

TRAVEL

Death in the Afternoon is not a pretty sight

BY JOHN REDDY
STAFF WRITER

The Sunday Madrid sleets is over. Life returns slowly to the streets. We tourists from Oakland County gather in the long shadow of our hotel, eyeing anxiously the taxis that queue up in the narrow street. The cab drivers watch us furtively, knowing their fares are headed to Madrid's stadium to see the bull-fights.

Outside the stadium, the brilliant afternoon sun welcomes us, carving shadows in flora, stone, concrete and all things that face west.

The price of seats in the stadium sun will be less than those in the shade.

Many in the group remain disturbingly uncertain about this event, succumbing to the argument that one cannot tell friends they visited Spain and did not see a bullfight. Still, a sense of festive excitement grows as tour buses and taxis fight for curb space. Foreigners from around the world alight with cameras, belt packs and hats of all type.

Our group entered the Spanish culture at Barcelona, where the architecture of Antoni Gaudi embraced nature's design, and Pablo Picasso as a youth produced works not much unlike art students anywhere; and where the French influence defined the Catalan culture.

We would later go south, through the cities of Toledo and Cordoba with the treasured paintings of El Greco and the often bloody cultural commingling of Islamic, Christian and Jewish history. We would see Granada where King Ferdinand

and Queen Isabella lived after they forced the Moors from the El Alhambra and the Iberian Peninsula. We would walk the beaches and harbors at Marbella, witnessing how the Arab influence reappears in the Spanish culture in the form of Jewish yachts, homes and custom tiles. There would be Gibraltar, Seville, called the most Spanish of all Spanish cities, the shrine at Fatima in Portugal, coastal villages and, finally, Lisbon.

Despite all the sidewalk cafes, the stimulating museums and cathedrals, the endless rolling hills of olive trees, Flamenco dancers and Fado singers, the event today would provoke for me and others in our group the most compelling post trip memories.

Ernest Hemingway has shaped our expectations and actors like Tyrone Power, who in the movie "Blood and Sand" would be idolized for flamboyance and bravery. This is to be man against the bull.

The opening pageantry is colorful, but small by comparison even with half-time shows at high school football games. Horses parade amid trumpet fanfare. Finely embroidered in football-style pants and waist jackets, toreros they don't call them matadors anywhere here to the word means killers) strut before the VIP boxes with great flair.

Finally, the shiny-canted black bull rushes onto the sandy stadium floor, pausing, starting this way, then that - bewildered. He is the first of six that face a torero's killing sword this afternoon. I'm following the action through my telescope lens.

Four men emerge from behind



Toreros: A bull weakened by a picador's staves faces the taunts of toreros and banderillos.

their thick, wooden protective fences to join another riding a horse draped with huge, thick protective padding.

They wave their pink capes (it is the motion, not the color that attracts the color-blind bulls) and the bull charges. His horns wrestle violently with the padded horse. The mounted picador stabs a huge pole-like pick into the back of the bull at the base of the neck, urging his horse forward to add power to the poking and twisting of the pick. The clashing creates sounds and grunts that speak of great strength. The capes continue the distraction, confusing their prey as the horseman again and again thrusts the pick into the animal's shoulder. The bull now wears a collar of flowing blood and no longer lifts his head high.

Banderilleros taunt the weakening bull, gracefully plunging their staves near the picador's wounds.

I aim my telephoto lens instinctively to the right, shooting, then to the left, recording the expressions on the faces of my fellow travelers and others in the stands that are absorbed by action in the ring.

Now comes the principal torero. His graceful stops and sweeping red cape give life to

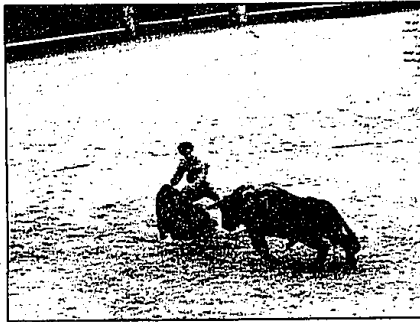
bullfighting posters. The bloodied bull remains a formidable opponent. But charge after charge into the elusive cape begins to tire the weakening bull, which at times staggers to its front knees. The bloody collar grows larger.

It is now that the torero receives a very long sword from an attendant. The drama builds as the yellow angled matador aims his long sword at the spot on the bull's neck where the blade must enter to sever the spinal cord and aorta.

The bull claws the sand with one hoof, signaling his death charge. The sword misses its mark. A chorus of roaring gasps engulfs the stadium as the torero is tossed into the air. His lies curled in the sand as the bull seeks revenge. The four attendants rush from hiding to draw the black warrior away. The pink capes snap wildly. The matador pulls himself slowly from the sand, recomposes, arches his back in an arm-waving salute to the crowd and takes another sword.

This time the matador's aim is precise. The huge animal drops instantly, to be dragged from the ring by a team of horses as the groundskeepers refresh the bull-ring with rakes.

Some of the group leaves.



PHOTOS BY JOHN REDDY

Charge: The principal torero waves his large red cape at the wounded but still dangerous bull.

Nearby, Japanese tourists file out. The second event provokes more vigorous stabbing of the animal by the mounted torero. The kill is quick. I leave with other from our group. Disillusioned by the shattering of a myth. It is not man against bull. It is men and crippling thrusts of

a huge pick against the bull. The sun is lower and the air bears a chill.

John Reddy is vice president of HomeTown Communications Network, publisher emeritus of The Eccentric Newspapers and a resident of Bloomfield Township.

Rooting for the bull

In reporting this story my cultural bias may show through. Certainly the Hemingway influence, the film portrayals such as "Blood and Sand" set the context for my experiences.

A traveling companion, Joe Tunac of Troy, may have a more balanced view. "I grew up in the Philippines," he said. "When I was 12, I raised roosters for cock fights. I used to rub elbows with the big guys. I used to tie the razor-sharp blades to the cocks' legs and let them fight."

"I went back five years ago and couldn't stand it. Yet I know it is part of the culture. Maybe it's the result of modern

civilization, feeling the value of life. Even in Spain I sensed we were experiencing something in another culture."

He said, "I was curious to see what Hemingway wrote about. I thought it was this cultural thing. It's one on one. But it's a bunch of guys attacking one bull."

"But when I was in Ronda, I had different thoughts," he added. "I went down into the bullring, the oldest in Spain. I tried to imagine myself facing a bull. At that time I felt utterly vulnerable."

"But when the torero in Spain got tossed, I said to myself, 'Way to go, bull!'"

John Reddy



DRAWING BY JOHN REDDY

Elegance: The flamenco dancers of Spain show the style and grace of Spanish culture.

GREAT ESCAPES

Great Escapes features various travel news items. Send news leads to Hugh Gallagher, assistant managing editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 3625 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax him to (313) 591-7279.

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FREE COMPANION FARES

Amtrak is offering free companion fares on several popular routes from now through Feb. 28, 1998.

The special offer is available on the daily Chicago-Pittsburgh-New York Three Rivers service; the daily Pittsburgh-New York Pennsylvania service; the six daily trains operating in the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac, Mich., corridor; the daily International service between Chicago and Port Huron, Mich.; the six daily trains in the Chicago-St. Louis corridor; the two daily trains operating in the St. Louis-Kansas City corridor; the daily Chicago-Carbondale, Ill., Illinois service; and the daily Chicago-Quincy, Ill., Illinois Zephyr service.

The Winter Companion Fare promotion is also available on

the Chicago-St. Louis-San Antonio Texas Eagle, which operates three-days-weekly through Feb. 6, when a fourth Texas Eagle will begin operating weekly between Chicago and Los Angeles, via San Antonio.

The tickets are valid for one-way or round-trip coach travel through Feb. 28, 1998, and reservations are required. The offer applies to coach fares and children's fares for up to two children (ages 2-16) per adult. Customers can purchase an upgrade to Custom Class or sleeping accommodations, subject to availability.

The offer is good for passengers traveling on an identical itinerary. Seats are limited, are subject to certain blackout days and are based on availability. The fare is non-refundable and is subject to change fees for both tickets. Other restrictions apply.

Customers should visit a staffed Amtrak station, call 1-800-USA-RAIL or see an authorized Amtrak travel agent, for details on this offer or any other Amtrak service. Ticketing, schedule and service information is also available at the Amtrak site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.amtrak.com>.

DRIVING TIPS

AAA Michigan has released some driving tips to start the New Year off safely:

- Don't tailgate. Tailgating is the number one cause of most rear-end crashes, representing 13 percent of all crashes in Michigan. AAA recommends striving for a "safety buffer" of at least four seconds between you and the vehicle ahead, with an extended following distance in inclement weather.
- Use your signals when stop-

ping or turning. Signaling is not only courteous, it's the law.

- Use your horn to warn, not to punish. Your horn is a safety device, not a weapon to punish other drivers.

■ Observe posted speed limits. One a 30-mile trip, driving five miles over the speed limit saves less than three minutes.

■ Apologize if you make a driving error. If your driving mistake involves others, offer an "I'm sorry" gesture. In a recent AAA survey, the favorite driver's apology sign is the "tap on the head," as in "What was I thinking?"

■ Don't drive drowsy. If you doze off while driving, you have lost control of your vehicle.

■ Don't run red lights. Ignoring a red light is not worth the increased risk of injury and fines just to save an extra second. The law in Michigan for amber lights

is, "Stop before entering the intersection. If you cannot stop safely, do not speed up, but drive cautiously through the intersection."

■ Pull over for emergency vehicles. If you block an emergency vehicle, you are interfering in a crisis. When you hear approaching sirens or see flashing lights, the law requires you to "yield the right of way and pull as close to the right edge of the road as possible, clear of an intersection and stop until the emergency vehicle has passed. Give pedestrians the right of way."

■ Share the road safely with bike riders. Bicyclists are not out of place on the roadway, they are part of the traffic and share the road with motorists.

■ Give road construction work zones a "brake." Slow down and use caution in work areas.

Winter GET-A-WAY Sale!

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