

The New York Times

The \$100 Posy Race: The Critics Decide

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at least one can say. (On the way to go with something more like "Thinking about which should buy," you must believe that honesty is its

1-800-FLOWERS suggestion you," which, printed in all capital letters and information mark, struck a nerve. My advice: assess your best before you bid. Corolla, \$105 bought 10 pink roses in a vase — also known as and thoughts of corner grocery delinquency," said Mr. Stark, who said you better try for about \$75. Mr. Stark, business partner, Avi Adler,

"Wild Flowers... (Pepcia) (Clarkson N. Potter, III), said \$15 to \$20 for those flowers, that'd be a lot." "Cramped and lousy, and been shipped away, a sign of those will never open." "I Pinch roses at their base, he says; the firmer the stem the flower and greater long further. To encourage blossoms putting flowers in clusters after cutting.

waited against judging a value of the raw materials, and to judging a cake by the looks. Florists typically add to the price of a bouquet for arrangement. (They also "three to four times, de-stem," in their profit margin) in this case, however, side an exception, because

the flowers were meant to be arranged by the recipient.

What message did the bouquet send? "No, thinking of you, I have no taste," Mr. Stark said.

Mr. Dahl said: "I would say you made a nice attempt to send flowers, but I'd never say it was an attempt to be romantic."

For \$108.23, the people at 1-800-FLOWERS sent an Elegant Wishes bouquet in a cut-glass vase. It was a reminder, Mr. Stark said, that flowers were like sex. "People don't know that it can be a lot better than what they're getting."

From the dealer, elegance meant three Fuji mums, two delphiniums, three astromeris, two roses, two Asiatic lilies and some filler of eucalyptus, goldenrod and statice. Mr. Dahl put the retail value of the flowers and vase at a little over \$50.

"This is the worst one," he added. "The flowers are the lowest grade of these types." Mr. Stark found the bouquet generic and "familiar," but thought the flowers might look better if separated by type. As a rule, he recommended asking for one kind of flower "and no filler — you have to spell that out." A \$50 bouquet of daffodils, for example, would pack more value than \$100 worth of this and that, he said.

You could always try to find out your loved one's favorite color before ordering, Mr. Esteban said, "but guys never know."

The FTD network delivered a Congratulations Bouquet for \$108.88. It was a big cherry thing: five carnations, three Gerbera daisies, three stock, three Asiatic lilies, three



Photograph by Steve Delaney for The New York Times

astromeris and four roses, plus filler of goldenrod, statice, bells of Ireland, lemon leaf and leather-leaf fern. Mr. Dahl estimated it and the vase would cost about \$45 to \$75 retail. The flowers were fresh and hearty, though common and uninspired. This time it was Mr. Esteban who thought the flowers, like a quarreling couple, should be separated. "I'd pull it apart and make two or three arrangements," he said.

"There are so many beautiful spring flowers in the market right now," Mr. Stark said. "You don't see that represented here." The Gerbera daisies were radiant, the most added mainly none.

At Martha's Flowers, callers hear Ms. Stewart's voice on the recorded greeting, along with an ad for MasterCard, just in case they're having trouble identifying the spirit of the occasion. For \$117.34, including Saturday delivery, the Lavender Rose bouquet consisted of 15 Ecuadorian roses (of two types: Mr. Dahl guessed Bluebird and Blue Curiosa, "with a slightly darker edge," he said) along with some heather and a short frosted glass vase. "I like the idea that they sent two roses in a similar colorway," Mr. Dahl said.

Mr. Esteban said: "There are no exceptional surprises. You're getting what you pay for. But you can work with it."

Mr. Stark was more positive. "I think this bouquet is the winner," he said. "If we're talking Valentine's Day, it is not super passionate. It's a little more like a kiss on Grandma's cheek... but Grandma's nice too!"

New York retail prices for the flowers and vase might start at about \$65. The roses had some browned edges and clipped petals but were otherwise healthy. But at the Martha Stewart Web site, the Lavender Rose bouquet is promoted with "plump stalks of stock"; ours, like many romantic promises, was unfulfilled.

The short vase called for cutting the 16-inch rose stems short. "The arrangement

should be about one-third of the base," Mr. Dahl

And Mr. Esteban cutting roses short. "I say they want a dove that were some other thing," he said. She laughs (the life of)

Blanchet Flowers, Street in the small short pink bouquet parrot tulips, 3 stem dandelion leaf and a colorful square vase \$129.99, including del the value at \$100 or more in the design by vase. Flowers were good condition, but clipped and dappled to the of love or lust. "If tulips with roses, being," Mr. Dahl said.

With a high-end Mr. Esteban recommended on the phone, if you have a favorite color, at least one a little.

To save the best 5000 Avenue at 54 sexy, short bouquet roses, four black call seven astromeris in cluster, all dotted with was the romantic. "This is easily worth Mr. Dahl said.

Mr. Stark liked the cheap filler. "It's a lot not to use astromeris

The message? "I very lavish gift, and ed," Mr. Dahl said.

The verdicts are colorful.