



Gene Donnis Baggett

A Wrangler's Last Ride

Two seconds of Gusto was plenty

By: Donnis Baggett

Pardon me if I don't get up. I've got a little hitch in my gitalong. If you'll recall, I announced a few weeks back that would celebrate my 50th birthday by riding a bull in the Bryan Breakfast Lions Club Rodeo. I explained that I'd done a good many exciting things in my life but hadn't yet had the opportunity to ride a bull.

I harkened back to that beer commercial from the '70s: "You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can."

When rodeo producer Sammy Catalena introduced me to one of his bulls, a Charolais-Brahman cross, I asked what the big fello's name was.

"You can call him anything you want," Sammy said.

So I named him Gusto. I grabbed all of him I could, and it was enough, thank you very much.

At this writing, it's been almost two weeks since Gusto and I met, and I'm still limping. My rear bumper, what there is of it, still sports an impressive set of bruises the color of overripe bananas.

The photos and the video that some sadistic staff person has posted on theeagle.com provide a better blow-by-blow narrative than I could.

So, in tribute to Gusto — and in gratitude to Sammy and Pete Catalena, John Epstein and all the other good folks who helped me make it through that night — here's a poem from a middle-aged cowboy.



Ode To Gusto

His philosophy was simple: Just give ‘er all you got.
You just live once, so let ‘er rip and take your bestest shot.
He didn’t ponder fate and such, or opine that life is cruel.
He was just a simple country boy — a Charolais-cross bull.

To him things were real simple: You ate, you slept, you bred.
And if somebody pestered you, you’d see three shades of red.

You didn’t go out of your way to look for controversy,
But if some jakeleg messed with you, you’d tender them no mercy.

It seemed to him a strange pastime, this thing called rodeo.
The people came from miles around; the clowns put on a show.
They’d put him in a crowded stall, tie rope around his loin,
And then some durn fool cowboy would start to clamber on.

They never were much contest, these scrawny little things
With chaps and boots and spurs and hats tied on with rawhide strings.
They’d slip bowed legs around him and cinch their palms up tight
In bullropes wrapped around his chest, then squeeze with all their might.
They’d tell a joke or force a laugh or maybe say a prayer
And then the gate would open and he’d launch ‘em out of there.
The good ones rode eight seconds, but most were off in three,
And almost every one of ‘em was pitched high as a tree.

They landed hard and grunted, then they hobbled off with groans,
These boys of Texas summer with too much testosterone.
By the time they left their 20s, most would stay there on the fence.
But tonight he drew a rookie who must’ve been real dense.

This codger had turned 50 and he thought it might be fun
To climb aboard a bull that weighed three-quarters of a ton.
He maybe rode two seconds, if the clock man was real kind,
Before he whistled through the air and busted his behind.

The big brute lumbered past him, his little night’s chore done,
And the cowpoke rolled o’er to his knees to favor tender buns.
“Hats off, my friend,” he mumbled, “You’re a regular live wire!
If it’s OK with you, Ol’ Son, I think I’ll just retire!”