



## The great drinking bout

**V**IRGILIO MAGRI, who operated Apipe Safaris on the banks of mammoth Parana River in Argentina, didn't have much formal education, but he knew how to communicate. Dr. Rudolph Koucky and I spent a delightful five days' dorado fishing with Virgilio, and we became very fond of Argentina's answer to *Zorba the Greek*. He reminded us so much of Anthony Quinn's *Zorba*.

He spoke about 30 words of English, and Dr. Koucky and I spoke a total of 25 words of Spanish. Magri was an excellent story teller. Through gesticulations and teaching us a few words he was able to convey complicated stories to us.

Like the time he had a drinking contest with a German hunter.

Virgilio was a super drinker. He was so good that he established a

standing bet that he could out-drink anyone. He had many comers at first and according to Virgilio he never lost. With his growing reputation as the region's champion beer drinker, he had few challengers.

Hans W., a dedicated bird shooter from Germany, came to the Parana for a hunt. He heard of Virgilio and his great drinking talent and about his standing bet. Hans considered himself a champion drinker, too, and won many bets through the years, so Hans sought and found Virgilio.

They decided that the bout would take place at a small local tavern, not far from Virgilio's camp. The rules were simple. They would drink beer and they could only leave the table to go to the washroom. The one who outlasted the other was the winner.

Hans suggested a \$500 cash bet and the loser pays the tab.

Virgilio gulped.

"I didn't have the money, of course, but everyone heard about it and my pride was at stake," he explained to the doctor and me. "There's no way I could lose the bet, because I did not have the money. I didn't have \$100! I could not afford to lose. If I backed down, well, I would lose the respect of fellow villagers. So I accepted the bet!"

The great championship was set for next day and would commence in the afternoon.

They shook hands, smiled at each other and started drinking. Pitcher after pitcher. More and more beer was ordered to the delight of the innkeeper.

"I started feeling it," Virgilio explained. "The German looked almost as refreshed as when he came in. We ordered more beer. If this continued I would lose the bet and I didn't have the money. What a disgrace that would be!"

Virgilio realized that, at this pace, he would lose. He excused himself, went to the bathroom. Through the window he saw a young boy who was a neighbor and summoned the lad to the window.

"Find my brother and tell him to come to the washroom in exactly twenty minutes, but to come through the back door so no one sees him in the front. Don't fail. I will give you some money. Be quick!"

Virgilio returned to the table.

The German, sensing victory, asked for another pitcher of beer. Virgilio lit a cigarette. They started drinking again.

In about 20 minutes, Virgilio excused himself and went back to the washroom. He found his brother, Juan, in the washroom.

“*Que pasa?*”

“Quick! Change clothes with me. The German is beating me. Go drink with him, and beat him!” Virgilio left through a back entrance.

Juan, now dressed in Virgilio’s clothes, went to the German’s table and began drinking.

More and more beer was ordered. Juan felt his head spinning. He didn’t know how much longer he could continue to drink.

But alas, the German, could drink no more. He gave up. “This is the first time in my life that someone beat me. Here’s the money.”

The small audience clapped. They knew that the winner was not Virgilio, but, Juan, his identical twin brother. The resemblance was so close that they often had trouble distinguishing between the two.

“What did you do with the money you won?” I asked Virgilio.

He affectionately patted the late model motor, and pulled the cord. And we resumed chasing the fabulous dorado.