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A TENTAR... with Manuel de Sousa

It is difficult, maybe impossible, to predict the future of anything about bullfighting. Peering into the murky crystal ball of bullfighting is like trying to drive thru one of Fresno's infamous winter fogs. But on Saturday, January 6, the crystal ball was as clear as the cloudless, blue skies above the Crow's Landing hills at the ranch of Manuel Sousa. It was a perfect day for a tenta, and the eighteen heifers that were tested were brave and charged capes and muletas readily. More importantly, the vast majority of these animals displayed the style of bravery needed for successful performances in the California

who appear regularly in many of the Central Valley corridas. By this time the frosty morning was being warmed by the sun, and, even more importantly, there was no "aire" (the wind that blows the toreiro's capes not only destroys the artistry of a smooth pass, but fluttering capes can lead to tossings and even gorings.) So we prepared our capotes and muletas and... a tentar!

These tentas are serious events, since only heifers that pass the ganadeiro's standard are kept for breeding. The rest go to the slaughter house. There is an old saying among bullfighters that that after 15 years of consistent

do all the work, in this case, Manuel Sousa was gracious and allowed Cesar Castañeda, Jose Rodriguez, and Mario Teixeira to let this reporter also fight the heifers.

After seven heifers were tested, ganadeiro, participants, and visitors, broke for lunch. Manuel had laid out a delicious spread, and the only thing that kept me and the other toureiros from eating our fill was the thought of more vaquillas that were waiting to be tested. While we were eating, some of the guests decided card games were more important than food, and set up tables outside the plaza. I don't know if these players were as lucky as those of us who were fighting the heifers, but I can't believe they were having nearly as much fun.

With our lunch only slightly settled, it was back to the remaining eleven animals. These heifers were as good as the first seven. It is a real credit to Manuel and to his recently deceased father that they have achieved such a consistency in their fighting stock. While some were better than others, the vast majority of the heifers showed their willingness to charge from afar, to follow the cape with their heads held low, and to continue following the cape rather than stopping in mid-charge. I do not know Manuel's final decision about which heifers would be kept and which would go to the slaughter house - after all these decisions are very private matters, something I know well since I raised fighting bulls in Ecuador, South America. But I can say that all the animals had at least some characteristics that any bull breeder would be anxious to keep in herd. If it were my ranch, I would have kept all of the animals (providing I had adequate pasture capacity.)

As darkness approached, we finished the day's work. Or maybe I should call it "a day's play." Either way, it was a satisfying day for Manuel Sousa.



Vaquillas tentadas



After a hard day testing the vaquillas



Cesar Castañeda's chicuelina

bloodless corridas. Based on what I saw at this tenta, I can safely predict exciting and enjoyable corridas wherever Manuel Sousa bulls are fought. The day started early. Leaving Fresno at first light, I arrived to the ranch at nine o'clock sharp, Manuel was already there, busy separating the heifers. From the bunch of young animals, he selected the larger ones which ranged from about 12 to 18 months old. By the time this work was done, the toureiros began arriving. Two well known matadors from Tijuana, Cesar Castañeda and Jose Rodriguez "Pepe-Hillo," had driven up from San Diego the day before. They were followed by Mario Teixeira and Miguel Andrade, two local bullfighters

selection, the toiros begin to resemble the ganadeiro. And, at least in this case, this old saying appears to be true. Throughout the day, the fighting heifers displayed many of the "gracious" characteristics that bullfighters seek - honesty and smoothness in their charges. The photos that accompany this article show the noble bravery of the animals and the skill and artistry of the participants.

When testing, the ganadeiro needs to have toureiros who know how to handle heifers so that he can observe the true potential of each animal. And, the professionals did an excellent job in showing the worth of the animals while also showing their own skill and artistry. While at many testings the professionals



Mario Teixeira's pase de pecho



Jose Rodriguez "Pepe-Hillo" with a derechazo



Jim Verner's pase natural



Miguel Andrade's derechazo