



CUT ABOVE... Dubh Prais is small but perfectly formed



Festive felicitations to my old chum Martin Hunt!

Until very recently, Martin (the head of Edinburgh PR firm Tartan Silk and an all round good egg) was the poshest person I'd clapped eyes on. In fact, I once heard a rumour he's the only person in the city who gets the Big Issue delivered.

But I'm afraid it's time to move over, mate. Sorry, Martin, but the guy I sat next to in this week's restaurant, well, what can I say? He made Leonard Sachs from The Good Old Days sound like Arthur Mullard.

After reading out the entire wine list loudly, slowly and very pompously – allowing each and every syllable to roll around his tongue for at least seven seconds – he settled for a Chateau red. And did he ask for it to be decanted? Let's put it this way, do Popeye's farts smell of spinach? It was one of those thoroughly annoying accents that divides opinion – English or posh Edinburgh? It's impossible to tell.

What I do know, however, is that his voice provoked yours truly to ask the waiter one of those once in a lifetime questions: "Excuse me, mate, any chance you could turn that Cliff Richard CD up a bit?"

To be perfectly honest, though, even if I'd been sitting opposite Janet Street Porter, Joe Pasquale and Jade Goody (in vocal terms, surely three of the all-time grates?) I reckon I'd still be raving about Dubh Prais.

That's the name of this week's restaurant and, nope, it doesn't sound the same as it looks. An old Gaelic term meaning 'black cooking pot' it's pronounced Duo Prash.

The fact I never studied 'O' Grade Gaelic at school perhaps explains why I'd never heard of a clearly excellent eatery that opened back in 1988.

Very snug and homely, the dining room is reminiscent of Robert Burns' cottage in Alloway and, sure enough, there's a picture of the bard on the wall behind the tiny bar. Service was warm

SCOT TO BE THE BEST...
Diners love the service and great food



Scots who hae

This Scottish eaterie on the Royal Mile could have been a cheap tourist trap but its food is fabulous

DUBH PRAIS 123B HIGH STREET, EDINBURGH

and welcoming from the moment we walked in and I appreciated the way we were offered a jug of tap water instead of having the overpriced fizzy stuff foisted on us.

Locally sourced produce is clearly what Dubh Prais is all about and their suppliers of meat, game, fish and veg are proudly displayed on the front of the menu. Iceland, Aldi and Tesco don't get a mention.

On the day we visited, the sirloin steak was off as the chef believed it 'wasn't up to scratch'. How's that for quality control? It was replaced on the £17.50 three-course menu with – wait for it – fillet steak!

How's that for a bargain? My wee sister started with the pan-fried haggis. The size of a pin cushion, it was full of flavour and the crunchy oatmeal coating was superb. A word of warning about the wicked whisky sauce, though. Let's just say it's best avoided if you're driving.

My wild mushrooms with crispy garlick of Ayrshire bacon and loads of shards were also very good and it's worth pointing out both appetisers were very well presented.

Main courses were excellent. I loved the fleshy, perfectly cooked lemon sole fillets and the Orkney

cheese sauce smothering the fish worked a treat. Okay, the roast potatoes weren't as crunchy as they could have been (perhaps the chef missed Nigella's campaign about goose fat) but the mound of creamy cabbage was tremendous.

Across the table, the substitute dish on the set menu – the fillet steak – definitely was up to scratch. It was really moist and tender.

Not a bad trick from the kitchen considering Mandy had asked for it to be cooked really well done.

The beef was served with another pile of potatoes and veg, although I personally think a fillet steak is best with a generous handful of crispy, homemade, matchstick fries.

Make sure you stay for dessert. The chocolate cheesecake with coffee sauce (roughly the same amount of calories as three tins of Quality Street) was seriously yummy, while the lemon shortcake was light and sharp.

A quick word about the coffee. Served with butter shortbread fingers and big squares of chocolate fudge, it cost just £2. And that includes unlimited refills. Can you imagine how many bank loans you'd need for something similar at, say, Starbucks? Just one grumble about Dubh Prais

(and who knows, it may have cost it our next Hot Plate Award). The tiny toilets were grubby. But let's look at the bigger picture. Just yards from Edinburgh Castle, a Scottish restaurant like this could easily have been a cheap tourist trap. Nothing could be further from the truth.

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TAM'S HOT PLATE CONTENDERS

DUBH PRAIS
Address: 123b High Street, Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 557 5732
Open: Tuesday to Saturday for lunch and dinner
Wheelchair access: No
Bill for two: £50
Food: 5/5 – terrific from start to finish
Service: 5/5 – warm Scottish welcome
Decor: 4/5 – snug and toasty
Toilets: 3/5 – need a bit of work
Value: 5/5 – fantastic set-price lunch
Total: 22/25

23/25 Voujon, 107 Newington Rd, Edinburgh. Tel: 0131 667 5046
22/25 The Grill @ Dakota Eurocentral, Shawfoot Road, Motherwell. Tel: 0570 2208261
22/25 Mother India's Cellar, 28 Westminster Terrace, Glasgow. Tel: 0141 221 1633
22/25 Harlem, Central Esplanade, Kirkcaldy. Tel: 01592 264496
21/25 Dino's, 35 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow. Tel: 0141 332 0626
21/25 No.28, 28 West Princes St, Helensburgh. Tel: 01436 678288
20/25 Platform 1, Stow Brae, Paisley. Tel: 0141 889 3693
20/25 La Tasca, 9 South Charlotte St, Edinburgh. Tel: 0131 220 0011

20/25 Giannino's, 80 East Main St, Broxburn. Tel: 01506 856667
19/25 La Capannina, Main Street, West Calder. Tel: 01506 872258
19/25 Blues Bar And Brasserie, Blackpool. Tel: 01253 400045
17/25 South Bistro, 47 South Street, Perth. Tel: 01738 633334

The current Hot Plate winner is Catch 22, 158 Bath Street, Glasgow. 0141 331 6222