

# Joe Scalzo's

## City of Speed and elsewhere

### Beursgoeroe

Formula 1 racing is a respectable corporate enterprise, and no longer makes room for strange creatures like Jean-Pierre Van Rossem, a bizarre Belgian who described himself as a “beursgoeroe,” a stock market guru, but whose own father labeled him a psychopath, which seemed a far better title. Van Rossem, it may be dimly recalled, was the curiosity who, toward the end of the last century, was warmly welcomed for planning to join Formula 1 by sponsoring Team Onyx.

In some ways, Mijnheer Van Rossem –now long departed -- was admirably respectable. The color of his hair was dignified banker’s gray – and it hung halfway down his back; he dressed in correct evening dress, doing so in the day-time as well as nights; guarding against the chill, even in the heat of a Brussels summer, he was seldom seen without his white winter shawl; he wore a starched white dress shirt, which he never bothered to tuck in, but allowed to freely flow over his formidable beursgoeroe belly; and, fleshing out this fascinating sartorial portrait, Van Rossem, day and night, wore a pair of amber-tinted aviator’s glasses.



Van Rossem was raised in Brussels, but his semesters spent in Ghent, at the University, acquainted him with Karl Marx, and the philosophy of Marxism so inflamed him that he grew an anarchist’s beard and, in 1968, set off to promulgate it worldwide, first hurrying to Paris to riot with the rest of the kids in the Days of Rage, then heading out to Moscow, and Red Square, to fire off a complaint about how the comrades were distorting Marx.

Next Van Rossem took his crusade to America, where he discovered computers, stocks and bonds, and the brutal backs-to-the-wall world of the U.S. futures market. All his goals shifted violently and, veering from Marxist to predatory capitalist, he returned to Europe beursgoeroe, with his own Van Rossem investment scheme. Van Rossem bragged that this scheme would some fine day earn him the Nobel Prize in

economics, and already was making him so enormously rich that he was opening his own Ferrari salon, plus joining Formula 1's 1989 tournament, where he was immediately welcomed as the tourney's most exotic new member. Laying on some bodyguards, and firing up a few of his Testarossas, he showed up at Monte Carlo as team sponsor of Onyx. This was in spring. But by winter he already was gone, no longer wanting anything to do with F1 after having dug up some dirt on F1 honcho Jean-Marie Balestre. Going public with the dirt, Van Rossem sped one of his Testarossas into Paris, to the Hotel Ritz, where to conducted a hysterical press conference where he excoriated and libeled Balestre by the hour.



By now Van Rossem had courted and married Niki Annys, a siren of what exists of jet-set Flanders, but it was only after the nuptials that Nike shared with Jean-Pierre her macabre secret: per Niki, the dead could be restored to life, providing they were refrigerated and not thawed out until the passing of, say, half a century. When Niki died not long after the marriage, Jean-Pierre set out to honor his widow's wishes. But he got into a big fight with the city fathers of Brussels who were reneging on their promise to allow Niki's custom-made ice block casket inside the city's

medieval cemetery.



Not long after this, Jean-Pierre surfaced anew, in Antwerp, where he called a standard, hysterical, Van Rossem press conference, announcing good and bad news. The good news was that the world had one less capitalist and the bad news was that it was himself. He moaned that he was broke and had lost all his Ferraris. Two shifty Americans had flim-flammed him and clipped him of between \$150 million and \$300 million.

He was held in a tremendous prison and made to serve a harsh sentence of five years, which totally broke his spirit as beursgoerue. But while he was incarcerated he'd turned his attentions toward literature, self-publishing one novel and threatening to hunt-and-peck dozens more. Corrosive reviews from his own publishers made him promise not to be a man-of-letters either, but to switch to politics, and he still was a politico when he died. JS