

three-day affair. An invitation to attend a special afternoon *fiesta* at a nearby stadium was extended to all delegates during the closing ceremonies. The *fiesta* included a variety of equitation demonstrations, with *senoritas* riding side-saddle, and *gauchos* executing intricate movements on horseback, and of course, bull-roping. A message inviting conference delegates to take part in the festivities was blasted regularly over the PA system, but there were no volunteers.

As you may or may not know, this type of Mexican entertainment is a lot of fun for everyone but the bull. Part of the demonstrations involve roping the bull from horseback at full gallop, which causes the bull to somersault to the ground. This is followed by a second demonstration, also at full gallop, in which the rider grabs the tail of the bull, while pushing on his hind quarters with his foot, causing the bull to do what would appear to be a backwards somersault.

Then a fateful message was broadcasted over the PA system, "We understand that we have a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the audience who would like to demonstrate his equitation skills." This was followed by a standing ovation from the other delegates and 200 invited guests.

Canada's honour appeared to be at stake, and I reluctantly accepted, after a *fiesta* spokesperson assured me it was all in fun, and that I would be properly outfitted for the occasion. The fun began as soon as I arrived at the stables. I am 6'2" tall and wear size 12 shoes. The tallest Mexican rider must have been half my size, and wore size 6 shoes. The only thing that fit was the *sombrero*. While all these preparations were underway, the PA system blared 30-second updates, saying that I would be arriving soon.

Now that I was at the point of no return, my Mexican friends explained that the whole world knows about the famous Musical Ride, and since every Mountie can ride a horse — and to avoid showing up their *gauchos* — they wanted me to ride *toro*.

*Toro*, as it turned out, was in a 3' X 8' cage. *Toro* was also the same bull that had been the guest of honour during the earlier performances... Needless to say, the animal appeared somewhat agitated. I truly felt that my Mexican friends were just testing my courage, and certainly never expected to ride that beast. At any rate, I followed instructions, and climbed on top of the cage and lowered myself over the back of the rather excited bull. Sure enough, when I was several inches above the bull, someone yelled, "Whoa!" As I quietly thanked you know who, and prepared to exit, someone reached through the bars, and wrapped a multi-coloured braided strap around the bull's shoulders and over my hands... You guessed it — the bridle, saddle, reins and stirrups were all conveniently missing!

"What comes next?" I asked. "We open the g—a—t—e," was the response. And out we came. No one had a stopwatch, but I could swear it was an hour, others said it was closer to 20 seconds before I joined the astronauts in space.

While in orbit, my training days flashed before my eyes, and I prepared to land with a tuck and a roll. Both were executed with the utmost precision, and I landed on my feet, only to receive a two-hoofed send-off from the notorious *toro*. Fortunately, only my pride was bruised, and I was escorted back to my seat to yet another standing ovation. Canada's honour was still intact — I think.

For those who may envy delegates who have to attend these conferences, let me say that I have heard rumours about sharks at the next conference — and that isn't any bull! ■