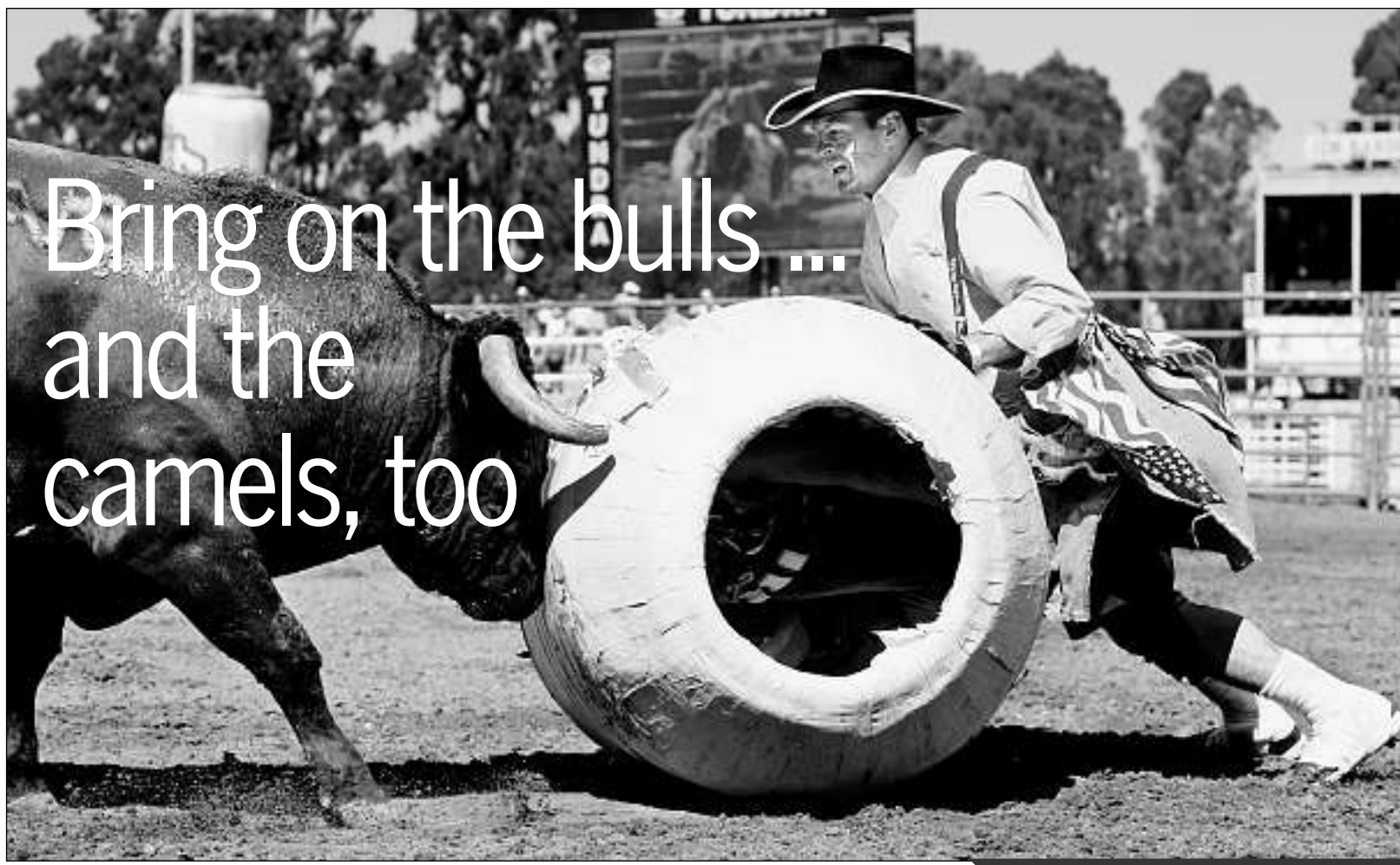


CALIFORNIA RODEO SALINAS

what's new

Andy Burrelle puts a barrel between him and a bull in the freestyle bullfighting competition at the 2007 California Rodeo Salinas. Burrelle has had more than one close brush with a bull in Salinas, but says he enjoys the rush.



Bring on the bulls ... and the camels, too

PHOTO BY SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN



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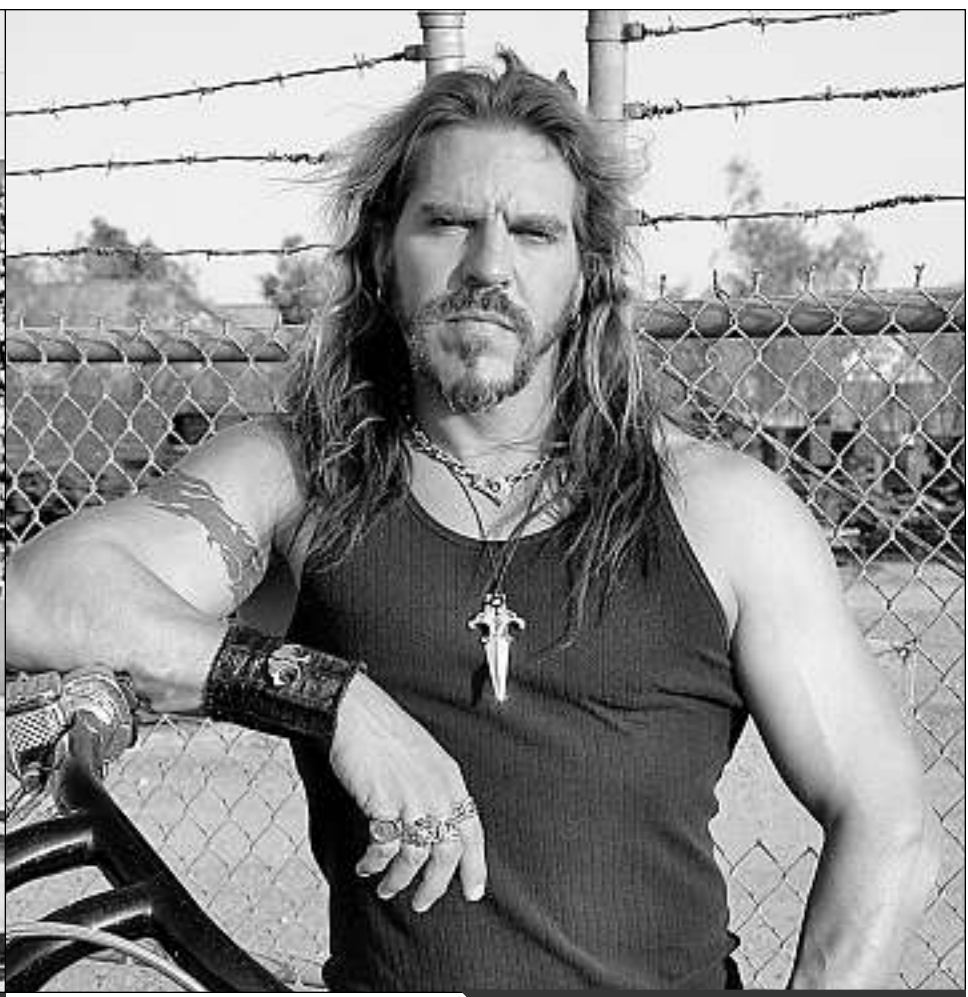


PHOTO PROVIDED BY LOUDMOUTH ENTERTAINMENT

Camel racing comes to the California Rodeo Salinas this year. There will be races featuring the so-called 'ships of the desert' all four days of the rodeo.

Don Yates, who plays 'Wolf' on NBC's 'American Gladiators,' will be one of the competitors this year in the freestyle bullfighting event. He is a 23-year veteran of the pro rodeo circuit.

Bovines, dromedaries, window dressing and pink garb all part of this year's California Rodeo

By JOSE SAN MATEO
The Salinas Californian

Some old events are making a return to Big Week this year, while a few standbys will have something new to offer. Camels shot out of the starting gates in front of the west grandstands eight years ago, and this year the unusual animals return to the track courtesy of Hedrick Exotic Animal Farm in Nickerson, Kan. The dromedary camels sport a single hump and hail from the Middle East, but jockeys will try to navigate them around the eighth-of-a-mile track each day during Big Week.

"They are very fast and unusual," said Joe Hedrick, owner of the Kansas farm. The camel's exotic nature makes them a popular attraction, according to Hedrick, but also an interesting experience for the riders who are used to horses. He advises potential jockeys to ride behind the hump and watch out for the animals' longer stride. "The camels' stride is much longer so their legs won't hit the ground quite so often," Hedrick said. "(Camels) can also stretch out and

ride longer distances than horses." An exotic animal of a different ilk also will be returning to the rodeo, only this one is a man and he is fresh off of a stint on the NBC TV show "American Gladiators." Don Yates, who plays the Gladiator "Wolf," is a 23-year professional on the rodeo circuit who will return to the freestyle bullfighting competition after severe injuries in previous competitions. Andy Burrelle, a participant in the freestyle bullfights since 2000, witnessed both injuries. He said that

Yates took a bull horn right through the hindquarter two years ago and injured his Achilles heel during last year's rodeo. The freestyle bullfights happen during each day of competition and pit six rodeo professionals against a bull in one-on-one competition. "It's an adrenaline rush," Burrelle said, "like playing a 70-second game of tag with a bull." Unlike bullfights in Spain where the bulls are stabbed with swords or injured to get them agitated, the Salinas bullfights use animals that

are bred to be naturally aggressive. "These are some of the best fighting bulls in the world," Burrelle said. "They put a lot of pride in breeding them that way." Most of the events during Big Week take place at the Salinas Sports Complex, but the window decorating contest gives local businesses a chance to participate. While some always have decorated their windows in anticipation of Big Week, it has been three years since there has been an official competition.

There's a twist to this year's competition, though. It's in conjunction with "Tough Enough to Wear Pink" night on July 17, which benefits the Breast Cancer Assistance Group of the Monterey Peninsula. Judges will be awarding prizes in the categories of Best Pink and Best Western Decoration. "This raises awareness for both the rodeo and breast cancer," said Mandy Roth, a coordinator with the California Rodeo. Winners will receive 10 free tickets to the performance during "Tough

Enough to Wear Pink" night and get a congratulatory message on the rodeo's video board. A Breast Cancer Assistance Group report shows that last year the rodeo board donated more than \$18,000 to women in the local community members who have been diagnosed or treated with or have recovered from breast cancer.