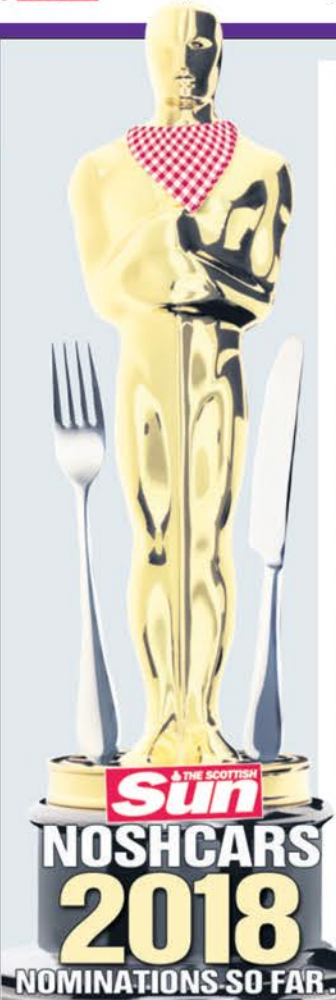


the **Sunday**

• Music • Games

• Motors • Puzzles • Travel



- 1) **SOUTER'S INN**, 33 Main Road, Kirkoswald, Ayrshire, KA19 8HY. Tel: 01655 760653. 31/30
- 2-) **LA DRAGON**, St Marnock Place, Kilmarnock, KA1 1DU. Tel: 01563 555993. 30/30
- 2-) **EE-USK**, North Pier, Oban, Argyll, PA34 5QD. Tel: 01631 691877. 30/30
- 4-) **THE FISHMARKET**, 23A Pier Place, Newhaven, Edinburgh, EH6 4LP. Tel: 0131 552 8262. 29/30
- 4-) **LYCHEE ORIENTAL**, 59 Mitchell Street, Glasgow, G1 3LN. Tel: 0141 248 2240. 29/30
- 4-) **TWENTY ONE**, 17-21 Campbell Street, Hamilton, ML3 6AS. Tel: 01698 767900. 29/30
- 4-) **BRANDER LODGE HOTEL**, Bridge of Awe, Argyll, PA35 1HT. Tel: 01866 822243. 29/30
- 4-) **CARRIGAN'S**, 10 Broompark Road, Blantyre, Lanarkshire, G72 9RN. Tel: 01698 823123. 29/30
- 4-) **THE COTTON HOUSE**, Longcroft, near Bonnybridge, FK4 1QQ. Tel: 01324 840840. 29/30
- 10-) **COAST**, 104 George Street, Oban, Argyll, PA34 5NT. Tel: 01631 569900. 28/30
- 10-) **THE GLEN LUSSET**, 67 Dumbarton Road, Old Kilpatrick, G60, 5DA. Tel: 01389 890898. 28/30
- 10-) **LA LANTERNA**, 447 Great Western Road, Glasgow, G12 8HH. Tel: 0141 334 0686. 28/30
- 10-) **CATTLE & CREEL**, 73 West Clyde Street, Helensburgh, G84 8AX. Tel: 01436 269278. 28/30
- 10-) **THE SILVER DARLING**, 43 Poca Quay, Aberdeen, AB11 5DD. Tel: 01224 576223. 28/30
- 10-) **HUP LEE**, 131 Merry Street, Motherwell, ML1 1JP. Tel: 01698 253313. 28/30
- 10-) **MEDITERRANEO**, 159 Ingram Street, Glasgow, G1 1DW. Tel: 0141 552 0460. 28/30
- 10-) **MARKET ST CAFE**, Morrisons, 900 Crow Road, Glasgow, G13 1HY. Tel: 0141 959 7287. 28/30
- 18-) **MHARSANTA**, 26 Bell St, Glasgow, G1 1LG. Tel: 0141 552 9900. 27/30
- 18-) **CHEZ MAL**, Malmeson Hotel, 44 Whitehall Crescent, Dundee, DD1 4AY. Tel: 01382 339715. 27/30
- 18-) **THE DINE**, 53 East Main Street, Broxburn, West Lothian, EH52 5EE. Tel: 01506 853888. 27/30
- 18-) **MONDO**, 144 Main Street, Coatbridge, ML5 3BJ. Tel: 01236 427397. 27/30
- 18-) **THE KITCHEN BRASSERIE**, 15 Huntly Street, Inverness, IV3 5PR. Tel: 01463 259119. 27/30
- 23-) **CATCH**, 196 Farwick Road, Giffnock, near Glasgow, G46 6XF. Tel: 0141 638 9169. 26/30
- 23-) **MR SINGH'S INDIA**, 147 Elderslie Street, Glasgow, G3 7RJ. Tel: 0141 2211452. 26/30

**NOSH CARS 2018**  
NOMINATIONS SO FAR...



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# Tam Cowan's

OUR PULITZER PIES-V RESTAURANT CRITIC



- NOSH CARS Hall of fame PREVIOUS WINNERS**
- 2014 MILANO STEAKHOUSE Cumbernauld
  - 2015 THE SUN INN Dalkeith, Midlothian
  - 2016 THE TREEHOUSE Ayr
  - 2017 BUTCHERS STEAK & GRILL Elderslie, Renfrewshire

WITH BBC producers unlikely to accept the History of Scud Books 1978 to 1995, I mentioned a few months ago that my specialised chosen subject on Mastermind could easily be — wait for it — croquettes.

And I was deadly serious, folks. From the French word "croquer" meaning "to crunch", I find them quite irresistible and I've unearthed some absolute crackers on my Scoff The Ball travels.

Best of the bunch? The Loch Melfort Hotel near Oban (plain potato croquettes), Ox & Finch in Glasgow (smoked ham and cheese), The Georgian Hotel in Coatbridge (panko-breaded chicken), The Creel Inn near Stonehaven (Arbroath smokie), La Barca in Helensburgh (mushroom and Manchego cheese), Vittoria On The Bridge in Edinburgh (macaroni cheese), The Blythwood Hotel in Glasgow (cauliflower and cheddar) and Brian Maule's in Glasgow (confit duck).

My favourites — the very best croquettes I've EVER sampled — were the three-cheese variety ("a tasty blend of cheese and potato in a crumbly, crunchy coating") at a cracking wee cafe/restaurant in Bridge of Allan called Jam Jar. But — newsflash — I can tell you they were totally blown out of the water by the pork belly croquettes at Mharsanta in Glasgow.

Just how good were they? Well, even though the kitchen had made a fatal mistake — the croquettes were resting on a sweet chilli sauce which threatened to kill the crunch — I still thought they were stupendous.

**Service was warm on a bitterly cold night**

In fact, chef, serve the sauce on the side as a dip and I think your customers will be transported to food heaven. My main course was also a thing of beauty. Morecombe and Wise, Starsky and Hutch, Renee and Renato... just three of the greatest-ever double acts.

But, with the possible exception of fish and chips, I don't think there's a finer culinary combo than mince 'n' tatties. And I can tell you the Aberdeen Angus steak mince with buttered mash at Mharsanta was **SENSATIONAL**.

This was comfort food at its very best. In fact, dear reader, in terms of the perfect winter warmer, I'd put it right up there with half-an-hour in a hot tub with Bananarama.

*Silky smooth potato, the very best lean mince, a thick rich gravy and — just to totally knock it out of the park — a runny poached egg plonked on top.*

Easily one of my favourite main courses of 2018, I urge you to give it a bash.

Mharsanta is Scottish Gaelic for "merchant" (eg. Alexander Armstrong is a mharsanta banker) and this Glasgow restaurant is located — surprise, surprise — in the heart of the Merchant City.

The Scottish theme extends to the music with a soundtrack on



**Mharsanta Glasgow**

**FOOD** 9/10  
Don't miss croquettes

**SERVICE** 5/5  
Very impressive

**DECOR** 4/5  
Warm & comfortable

**TOILETS** 5/5  
Clean as a whistle

**VALUE** 4/5  
Good for G1 postcode

**TOTAL SCORE** 27/30

Mharsanta, 26 Bell St, Merchant City, Glasgow, G1 1LG. Tel: 0141 552 9900. Open all day, seven days. WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes. BILL FOR THREE (with wine): £87

the night we visited starring Simple Minds, Altered Images, Texas, etc. That's why we were puzzled to hear a couple of tracks from Johnny Cash. Who knows, as a follow-up to his legendary 1969 album recorded live at San Quentin, perhaps he did another one at HMP Shotts.

The restaurant that previously occupied this space — 26 Bell Street — had a Mexican theme and I'm utterly amazed it lasted for so long.

I tried it years ago and I thought it was shocking. In fact, I'm convinced it would only have got a good review from Donald Trump as it gave

Mexico a bad name. On this evidence, however, I reckon it'll be great write-ups all the way for Mharsanta. Service was warm and welcoming on a bitterly cold winter's night (the impressive Eilidh was well worth her tip) and the three of us loved our large, comfortable booth which could easily have seated six.

I was joined by Evelyn and Jacqui, two Motherwell girls who'd forked out for a Scoff The Ball experience at a charity lunch.

Turns out we'd actually gone to school together (Calder Primary then Braidhurst High), so plenty of nostalgia to accompany the nosebags and I can assure you we all thought Mharsanta



# Mharsanta comes early with a feast



**EGG-STRASPECIAL...** Tam's pal Evelyn loved the haggis Scotch egg, left, for her starter and Tam wolfed his mince and tatties, above, after enjoying best croquettes he's ever tasted

was miles better than our old dinner halls.

Tell you what, I bet Evelyn is relieved (or not as the case may be) the Scottish music didn't include my old pal Sydney Devine singing The Happy Whistler.

"I don't do toilets," she revealed. And, sure enough, she didn't go near the ladies' loo all night.

"I'm like a camel," she said. "I can always hold it in until I go home."

She's clearly got a hygiene issue with public lavatories and two of my favourite restaurant anecdotes were never going to change her tune.

First up, the chef I witnessed emerging from a toilet cubicle whilst eating a roll. And what

about the barman who fixed a blocked urinal with his bare hands as two guys at the other end of the trough were still peeing into it?

Neither gent — I'm disgusted to report — washed his mitts before resuming his shift!

Anyway, for the record, the toilets (and the staff) at Mharsanta were absolutely spotless — 5/5 for both.

And it's a very impressive 9/10 for the food as, apart from my croquettes and mince 'n' tatties, the rest of the stuff that arrived at our table got a big thumbs-up from my dining companions.

Evelyn started with the haggis Scotch egg — spicy haggis instead of the traditional sausage — and we were all impressed with the

runny, glistening yolk in the centre. How exactly do chefs manage that? It must be a trade secret, right? Jacqui plumped for the Mharsanta bon bons — crunchy little bite-sized balls filled with soft, gooey goat's cheese.

They also do a haggis version, but Jacqui insists you'd be MAD not to try the cheese filling.

She then raved about her main course — Mharsanta's steak and sausage pie. You know what I'm going to say — yep, it wasn't a PROPER steak pie — but even I'm willing to turn a blind eye when they throw in a wee bit of sausage.

It looked — and smelled — terrific and the hearty stew was topped with crisp puff pastry and served

with creamy mash and roasted veg. Plenty of positive vibes, too, from Evelyn. She'd gone for the halloumi, mushroom, courgette and red pepper kebab and — served on a hefty bed of noodles — her main "complaint" was that it was too big.

And, in terms of the classic \$64,000 question, I can assure you that, yes, I would definitely go back.

Plenty of other goodies on the menu caught my eye — the hot roast beef dipped sandwich, the rack of Bourbon smoked BBQ ribs and the panko-crusted chicken goujons to name but three.

To be honest, though, I think I'd just order the pork belly croquettes followed by the mince 'n' tatties... for money. Our total bill — including a bottle of wine, coffees and one dessert (a very nice Equi's ice cream for yours truly) — was £87. That's not bad for three people at a lovely restaurant in the Merchant City.

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DO YOU KNOW A RESTAURANT THAT

TAM SHOULD REVIEW? THEN EMAIL HIM AT TAM.COWAN@THE-SUN.CO.UK