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Canadian escape artist gives new meaning to the phrase "tractor pull"



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Sun Jun 10, 1:11 AM

By Steve Lambert

NIVERVILLE, Man. (CP) - World-renowned escape artist Dean Gunnarson gave new meaning to the term "tractor pull" Saturday night as he was chained in between two huge farm machines that started rolling in opposite directions and threatened to tear him apart.

Gunnarson wowed the crowd of a few thousand people at the Niverville Old Tyme Country Fair. Before his stunt, he asked some in the audience to ensure his handcuffs and locks were secure as chains were wrapped tightly around him.

"Start your engines!," Gunnarson roared as the two 450-horsepower tractors started up and prepared to make Gunnarson the centre of a mechanical tug-of-war across the town's main street.

The tractors each had 30 metres of rope between them and Gunnarson, which left him just over a minute to unlock the locks, unwrap the chains, and wriggle out of the handcuffs.

Ever the showman, Gunnarson broke free from the southbound tractor's still-slack rope just as the northbound tractor's rope pulled tight and hauled him head over heels for a few feet.

He quickly stood up, showed he was free of the final rope, and the crowd erupted in applause.

"It was very close", a breathless Gunnarson said afterward.

"The rope was shorter on one side than the other, so I tried to hedge a little bit, and I knew I was running out of time."

Gunnarson, who was born in Manitoba, has been impressing audiences for more than 20 years. His stunts have been featured on television specials in the U.S., Japan and other countries.


He's dangled by his feet 200 metres over a Nevada river, chained himself across a busy roller-coaster track in China, and performed countless other stunts that might make some

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question his sanity.

His stunts have gone off smoothly - with one notable exception. He was pulled unconscious from the Red River in Winnipeg in 1983 after a botched escape attempt from a sealed coffin.

Like any escape artist, Gunnarson does not share his secrets - for example, how he can seemingly undo locks and handcuffs in a matter of seconds, even when covered in wet cement as he was for a performance last Halloween.

Gunnarson still gets nervous before an escape attempt, and he says that's a good thing.

"You have to have that nervous energy. You need the adrenaline flowing."

"If you're not nervous, then you're in trouble. You may not be alive."


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