



RAGING BULLS

Photos by **Quinn Ryan Mattingly**

Hot. Muddy. Loud. Chaotic. Exciting. All these words came to mind when we entered the stadium in Tri Ton to witness the annual Khmer Dolta Oxen Race. The huge crowd inside the Ta Miet Pagoda arena had gathered along the boundary of the tracks since dawn. Such was the anticipation for the breathtaking spectacle that some spectators had even perched themselves on tree branches to guarantee the best view.

Suddenly, a thunderous explosion of cheers was heard as the bovine contenders were led around the track to familiarise themselves with their surroundings. After this first round, the action began. Jockeys, standing on wooden planks tied to a pair of oxen, drove the animals onwards by stabbing them with spiked canes

Their treatment during the race may not be to the taste of proponents of animal rights, but in the months leading up to

the race the oxen are treated like royalty. They are fed on a diet of boiled eggs and coconut milk and receive regular massages to keep them relatively stress-free. And it's no wonder the animals are so prized, what with owners paying up to VND60 million for them.

The races began as entertainment for households using oxen to till fields that belonged to local Buddhist pagodas and developed into a going concern. Fast forward to the present day and the event is as fascinating as ever.

We looked on in wonder as the bovines fought it out. The race built up to a thrilling conclusion with the winner sparking scenes of great excitement as he made it past the post.

A special thanks to the Victoria Hotel & Resorts for organising the trip. For anyone interested in attending next year's event, keep an eye out for the hotel's promotional packages. 

