

Welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English.

I'm Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today on the program, we report on the growing number of wealthy South Africans buying costly cars.

"There definitely is a larger number of people entering into the super car market, even though the financial situation is not where it should be."

But first, we hear about an herbal substance called "muti"...that some African athletes believe can improve their athletic performance.

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New Sport Doping Rule Doesn't Ban Herbal Drugs

The list of banned substances in sports is long. Recently, anti-doping officials released new, stronger rules. The new rules are aimed at stopping athletes from taking performance-enhancing drugs, or PEDs.

But in some countries, anti-doping officials are dealing with such substances as snake skins and monkey parts that some athletes are taking because they believe they will improve their performance.

Last month, officials of Africa's sports groups gathered in Johannesburg, South Africa for the world anti-doping conference. They met to talk about whether they should deal with traditional medicines in their rules.

VOA's Anita Powell tells us more about one of those herbal substances -- called muti -- and its users...

I first learned about muti from a professional fighter at my Johannesburg boxing gym. "I'm going to the sangoma," he told

me -- using the word for a traditional healer. "He is going to give me muti to make me really strong."

The fighter told me about a market where dealers sell powerful combinations of shrunken animal parts and herbs. The dealers claim these drugs will make you harder, better, faster, stronger.

Last month, I attended the world anti-doping conference where we discussed hard-to-pronounce chemicals and the doping activities of American cyclist Lance Armstrong. I thought of my friend at the gym. And I discovered that I am not the only one worried about traditional medicines.

Rafiek Mammon works at South Africa's anti-doping agency. He says muti is very popular in some sports. He says officials must respect the culture of the athletes who believe the herbal drugs help them.

"It's quite common in certain sports, especially such as boxing, and in some cases in wrestling, because there are many African people who subscribe to that kind of culture, who, who take the muti, and who believe in it. So, who are we to tell them that their supplement is not allowed or is allowed in sport?"

David Howman is the secretary-general of the World Anti-Doping Agency. He says the agency has decided that herbal drugs should not be placed on a list of banned substances.

“We had that very question asked before the Olympic Games in Beijing, as to whether Chinese traditional medicines were possibly doping substances. All the study that has been conducted so far worldwide indicates to the contrary, that most of the herbal -- I can't say all, because I just don't know them all -- but most of the herbal medicines and the traditional medicines have not shown to be performance-enhancing. So we don't have any view beyond that.”

Rafiek Mammon said African officials talked about the issue during private meetings at the anti-doping conference.

“Especially at this conference we have had very, very good interaction with other -- especially African -- countries who are dealing with similar problems, or challenges. And I think the way forward would be to, to open up those discussions a bit more and to have them a little bit more prominently featured.”

I'm Anita Powell, VOA News, Johannesburg.

You are listening to As It Is, a program designed to help you learn how to speak, read and write American English.

I'm Christopher Cruise, in Washington.

Costly Cars Becoming More Common in South Africa

Last month, the German carmaker Porsche made a surprising announcement about its Middle East and Africa market. Porsche said it sells more cars in South Africa than in any of the other nineteen countries in that market.

Ross Crichton owns an event company in Johannesburg called Super Car Lifestyle. He says more and more of his customers are choosing what he calls "super cars" like Ferraris and Porsches.

"There definitely is a larger number of people entering into the super car market, even though the financial situation is not where it should be. Compared to five years ago, I would say the jump has been massive."

South Africa's automobile manufacturing organization says 71 new Ferraris, 19 new Maseratis and 1,035 new Porsches have been sold in the country since May.

The Porsche dealership near Johannesburg is huge. In fact, it was the biggest in the world until this year. It is responsible for 20 percent of Porsche sales in the Middle East and Africa market.

Christo Kruger is the public relations manager for Porsche South Africa. He says both wealthy and very wealthy people are buying the cars.

“They are passionate motoring people. The global demographic remains exactly the same: that is, mostly male, 42-45, two kids, family, successful, entrepreneurial, or at least in a financial position where they manage other people.”

Nathaniel Nel is the president of SuperCar Club SA. He has owned Lamborghinis and Porsches. He says people like these cars because they do what other cars cannot.

“It’s amazing. It’s a completely different experience than driving any other car. You’ve just got so much power under your foot. Driving any type of super car is just freedom on the road.”

The research company New World Wealth says there are about 35,000 millionaires in South Africa.

Mr. Crichton says the buyers of “super cars” have changed over the years. He says there are more black buyers and younger buyers now.

“It is still only a very small segment of the South African population. It’s just really the ‘one-percenters’ who can afford these cars.”

South Africa’s income inequality is among the world’s worst. The World Economic Forum says the richest 10 percent of South Africans earn more than 51 percent of the country’s total income. More than half of the country is very poor and cannot buy any car at all.

Sales of costly goods in South Africa are expected to continue to grow. The business advice group Bain & Company says South Africa is still Africa’s top marketplace for high cost goods.

And that’s our program for today. It was written from reports by Anita Powell and Peter Cox in Johannesburg.



Straight ahead we have two more programs to help you learn everyday American English -- "The Technology Report" with June Simms and "This Is America" with Kelly Jean Kelly.

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