping from the inside cheek), and fingerprints. The subjects were all from the local Algerian and Tunisian population – the only lead so far being some evidence that the attacker's accent and tone of voice indicated a North-African origin. To date samples have been taken only from those who live in *Vence* and either have a criminal record, or could have been in the vicinity at the time of the assaults. Nothing so far suggests that the attacker lives or works in *Vence*.

Rape inquiry turns bizarre

The 2,200 inhabitants of the village of *Saint-Martin-du-Var* are still coming to terms with the alleged gang rape of a young mother, by local youths in front of her husband, at her flat in the central square.

One press report suggests that she was forced to undergo

this ordeal to save her husband from a serious beating by the youths. Police arrested five of the six offenders, who, appears also live in the village. Three of the five were released after questioning.

Money-laundering

It is alleged that an Italian, Giovanni Bonora, has been acting as banker for nearly 20 businesses on the *Côte d'Azur*, enabling them to avoid compulsory French social charges and taxes.

It is thought that Bonora has been facilitating this black economy for over five years, laundering over €40m. The system appears to have operated by small businesses passing their cheques to Bonora, who added his name to the cheque, put them through his accounts, and then paid clients in cash, minus a commission of 5-15%. Businesses could then use the cash to pay their employees.

Bonora, who was also convicted in his absence of charges last year, and sentenced to a term of three years imprisonment, was arraigned thanks to joint French-Italian operations. In February fourteen people have been questioned, including the director of a business with a workforce of 70.

WHAT'S ON IN FEBRUARY

All month CANNES Made in Cannes

A group of locally trained artists offers a wide range of events in music to performance arts, including dance, circus and, for the time, a catwalk show organised by local college students. *Le de la Licorne, Cannes*. Prices start from €5 for adults to

October 2002. The overnight closure of the tunnel for several days caused speculation which was not entirely damped down by the announcement that water had been seeping in via numerous tiny fissures in the 1.2m-thick protective casing.

This, said the authorities, was nothing to worry about. "It happens in every tunnel in the world," said Pierre Custaud of the roads service.