

The Most Exciting 4 Seconds of my life.

Every July, an estimated one million people journey to Pamplona, Spain, to see the Running of the Bulls. In 2019, I was one of those million people.

At some point, the idea of Running with the Bulls intrigued me and it became a goal and then a plan. Fortunately, my wife, Dede was incredibly supportive—In fact, so supportive that I was starting to get suspicious! Death is rare in bull-running -- only 16 Pamplona runners have been killed in the last hundred years. That being said, running with the bulls definitely comes with a level of risk.

Suspicion aside, Dede and I planned our trip, booked our tickets, and packed our bags. We were going to Pamplona!

Pamplona is an interesting city, home to about 200,000 people. It is a modern city in the heart of Basque country that was founded as a military encampment in 75 BC by Roman General Pompey. [A historical perspective: It was Julius Ceasar who was his enemy...and his father-in-law.] The streets have a ton of history, and the Bull Run is held in the historic section of OLD TOWN, at the foot of a 500-year-old Citadel.

Bull running began in the 14th century when farmers transported cattle to the market. The men would try to speed up the process by hurrying their cattle along with tactics of fear and excitement. People started watching this procession of livestock to the market, which brought the bull-running tradition to life. There are a lot of bull runs in Spain, but Pamplona is the most famous. Ernest Hemingway, a frequent vacationer to Pamplona, added to its fame in 1926, when he published *The Sun Also Rises*, which weaves the Running of the Bulls into its story.

Today, bull running is one element of the **Fiesta de San Fermin**, which is said to be the world's largest Festival. It is a religious festival honoring the city's first bishop and patron saint, ...**Saint Fermin**. The festival, and the running of the bulls, begins every year on July 6th and ends on July 14th. Both events were merged to the same date in 1591.

Moments before the start of every Run, it is a tradition for all runners to chant a homily to **Saint Fermin** -- seeking guidance and protection.

In addition to the religious activities and Bull Running, there are massive parties all over this area of Pamplona. When the Bull Runners start to congregate at 6:30 a.m. they find broken glass and layers of trash on the streets left by the all-night partygoers. The remaining partygoers who are still there can easily be identified by the pink stains from red wine on their white outfits. Fortunately, every morning at that time, the sanitation department comes through with power washers, shovels and brooms leaving the area clean but wet and slippery.

Dede and I arrived in Pamplona on July 6th to attend the opening ceremony. After checking into our hotel, we went to town to participate in the formalities. I estimate there were **5,000** people packed, **like Tuna in a Can**, into **Plaza Consistorial**...all in the traditional dress. The Old Town Mayor conducted an opening ceremony which ends with the tradition of removing the red scarf worn around the wrist, then, in unison, placed around the neck.

Later that day, after the crowd had thinned, we returned to take a tour of the Bull Route led by a professional bull runner, Dennis Clancy.

Let me briefly describe the route and then look at it.

- The route is 875 meters (half a mile).
- The bulls are kept in a corral from the night before.
- The bulls cross a 200-foot buffer zone to reach the waiting Bull Runners at Calle Santo Domingo, which is 280 meters long.
- They proceed across Plaza Consistorial diagonally to Calle Mercaderes.
- Calle Mercaderes is about 100 meters long, and ends with La Curva, also known as Dead Man Curve.
- Deadman's Curve is a 90-degree turn that leads into Calle Estafeta, which is 300 meters long.
- **It is so named** for its danger when the herd passes through.
- At the end of the 30-foot-wide Calle Estafeta, the Bulls and Runner funnel into the 12-foot-wide Callejon, which takes them into the **ARENA**.

VIDEO 1: SECUNDO ENCIERRO

Registration is not required to run with the bulls. The Rules say: "Any able body souls over 18 years old can participate". Runners simply show up **on the day of**. In my case, I was able to be prepared for what was going to happen.

I found an online travel agent that coached "wannabe runners" to be safe and successful. Their service provided online courses, webinars, Bull Running tips, and was a source for Bull Running clothing. The best tip they gave me was to watch a lot of Running of the Bull videos on YouTube. Specializing in Pamplona Bull Running travel services, they also rented balcony viewing sites.

The first Running of the Bulls was on July 7th. Dede and I rented a balcony on the route to watch the first day's run together. That was my opportunity to clock the bulls running time.

I felt the more I knew, the more mentally prepared I would be. After all, one wrong move, and I could be seriously injured or, worse, killed, [but not likely].

Each day, 12 of 15 bulls are released to run at 8 a.m. sharp. Of the 12 bulls, six are trained fighting bulls, [who have never seen a person on foot] and six (6) are bell-ringing oxen, which leads the way and reinforces the herd instincts. By nature, bulls want to run as a group.

At the back of the pack by about 3 or 4 minutes, when the route has few people on it, are three sweeper oxen. They travel the course and pick up any possible [Sueltos]. (Loose or straggler bulls).

Here's what is hoped to be avoided.

VIDEO 2: Clip - Caught by Surprise

Surprisingly, the bulls run up to 35 miles per hour, so you can bet I will not be outrunning any of them, and actually, you do not have to.

By their nature, bulls do not want to step on humans. They know where its hooves are landing; they will try to run around you, step over you or jump over you. The trouble comes if you run directly in front of them or slip and fall when pushed by other runners. **Counterintuitively**, if you fall, you are supposed to stay down lying motionless so that the bulls do not headbutt you out of the way. One popular nuance of this sport, is "Running on the Horn." This is when a runner

moves in front of the moving herd running as fast as he can and, at the last moment, steps aside. **You will see this in the last video.**

Along with the bulls, multiple teams of Pastores, or shepherds, run with the bulls, carrying long, lightweight rods to protect the **bulls** from the runners and the **runners** from the bulls. Bull runners like me are called Mozos.

On the day of the run, we awoke at 4:45 a.m. Still concerned, Dede said, "Are you sure you want to do this?" By now, I was confident and said, "I'm ready!" As we got up to dress, Dede opened the heavy drapes revealing pounding rain with lightning and thunder. She said, "look at this!" I immediately thought "Hey, less people would be running!"

The run was set to start at 8 a.m. sharp, rain or shine. We finished getting ready and then headed to the hotel entrance to find the car we had scheduled for a 5:30 a.m. pickup.

On our way out, we picked up an umbrella at the front desk. Outside and to our surprise, all we could see was a sky full of stars! The storm had passed.

When the car dropped us off, it was still dark. The trash team worked its way on the streets, sweeping trash and broken glass from the parties that were just ending. We found the entrance to Dede's balcony, but it was closed. So, Dede waited for access, and I left to find my temporary waiting spot in Plaza Consistorial. What many first-time runners do not know is the police purposely clear runners from a section of the route to thin the crowd for safety. I knew that section was Calle Estafeta, the area where I planned to be positioned.

At 7:30, Dede entered her balcony position overlooking Calle Estafeta, and at about the same time, I was walking to my starting position about halfway down the street as I looked for her. Having spotted each other we waved and took videos.

VIDEO 3: Finding DEDE Telling me what to do is what Dede does best.

As the clock ticked closer to 8:00, I felt a little bit of excitement as more runners congregated on the street.

THEN, at 8 a.m. sharp, the **FIRST SIGNAL** rocket went off, meaning the corral gate was opened. I check my watch! A few seconds later, the **SECOND**

rocket went off, which signals “the last bull cleared the gate!” My degree of excitement was increasing. Thanks to my timing on the 7th, I knew the bulls would swing through Deadman’s curve and enter Calle Estafeta 40 seconds after the first rocket.

Looking down the street I could see a crowd of bobbling heads as runners were jumping up to look for the bulls. Right at 40 seconds, the texture of the crowd changed and appeared like an ocean wave rolling towards me.

At the same time, A SUDDEN awareness came over me! HERE They Come! That was... [IN ROTARY VENACULAR] my **oh-SHOOT** moment! Fortunately, I remembered which way to run. But It was crowded, and running was difficult. The fellow behind me kept putting his hand on my back. Not pushing me aside but stopping himself from running into me.

Then SUDDENLY, the runners in front of me STOPPED instantly! The runners behind me DID NOT and I was SQUEEZED like an accordion...still upright.

At that moment, I looked to my left just in time to see the backs of two bulls as they passed.

It was OVER! My less-than-perfect but successful run was done. “The Most Exciting 4 Seconds of My Life” was over.

TO WRAP UP:

With the rest of runners, we followed the streets to the bull fighting arena – Plaza de Toros, the end point of the run. It takes the Bulls about 3 minutes to run from start to finish.

The street narrowed like a bottle neck into a Cal-le-yon about 12 feet wide that entered a tunnel into the Arena. Because of the narrowing path, it was considered dangerous when bulls and people run through. But there were only a few people, so I walked through to take a look. Inside I looked up and had a FIGHTING BULL’S eye-view of the 23 thousand people in the stands.

Just then, two men yelled from behind: “Get out of the way!” I quickly stepped to the side as the Sweeper Bulls charged through.

VIDEO 4: INSIDE THE ARENA- Plaza de Toro

After looking around and knowing that Dede would be concerned, I surveyed the best way to exit. The best way was to climb an 8' concrete wall into the stands and out one of the entry ways. With the boost from a young man, I climbed over and made my way to the nearest exit.

I found Dede in the area that I left her that morning. My delay worried her and I felt guilty for making her wait. But we were both happy about the fun we had together. After a big hug, we rushed to the hotel to change, grab our bags, and drove 100 miles to the airport on the way to our next stop, Madrid.

VIDEO 5: Premiere Encierro - July 7, 2019