



Los Bayones cattle in the fields

the vacas, with this year's calves at foot, grazing quietly in sheltered, irrigated pasture overlooked by a pine-clad hillside.

The finca is set in rolling farmland, looking pretty arid in September, growing mainly cereals but also sunflowers, sugar beet, alfalfa for the stock, olives and vines. The grapes go to a local bodega, and to round off our visit we were taken round the spanking new winery, all gleaming stainless steel tanks and tortuous pipework. It is owned by Domecq, which is now apparently owned by the French. The grapes are Verdejo and produce an excellent dry white wine, which we sampled in an elegant tasting room, accompanied by an equally elegant English-speaking guide. Clearly, the Spanish wine industry is prospering.

The next day was Sunday, and we were invited to visit another ganadería owned by César Mata y Martín, a fulltime lawyer based in Valladolid, but also an eloquent and enthusiastic aficionado, much in demand as a taurine commentator on local television and at numerous tertulias throughout the Feria.

We set off early in his smart 4x4 Mercedes, but, once at the finca, some 30 km southeast of the city, we switched to the battered old flatbed truck he uses for feeding the stock.

The ganadería is called 'Toros de Tierz' and is a new venture started by César two years ago on 25 hectares of dry scrubby land with scattered thorny bushes and low pine trees. The semental (stud bull) is from El Pilar, and the 24 vacas from El Torreón, which means they are Domecq. They, with their calves, were in one of several large fenced enclosures. It was time for their daily

feed, and we drove slowly round among them, stopping every so often for César to get down quietly and dispense little piles of vetch hay on the ground. The cattle were wary (as were we) and only started to feed as the truck moved off. We were strictly confined to the cab and kept perfectly quiet whenever the truck stopped.

At one corner of the enclosure was a small, newly built ring, used for encierros three times each year, and for holding the cattle before branding them in the adjacent pens. There was also a barbecue, and we gathered from César that the branding ceremony comes with a good deal of convivial merriment – at least for the human participants.



El Pilar semental at 'Toros de Tierz'

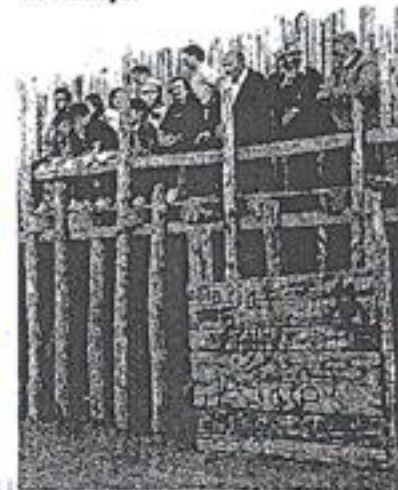
As we climbed back into the car for the return journey, César presented us each with a slim paperback *Ritos taurinos en Castilla y León*, a fascinating and beautifully illustrated guide to taurine rituals, culture and tradition in that part of Spain (published by Edical S.A. ISBN: 978-84-936135-9-4). Only as we glanced at the book in the car, did it transpire that he was the author, a point he had modestly failed to mention.

On his recommendation in search of a local example of taurine tradition, we visited Montemayor de Pililla, a small village nearby which was holding its annual feria the following day, 14th September. There was to be bullrunning in the streets followed by unspecified taurine goings-on in the plaza de toros. Start time 6 pm; end time unstated.

At 6 pm, the village was silent and deserted. Gradually – very gradually – a few people started to appear at the bar in the village square and then there was a scarcely perceptible drift of young men and girls and family groups towards one end of the village. Following the sauntering crowd, we came upon a cattle truck clearly (from the smell) containing toros, but quite stationary and confronted by a seated group of young people bearing placards and banners. At first, we thought they were antis, but it became clear from their demeanour – not to mention their pañuelos – that everyone was on the same side. Their function apparently was to delay the action and heighten the tension – which it did. A band appeared, dancing started, young men threw water-filled balloons and slowly, with many a stop and start, a procession gathered, leading the truck right through the village towards the ring where the toros were to be let out in the barricaded streets and on to the ring.

After two hours, and still only halfway to their destination, the crowd had become pretty animated, though universally happy and good-natured. Almost everyone, from babies to granddads, was wearing pañuelos advertising their peña. In a village of a thousand people (2,000 in summer), there are some 80 peñas, each with its tiny headquarters in some old building, whose sole function seemed to be to dispense free drinks to members and their friends during the feria.

Getting ready for festivities at Montemayor



We were soon swept up by Raúl Redondo, an enthusiastic young man and an official of the Asociación Cultural Taurina 'La Empalizada', a peña devoted to protecting and promoting traditional taurine activities and especially the ancient wooden plaza de toros in Montemayor de Pililla. Via several peñas proffering drinks, and accompanied by numerous friends, we were taken to see this famous structure – one of the very few left in Spain. Originally built in the 18th century and genuinely rustic in appearance, it is constructed of heavy pine logs standing vertically around the ring in a palisade (hence 'La Empalizada'). The poles are wide enough apart to allow a man between them, and the whole structure is surmounted by rough wooden seating.

Alas, we were not to see the denouement, for we had an appointment to keep in Valladolid. Had we been able to stay, Raúl assured us, we would not have left until dawn. By then, we certainly would not have been fit to drive the hire car! Whatever the taurine goings-on were, we were left with a determination to come back and find out next year.

Thanks largely to the influence and enthusiasm of our dear journalist friend, Ana Alvarado, we had enjoyed a five-day feast of taurine experiences, a blizzard of hospitality from many new friends in Valladolid, and a tantalizing glimpse into the fascinating world which surrounds and supports torero.

Our sincere thanks are due to Ana, Sergio Vega, César Mata y Martín and numerous other people we met for all their kindness, generosity and friendship. Almost all of them said that this spirit is a fundamental part of their afición. We assured them that the same spirit pervaded the Club Taurino of London!



Bumper Harvest at Nîmes

Tristan Wood

After last year's excellent FERIA des Vendanges at Nîmes, how could one resist going back to the self-proclaimed French capital of bullfighting this September? There was a local siren voice claiming that the feria could not possibly be of interest to any self-respecting aficionado, but I reckoned that a feria offering seven festejos in four days, the début of Robert Margé's bulls in the Roman arena, an attractively programmed novillada, El Juli celebrating the 10th anniversary of his alternativa by facing six bulls, a similar encerrona for Sébastien Castilla, a sighting of Morante de la Puebla and a closing corrida with Enrique Ponce and Miguel Ángel Perera overseeing the alternativa of the Club's 2007 Novillero of the Year, Rubén Pinar, held plenty of attraction. A number of CTL'ers obviously took the same view as me, for not only were my companions from last year's feria - Grant Pulen, Ivan Moseley and Mark Rayner - back again (the first two accompanied by their respective partners this time), but Nîmes regulars Sir Mark Prescott and Jim Collins & Anne McIntyre were also in town, along with Brian Harding, David Pearn and – all the way from Austria – Josef and Ursula Herzog.

18TH SEPTEMBER (EVENING): MARGÉAL SUCCESS

The headlines the day after the feria's opening corrida exclaimed 'Un toro de Margé a deux doigts de la gloire', but, while it was true a number of patriotic spectators were calling out for this bull to be indultado, it would be an exaggeration to say that an indulto was deserved, or that the corrida as a whole had been a success for the ganadero.

Robert Margé's bulls are an interesting mix of Cebada Gago, Núñez del Cuvillo and Santiago Domecq blood and had already done well this year with three bulls

yielding four ears on their presentation at Vic-Fezensac. The first toro was beautiful-looking and applauded as it came into the arena to mark Margé's Nîmes début and gave added excitement when it broke up a portion of the barrera, but it turned out to be a plodder and not particularly keen to charge to the lure; the second bull had impressive horns, was not controlled well in the opening tercio and left the picador of its own accord (to the extent that a wily substitute picador made legitimate use of the carioaca to give the bull sufficient punishment – after which it improved); the third bull was the one for which an indulto was sought – it was very good in the muleta, but had not impressed sufficiently en varas (when, after its second puyazo, it broke away to find the toriles) for the call to be justified; the fourth was a lovely brown perdiz, but not keen to charge at all; the fifth was another whose horns were more impressive than its mobility; and the sixth suffered from a voltereta during the opening capework, being weak-legged thereafter.

Luis Bolívar was first up, although the least experienced matador on the cartel, as Nîmes persists with confirmation of alternativa ceremonies for those matadores appearing in the Roman arena for the first time. He gave his first toro some nice opening capework and decided to appeal to the crowd's better nature by dedicating an unpromising looking animal to them. Things went predictably from then on, in that, although the Colombian was able to bring off series on each hand, the performance of his toro was such that there was no transmission to the stands. An age spent lining the bull up for the kill ended in a bajonazo, Bolívar nevertheless receiving an ovation and taking saludos. With the last bull of the day, the highlight was the picador's performance, as, following the toro's first entry, he kept his horse upright with the lightest of touches on the reins and with his feet and then gave two light puyazos to a clearly weakened opponent. The crowd did not warm to Bolívar in the faena, and once the bull had made a lunge towards him,