

Injuries Few in Annual "Running of the Cats"

by Con Chapman

SOMERVILLE, Mass. When this suburb of Boston decided to become a "sister city" with Pamplona, Spain a decade ago, few realized what it would mean for the many cat-owners who live here.



El gato de Somerville

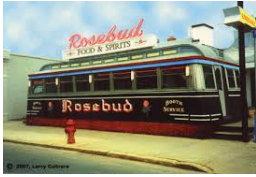
"We have cats the way some cities have cockroaches," says city animal officer Hardy Michaels. "There are more apartment dwellers here per capita than any city in Massachusetts, so we have more cats. Also a lot of goldfish, but they don't get out as much."



Running of the bulls, Pamplona

Pamplona is the site of the annual running of the bulls made famous by Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel "The Sun Also Rises," however, and when officials from the Spanish sister city visited Somerville in 1998, they asked why there was no counterpart to

their annual San Fermin festival, generally regarded as the world's leading manifestation of innate male stupidity.



Somerville, Mass.

"Frankly, we were caught off guard," says Elinor Harrity, who chaired the Committee on International Relations that the City Council set up because they found the topic of sewers boring. "We improvised to show our Spanish *compadres* that we meant them no disrespect, and the running of the cats was born."



"Look out!"

All able-bodied males take to the streets of Somerville today while their Spanish counterparts participate in the San Fermin festival. There are eight scheduled runs before a pack of cats that have been fed only dry food and water for a week, whetting their appetite. "It is a sign of your manhood to risk your life running before the jaws and claws of the hungry cats," says Andrew Benis, a freelance photographer who recently broke up with his girlfriend of six years. "Women admire a brave man, but what's the point if you get trampled to death by a bull before you can score?"



On the prowl.

Last year, two men were admitted to Mt. Auburn Hospital with claw scratches on their calves and small puncture wounds on their hands that they suffered when they were bitten as they tried to remove attacking cats from their legs. "You see your whole life flash before you when those cats come tearing around a street corner," says George VandeKamp, who works in a used record store. "Of course, if your life is mainly beer, pizza and beating off like mine, that's not such a big deal."

Because of its density, city officials say they would never issue a permit for a running of the bulls here, not that such an event is very likely. "It's pretty rare to see a bull around here," says Assistant Chief of Police Dan Hampy, "although you hear a ton of it any time you walk into a bar."

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Cats Say the Darndest Things."

