

On the Road Again



With Albie & Burnsie

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MacDrag-race at the Great Scots Corral

A Scottie finds chickens appealing
 As teens take to car tires a-squealing.
 When wings begin flapping
 It's show-time for frapping
 As feathers and fur fly free-wheeling!

Now, a young Scottie has something of James Dean in his bones, a bit of the rebel without a cause that spawns fast adventure in a kind of wild race with life. I tell you this about my need for speed, my need for free-wheeling adventure, not because you who love my breed don't know it, but because you need reminding of it to appreciate the new passion in my life—chickens!

If that seems a contradiction then you never chased one. Why, a chicken can run three directions at once, making him a natural born frapper's delight, plain and simple, and with plenty of squawk and squeal thrown in for good measure! For this Caledonian Hot-Rod, a chicken is pop-the-clutch-and-squeal-the-tires kind of fun in the barnyard.

Those of you familiar with these pages know me as 'Burnsie,' the new kid on the block at *GSM*. You know I started out life at Las Golondrinas as a 'wrassler' honing my rough-and-tumble skills against Percy, a big housecat at our place who obligingly tutored me in all the right moves. Trouble is, I'm a quick-take student when it comes to adventure, so now, a year later, I know all his moves and he knows all of mine. Where's the challenge?

It's more of the same with squeak toys. I was born with a Ph.D. in ectomology giving me the genius to perform a 'squeak-ectomy' on even the toughest squeaky-toy with laser precision in minutes. I love it while it lasts. It's just that, when you're 'Edward MacSissor-Teeth' it's over almost before it starts. You get my point. I'm a rebel without a cause.

Without one, that was—until 'Colonel Sanford' showed up uninvited one day in our corral.

We call him 'Colonel Sanford,' 'CS' for short, since he's an entire food chain away from Colonel Sanders and KFC and more like a junkyard rooster version of 'Sanford & Son.' He's our "rat chicken" with missing tail feathers, his comb chewed off, scrawny, sinewy legs and body—and boundless attitude. You guessed it: he's my kind of guy!

He just showed up one day noisily claiming our donkeys and their stable as his own. We don't know where he



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came from. All I know is, he's got drag-racing experience from way back. He can peel-out at warp speeds at the drop of hat and he can do it in more than one direction at once! I know it sounds crazy, but believe me, I've seen it up close and personal and this little guy may look like a junkyard hotrod but he's got a Ferrari under the hood!

And that's my problem, you see, 'cause my Dad doesn't like drag-racing—of any kind. In fact, he was never a drag-racing kid. When everyone else was swooning over James Dean and his Porsche Spyder sports car and discovering hot rods and street racing back in the day, my Dad fell in love with a 30 year-old, stock Ford Model A coupe his senior year in high school that went so 'fast' you could watch grass grow while driving it! Mom says he was grampa-on-wheels as a 16 year-old ... and he's slowed down nowadays from his 'hot wheels' beginnings!

So it's a predicament for me when it comes to 'Colonel Sanford' who spends all day at the drag-strip Dad calls our corral, revving his engine and scratching out, darting here and there at 0-60 in a heartbeat, periodically craning his rat-bird neck to look for me with his unblinking eye. He knows perfectly well he's taunting me to drag-race him, desperate to show off his junkyard, hot rod stuff.

And I'm more than ready to oblige, 'cause I've got racing pistons of my own. Why, I run circles around Miss Albie. Quite literally. When my Dad calls us to come in from the pea patch I race ahead of her, then wheel about, squat low to the ground for a drag-strip peel-out, shoot off the mark at mach-speed for a game of full-tilt chicken, stop on a dime at the last second in her face, twirl about, circle her twice, and then do my 'drag strip' stunt all over again. Dad gets apoplectic 'cause my racing antics only slow Albie down to an I'll-dawdle-till-the-traffic-clears pace. Truth is, no one in my world appreciates the art of the improvised drag strip—except Colonel Sanford. He was born to it. Suddenly, the Tomé corral has taken on whole new meaning for this Caledonian dragster. Old CS, the drag racing 'Chickenator,' has transformed every inch of the barnyard into our private drag strip.

Merton, our male donkey, ran the bird around when he first showed up. But I kid you not, old CS just squawked his protest, revved his engine, and peeled out around the donkey's big head and hooves till he wore Merton down. Now CS roosts under Merton's hay manger and walks around the two donkeys' feet as if he owned the place, pecking a living from donkey dung and errant oats. What's not to like about this pint-sized barnyard yodler?

And that's another grand feature of my new friend. He's not only a drag-racer's best challenge, he races with full-bore pipes the envy of the late-Luciano Pavaroti. This guy can squawk-n-squeal with the best of 'em. When he's into revved-up-mode, he belts out racket worthy of any dragstrip, and it takes an act of Congress to shut him down. That may be some of why my Dad takes hard lines against my drag-racing CS in our barnyard. However, to my ears it's music. Keep your Mozart and your Pavaroti. I'll take the dirt-track yodle of old CS revving his rpms for a drag-race of a lifetime!

His 'chickantics' are features I've come to admire about the Chickenator. He's fast, for one thing ... *really* fast off the starting line! He never gets tired, for another. Unlike my squeak-toys that last all of 20 seconds, no matter how many times I make my run at Colonel Sanford, no matter how revved up my engine gets—so revved up sometimes I don't even hear my Dad's B-I-G voice yelling for me to stop—no matter what I throw at him, old CS never tires out. And on top of everything else, I love the delicious noise he makes when he's revved up, filling the air to high heaven with squawks and racket and flapping of wings. Why, it's this Caledonian James Dean's vision of racing heaven in a barnyard! You see, I'm the luckiest kid in the world 'cause Life just gave me the ultimate drag-race challenge *and* squeak-toy all rolled into one.

Dad doesn't mind my having a new friend at the corral, but he's keeping a lid on the drag-racing. I'm bidding my time for now, watching ... waiting ... calculating. So is CS. I see that old chicken's eye staring at me from a distance, measuring my feet, my lines, calculating my torque and top-end speed. "Just how fast *is* that kid?" he's wondering, as he pretends to scratch and strut and preen. "What's that highbrow sportsdog got under his hood? Likely all chrome and shine and no real muscle. We'll see. One day ... we'll see."

Meantime, I'm following Dad's advice to learn all



Burnsie's 'squat-chicken,' "Colonel Sanford," a de-combed rooster who adopted the donkey barn and barnyard at the home of GSM editor and writer, Joseph Harvill. In the Southwest cock fighting flourished openly until banned in 2007. Fighting roosters are routinely de-combed. Photo: J. Harvill.



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I can from those I admire. In fact, the more I study old CS, the more I like this guy. I've come up with some chicken wisdom I call 'Chicken Nuggets' which I think are truths I want to live by that are worthy of my philosopher Dad himself. The first is *getting in a flap can save your neck*. Now, I know 'getting in a flap' is generally thought of as something to avoid, but I've watched old CS use it to good advantage. Whenever he's in a jam and something's closing-in on him, he flaps up a storm and gets out of it! I'm not yet sure how that translates to my stubby legs, but I'm working on it.

Another 'chicken nugget' I've gleaned is this: *life worth living is made from scratch*. Unlike the whiners my Dad often talks about who want everything ready-made and easy, my 'rat-chicken' accepts that Life is there in front of us, alright, but you've got to scratch for it yourself everyday and keep on scratching.

Something else he's teaching me, too: *it's the surly bird that gets the worm*. Forget the 'early bird' stuff—although CS is up with the sun as self-appointed Corral Crier—it's the one with attitude who gets the prize! Colonel Sanford has attitude out the wazoo and an I'll-show-you-who's-in-charge-engine-roar to match—Chicken-squawk, that is! Believe me, it's downright unnerving to encounter a creature smaller than I am who out-attitudes me. It's unnerving but at the same time it's awesome and almost religious. His impact on my psyche must be like my own on mortals and other canines who are quite dumb-struck over my larger-than-life sense of myself.

That brings me to my final observation inspired by my new chicken: *not everything that's called "chicken" is*. Old CS is as gutsy and revved up as they come—in any size. 'Chicken'—in the wussy-sense—doesn't apply to him. If this bird's 'chicken,' so am I.

I know he's got his eye on me. I also know I've got mine on him. And Dad's got his eye on both of us. Nevertheless, it's gonna happen. The drag-race of a lifetime will happen one of these days ... maybe when Dad is distracted in the hay shed ... maybe when he's concentrating on the donkeys. I can see it now: in the dusk at the evening feeding as the corral lights come on, a silent signal will go forth to "start your engines!" Suddenly, with blinding speed and a deafening roar of revved up fur and feathers, one of us will be crowned once and for all the Dragster King of Las Golondrinas!



Burnsie's new passion, a drag-racing chicken he competes with for fastest speedster honors at GSM headquarters. We named this vagrant 'Colonel Sanford' because "he's an entire food chain away from Colonel Sanders and KFC and more like a junkyard rooster version of 'Sanford & Son.' Photo: J. Harvill.

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