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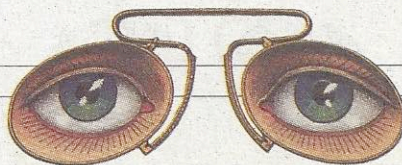
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VIEW FROM THE TOP



In a sport dominated by super bulls, none is more famous than Bodacious (above and right).

BIG, BAD BO

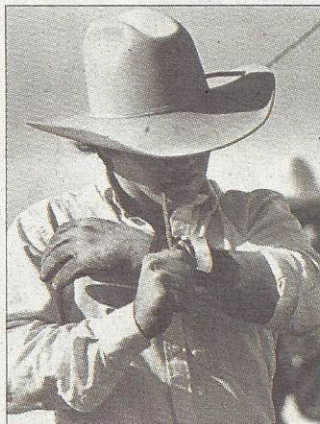
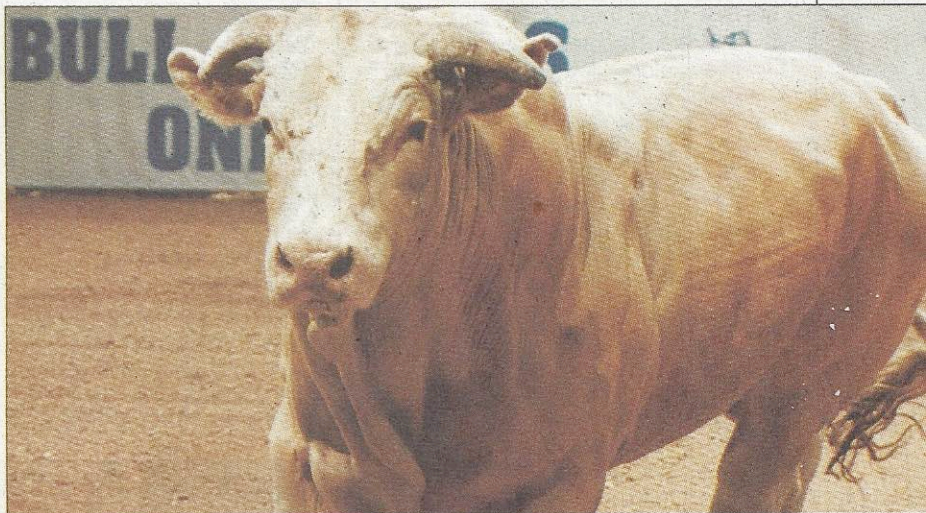
By Shaun Assael

Scott Breeding is high in the air, so high that he sees the bull's belly as he barely hangs on to its back. Nineteen thousand fan's watch as the animal they call Short Fuse rolls like a nor'easter, whipsawing in circles, leaping as if he's on burning coals. Breeding stays just above the dip in the bull's back—the place riders call “the eye of the storm.”

With one second left, the bull is pissed. Short Fuse likes to fake left and spin right, but Breeding knows the bull is mad enough to abandon strategy for power. Sure enough, Short Fuse spins Breeding's way, a furious leftward revolution punctuated by a leap skyward. Breeding keeps his free right hand over the bull's head for leverage. Both are in midair when the horn blares. Breeding has won ... for now.

Over the next ten evenings at the National Rodeo Finals in Las Vegas more than 100 bulls will visit hellfire on their riders. The bulls will draw wild cheers and gasps; and in some cases they will be more famous than the cowboys riding them. They are the super bulls, genetic monsters created by advances in breeding. But none will quite match Bodacious, the greatest bucking bull that ever lived, a bull so lethal he had to be retired in his prime. Breeding, the last man to ride him, admits rodeo hasn't quite gotten over Bo's retirement in December 1995. Rubbing the cheek that Bo caved in, Breeding says, “There won't ever be another Bodacious, and I ain't one bit unhappy about it.”

Even in retirement, Bodacious remains the biggest



star in rodeo, so big that as the National Rodeo Finals were under way, fans flocked to a casino on the outskirts of town to see him on display. They came to see a golden freak of nature that, like the airplane, wasn't supposed to fly. He bucked more cowboys than any bull before him, and along the way became the Secretariat of rodeo. Now breeders from around the world are buying every last drop of Bo's semen in the fervent belief that his children will become the scariest creations in bull-riding history.

Sammy Andrews is a tall, gentle cowboy with a 100-acre ranch on the outskirts of Paris, Texas, who has been bucking bulls since he was a kid in the fifties. Like most contractors who rent livestock to rodeos, he gets his bulls from auction houses. But as the beef industry consolidates, there aren't as many small-town auction houses as there used to be, and it's getting harder for men like Andrews to find good animals, which in his case are bulls that are too wild and tough to make good slaughter.

The perfect bucking bull is well proportioned. It does no good for it to have a fat ass that gets in the way of a whipping spin, or stubby legs that stop it from springing skyward, or a long dick that hangs so low from its sheath that the bull will hurt himself stepping on it, or so much weight that the animal can't twist and change tempo in midair. What you want is the perfect complement of muscle, litheness, and fire. The last quality is what Andrews calls “try”—the desire to make everyone who mounts you pay

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Because Scott Breeding (right) was wearing a hockey mask, he got away with just a broken eye socket and cheekbone.

over and over again.

The breeder brings his bull along slowly. The bull doesn't know anything about staying in the chute, so his trainer teaches him not to run over or through it. Then he lets him watch how the older bulls buck, where they place their feet, how they pivot and spin. By the third year the breeder starts bucking the bull, bringing him to what are known as high-school rodeos. The bull learns to perform on demand, accept pressure, and come back from defeat. The typical bull spends at least a year training there before he turns pro. Bodacious made the jump in six months.

It wasn't just his golden hair that set him apart, but his perfect anatomy. It all started with his size—more like a hippo than a bull. At a ton, he could have been slow, but here's where God—a rodeo lover—got crafty. He made Bo muscular everywhere, with a trim ass that looked like it belonged on a horse, legs that were like pilings, and a head as big and heavy as an air conditioner. Bo was only three and still growing when a local rancher offered him to Andrews. When Andrews saw Bo's hind legs lift him nearly vertically, he couldn't write a check fast enough.

Andrews hasn't stopped marveling at his prize since. Bodacious swept through high-school rodeo, and by 1993 was building a fierce reputation in the pro ranks. The average bull will rotate completely from two to three times during an average ride. Inside the spin—the pace of which a good bull will vary—are bucks, steps, skips, and directional fakes. This is what cowboys mean when they say that a bull can throw ten thousand

variations in the eight seconds before the horn blares.

Bodacious's riders rarely lasted for more than two seconds. "Bo was just pure power," says Tuff Hedeman, a three-time world champion, who is one of the few to have taken Bo the distance. "If you could get past the first two jumps, then, buddy, here comes the rest. He kicked so high over his head, there was just nowhere for you to go."

By October 1995 the bull and the rider were at the top



of their games. Bo had allowed only eight completed rides in 133 appearances and was on his way to winning bull-of-the-year honors. Entering the Pro Bull Riders' finals, Tuff was firmly in first place. But the parallels were even closer than that. The two were also coming off serious injuries from the year before.

For Tuff, it was a neck injury. For Bo, it was a leg sprain.

And like any aging athlete, Bo had started looking for ways to compensate for the strength he'd lost.

Normally cowboys lean forward, because if you lean back you fight the spin instead of rolling with it. Bo decided to take advantage of that. He'd lift and buck, setting them up. Then, when they were at their most vulnerable, he'd sucker-punch them, snapping his rock-hard head back like an anvil, smashing the cowboy's face.

Tuff had heard about that trick. But for a man who considered his 1994 ride on Bo "the most perfect I've ever done," it was never an issue. On the first jump Tuff was in perfect position, flush in the base of Bo's back, left hand gripping the rope tied around the bull's belly, right hand straight up and high. On the second jump he was still there, still in the eye of the storm. Then Bo reared back, hitting Tuff smack in the face.

"I knew I'd broken my jaw because when my mouth closed, my teeth didn't come together," Tuff remembers. "But it wasn't till I was on the ground that I realized there was more to it. [World champion] Ty Murray looked at me like he'd seen the devil himself. I figured, This shit can't look good."

Actually Bo had broken every bone from Hedeman's upper lip to his eyes. It took six hours of surgery and six titanium plates to put his face back together. Amazingly, Tuff, who got his nickname when a car door slammed on his hand as a child and he didn't cry, recovered quickly enough to enter the 1995 Pro

Rodeo Cowboy Association finals five weeks later.

He was 20 pounds lighter than his 170-pound riding weight because his jaw had been wired shut, but by the seventh round he was still in the top five. Out of a pen of 100 bulls, there was only one that Tuff wouldn't ride. Sure enough, the computer drew it for him.

In his convalescence, Tuff had watched videos of his Bodacious ride and decided "I was in exactly the right posi-



point when Bodacious snapped his head back.

"I remember seeing things, and then the lights went out," Breeding says. "I still got the hockey mask on my mantle. It's got a big ole dent, like it was hit with a 12-pound weight." The back of Bo's head broke Breeding's eye socket and cheekbone. Breeding figures that "if not for that mask, he'd crushed the whole left side of my face."

Watching in the wings, Sammy Andrews had decided

"Try" is what breeders call a bull's determination to make anyone who dares mount him pay big time.



Bo broke every bone from Hedeman's lip to his eyes. It took six hours of surgery and six titanium plates to put his face back together.

tion, because if I would have raised my body up any more, Bo woulda just jerked me down." So in front of 19,000 fans, Tuff briefly mounted Bodacious in the chute, tipped his hat, and said, *No mas*. He let the bull stampede into the ring without him.

There was only one other rider daring enough, or maybe desperate enough, to get on. Scott Breeding was in fourth place; he needed a huge score to leapfrog to the title. He'd ridden Bodacious twice before—once for 7.4 seconds, once for 7.9 seconds. This time he was sure he could ride the bull all the way to the eight-second mark. But to play it safe he donned a

hockey mask beneath his white Stetson, a reminder to everyone of how dangerous the ride would be.

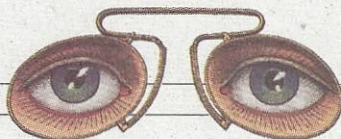
As the gates swung open, Bo went airborne, just as he had with Hedeman, lifting his hind end in the chute, then skipping a step before his back legs came down and he sprung up on his front ones. As Breeding stiffened, the bull seemed to defy nature, bouncing off his hind legs so he was completely and thrillingly airborne. Breeding was nearly horizontal over Bo's back, as if he were preparing to be shot out of a cannon, when Bo's front legs went down, slinging the cowboy forward. Breeding was at his most vulnerable

that Tuff was right when he'd said Bo had become the "biggest cheap-shot artist I've ever seen." The next night Andrews retired Bodacious.

Bob Tallman, who is the official voice of the Pro Rodeo Cowboy's Association finals, is a mix of Dick Vitale and Jerry Springer, with a hefty dose of Elvis's old manager, Colonel Tom Parker, thrown in. In addition to being a high-profile announcer he owns a cattle ranch, and he seems to be one of the few people who've figured out how to make money on rodeo.

Sensing that Bodacious was a gold mine even in retirement, Tallman convinced

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Andrews to let him manage the bull. ("No one's ever managed an animal, except for Lassie," he boasts, dubiously.) Since then he's created a catalog of memorabilia, from \$10 mouse pads to \$140 belt buckles. You get the sense that Sammy Andrews, an easygoing, big-hearted man, doesn't quite know what hit him. But Tallman is in it for more than million-dollar merchandising business or even the movie deals he says are on the table.



18 cubic centimeters (for perspective, an adult human in his prime produces two c.c.'s per orgasm) that then get divided into "straws" about the size of a ballpoint-pen cartridge. Thanks to Tallman's silver-tongued selling, at least 3,000 straws have been sold at \$300 a shot. If 75 percent of those samples take, and half produce bucking bulls, that means that Bo will have about 1,125 sons.

Anticipating success, the market is pricing the straws



Bull-riding faithfuls want to see the savage buck that sends a cowboy aloft like a missile, twirling in midair and landing hard on the dirt.

Bo's perfect muscular anatomy sets him apart—an ass like a horse, legs like pilings, and a head as heavy as an air conditioner.

He's in it for what he calls "the dream."

The dream is Bodacious's semen, or, more precisely, the hype Tallman has built up around it. Before a bull's semen can command top dollar, proof is needed that a bull's bucking can be passed on through its genes. The most successful breeder is California rancher Don Kish, who started in 1983 with frozen sperm from Oscar, one of the finest bucking bulls of the fifties. Oscar produced a son named Fonzie, and then Kish bred him to produce Wolfman, the only bull ever to earn a 100-point perfect score. Now Kish figures that at least

half of the bulls he breeds will be able to buck a finals-caliber cowboy.

Kish, for one, is skeptical about Bodacious's breeding prospects. First, none of Bo's relatives bucked. And second, none of the offspring who are coming of age have matched Bo's skills. True, it's still early in their lives, but even Andrews admits, "The jury is still out. We'll have to see if they can withstand the pressure of competition."

Being a sperm factory isn't a frat party for Bo. To obtain samples, men in lab jackets insert a probe called an "electro-ejaculator" in his rectum to stimulate the prostate. A single ejaculation produces

at a premium. Tallman insists that one owner has even turned down \$4,000 for a calf—an outrageous figure. Some have even bought the semen for an investment, with no intention of using it, figuring that as Bo's children start bucking, its value will appreciate. Even Kish, perhaps the greatest doubter, hasn't been able to resist—he's bought Bodacious semen that he will use on the daughters of Wolfman.

If all this genetic tinkering works, expect bull riding to vault itself farther out of rodeo's shadow and become more extreme than ever.

All you cowboys better watch out, hear?

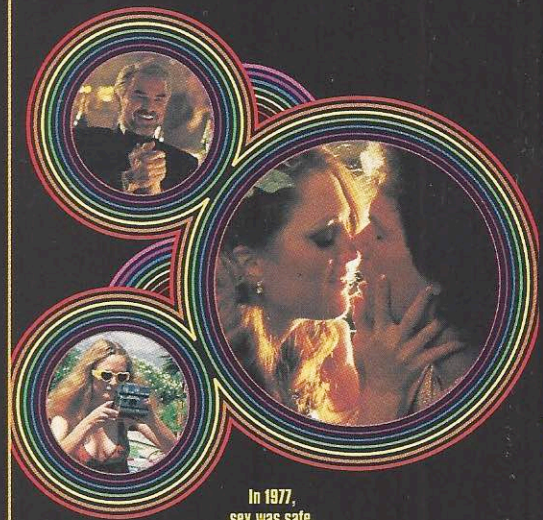


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