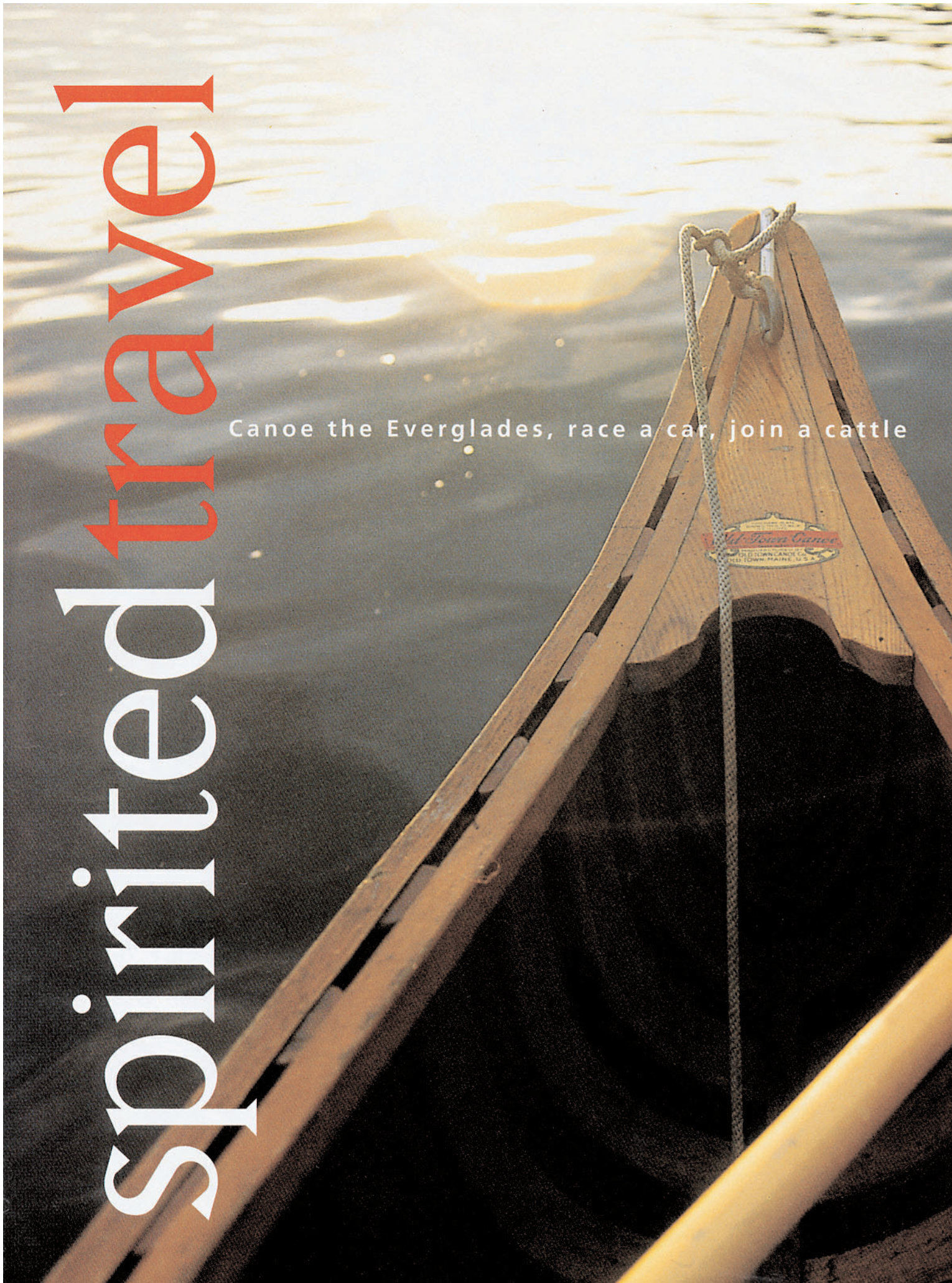
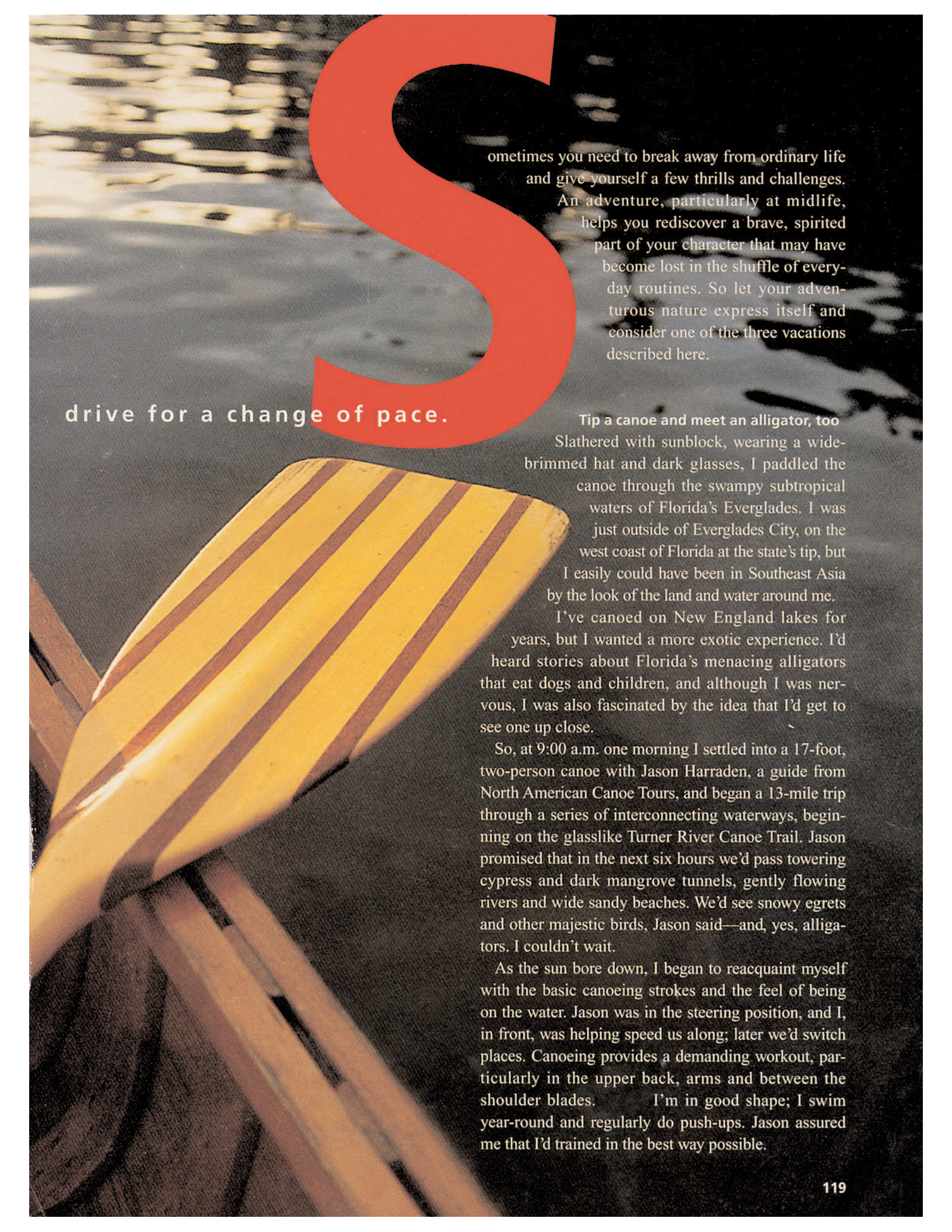


# spirited travel

Canoe the Everglades, race a car, join a cattle







drive for a change of pace.

Sometimes you need to break away from ordinary life and give yourself a few thrills and challenges. An adventure, particularly at midlife, helps you rediscover a brave, spirited part of your character that may have become lost in the shuffle of everyday routines. So let your adventurous nature express itself and consider one of the three vacations described here.

**Tip a canoe and meet an alligator, too**

Slathered with sunblock, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and dark glasses, I paddled the canoe through the swampy subtropical waters of Florida's Everglades. I was just outside of Everglades City, on the west coast of Florida at the state's tip, but I easily could have been in Southeast Asia by the look of the land and water around me.

I've canoed on New England lakes for years, but I wanted a more exotic experience. I'd heard stories about Florida's menacing alligators that eat dogs and children, and although I was nervous, I was also fascinated by the idea that I'd get to see one up close.

So, at 9:00 a.m. one morning I settled into a 17-foot, two-person canoe with Jason Harraden, a guide from North American Canoe Tours, and began a 13-mile trip through a series of interconnecting waterways, beginning on the glasslike Turner River Canoe Trail. Jason promised that in the next six hours we'd pass towering cypress and dark mangrove tunnels, gently flowing rivers and wide sandy beaches. We'd see snowy egrets and other majestic birds, Jason said—and, yes, alligators. I couldn't wait.

As the sun bore down, I began to reacquaint myself with the basic canoeing strokes and the feel of being on the water. Jason was in the steering position, and I, in front, was helping speed us along; later we'd switch places. Canoeing provides a demanding workout, particularly in the upper back, arms and between the shoulder blades.

I'm in good shape; I swim year-round and regularly do push-ups. Jason assured me that I'd trained in the best way possible.





We headed into the “tunnels,” so named because the mangroves forming them interlock so densely in places that the sky is obscured. Narrow and low, they forced us to set our paddles aside and crouch as we grasped branches to pull us through. Veils of gummy spider webs hung down, sticking to my body as we passed. At one point we displaced a nest of spiders, which scrambled helter-skelter all over us. Fortunately they didn’t bite but felt creepy nonetheless.

Not all tunnels are created equal, however: Those along the Halfway Creek had a magical quality—like an enchanted forest. Daylight filtered through the soaring mangrove canopies, casting soft sunbeams on the luminescent copper-colored water.

And here, wedged deep in the sludge, I spotted my first alligator, its scaly snout and meaty torso protruding. I’d never seen one outside a zoo, and it looked scary. But as I moved in to photograph it, this large, lazy lizard didn’t even blink. So much for the menacing personality! Crocodiles, I later learned, are the aggressive swamp reptiles. Alligators, unless provoked, usually are passive.

By midafternoon my arms ached, but my skin tingled and my soul hungered for more. I loved the wildlife and the otherworldly feel of the tunnels. It seemed I’d journeyed to another land. Yet, I’d been to the heart of the Everglades, right here in America—spiders, alligators, hot sun and all—and lived to tell the tale. In fact I’m already planning the next trip: First I’m going to increase my gym workout schedule and then set aside many more days to explore the real Florida—only by canoe, of course.

—Michelle Lodge

*Guided trips are available from North American Canoe Tours Inc. at \$40 per person, including lunch. Write to P.O. Box 5038, Everglades City, Florida 33929; call (941) 695-4666, or fax (941) 695-4155. The Everglades National Park Boat Tours rents canoes year-round, and the park rangers offer instruction. Call (941) 695-2591 or (800) 445-7724 within Florida; for general information, call (941) 695-3311.*

### Home on the range

The words *cattle drive* brought up the same response whenever I’d mentioned my upcoming trip.

“You mean, like City Slickers?”

“Similar,” I’d answer, acknowledging the Billy Crystal comedy about Manhattanites riding the range. “This is the women’s version.”

With that, I headed to the North Country—Canada—for the Kamloops Cattle Drive, the sixth annual charity event in Kamloops, British Columbia, where about 300 people on horseback help move cattle to greener pastures. I needed a vacation away from the hectic urban bustle of New York City and was attracted by the romance of the wide, Wild West. I also longed to ride a horse again—I hadn’t done that since I was 10.

**I** showed up at the cattle drive ready and willing in the requisite attire: hat, jeans, boots, gloves, shades and sunblock. I was in good company—this was a journey only for the hearty and high-spirited.

My fellow riders and I were responsible for our horses. The able wranglers (cattle women and men) helped out, but it was my job to saddle and bridle my horse, T-Bone, keep him on the trail, haul buckets of water and bales of hay, brush him and scrape the mud, pebbles and manure from inside his hooves. Before retiring and upon awakening at 5:00 a.m., I checked T-Bone to make sure he wasn’t tangled up or thirsty. I loved every aspect of this work; it was far removed from the pencil-pushing I do in the city.

The trip was long and the going sometimes rough. T-Bone and I traveled 60 miles in four days in 100-degree-plus temperatures. We passed through arid canyons, along clear streams and over rocky mountains. This was pure adventure of a decidedly nonurban nature. I galloped through green pastures, got to see the full moon rise above a jagged range and joked around the campfire with my fellow riders under the star-studded western sky. Each morning I packed up my gear and tent, then set it up again at the next campsite that evening.





### Go for it! Try these adventure vacations

**Hike and camp along the rugged coast of Lake Superior.** Voyageur Quest; call (800) 794-9660, or write to 590 St. Clements Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M5N 1M6 Canada.

**Navigate a sailboat by the stars in Maine.** WoodenBoat School; call (207) 359-4651, or write to P.O. Box 78, Brooklin, ME 04616.

**Mountain bike amid Indian cliff dwellings in Utah.** Kaibab Mountain/Desert Bike Tours; call (800) 451-1133, or write to 391 South Main Street, Moab, UT 84532.

**Kayak through glaciers in Icy Bay and Glacier Bay, Alaska.** Alaska Discovery Wilderness Adventures; call (800) 586-1911, or write to 5449 Shaune Drive, Suite 4, Juneau, AL 99801.

**Snorkel among exquisite coral reefs in Belize.** Oceanic Society Expeditions; call (800) 326-7491, or write to Fort Mason Center, Building E, San Francisco, CA 94123.

**Go fly fishing in Wyoming.** Flying A Ranch; call (800) 678-6543, or write to Route 1, Box 7, Pinedale, WY 82941.

**Raft through the Grand Canyon.** Canyoneers; call (800) 525-0924, or write P.O. Box 2997, Flagstaff, AZ 86003.

This enterprise, created to raise money for a local charity group, would have been more aptly named a trail ride with guest appearances by cattle. Like most of the others, I saw only a few. But no one seemed to mind: We were too busy having fun on horseback.

I was concerned about keeping up with the better riders. As a side benefit, though, I found that keeping up gave me a total workout. Riding worked my lower body; the chores, my upper. Only my backside was tender at the end of the day.

But the most enduring memory was this: Dusty and bone-tired, we all rode into Kamloops, high and proud, to jubilant cheers and admiring glances from the hundreds of townsfolk lining the streets. Here was a true heroine's welcome—just like in the movies. As I tied up T-Bone for the last time, I reflected on the past few days: The women's version, indeed! Billy Crystal never had it this good.

—Michelle Lodge

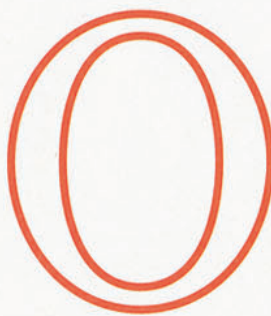
*For information about Cattle Drive '96 (July 14 to 19), call (800) 288-5850 or (604) 372-7075, or fax (604) 372-0262; the five-day drive costs about \$700, U.S. currency. Riding instruction is available from several sources, including Erin Valley Riding Stables in Kamloops, (604) 573-5442. For guided trail riding, call Wells Gray Ranch in Clearwater, (604) 674-2792, 674-2774, or fax (604) 674-2197.*

### Flooring it

Driving may not seem like much of an adventure, but sign up for a three-day course at the Russell Racing School in Sonoma, California, and your opinion will change faster

than you can hum a few bars from "Dead Man's Curve."

I'd always nursed fantasies of being a hotshot and driving really fast while remaining smoothly in control. This was the chance I'd been waiting for—to put my pedal to the metal and my mettle to the test.



On Day One of the course, our two excellent instructors taught us downshifting and braking techniques, as well as racing strategies, then led us out to the track to get our helmets and driving suits for hands-on drills in cars. The best drivers, they told us, excel in both instinct and technique.

They urged us to concentrate on being precise: Take each curve at just the right angle, accelerate to just the right degree, and let the speed take care of itself.

On Day Two, we learned more shifting and braking techniques. Speed was an afterthought as we handled skids and cutoffs. In fact, the Formula Ford racing car that was "mine" for all three days had no speedometer, just a tachometer, which measures the engine's revolutions per minute (RPMs). When I found myself staring nervously at the concrete walls, fearing I might crash, I calmed myself with the logic that since the school has few crashes, the odds were I probably wouldn't be in one.

Day Three was spent lapping the track, and each session we were allowed to go 200 RPMs faster than the last. I started out lagging behind the guys (*continued on page 124*)



## Spirited travel

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but by late afternoon I'd found my groove, gotten up to 100 miles per hour and didn't want to stop. Snug in the cockpit of a low-slung Formula Ford, navigating the twists and turns of a Grand Prix racetrack, new reserves of courage, stamina and self-discipline emerged. My nervous system flooded with adrenaline, and my heart pounded like a tom-tom. I jumped from exhilaration to terror and back again, and loved every minute of it.



By course's end, my back was stiff, my shoulders ached, and my body buzzed from the vibration of the car.

Race-car driving school offers a perfect adventure, whether or not you're in peak condition: You get an ultraconcentrated high and a powerful challenge to coordination and reaction times.

What an anticlimax it was to climb stiffly into my dull, slow Honda Accord for the drive home. But I'm saving to go back. Yes, I got just what I wanted: to go fast, full-out fast. But I also learned that to be a real race-car driver takes a lot more than just being a hotshot—it takes skill. I don't have the desire for a full-time career behind a wheel six inches in diameter, but without a doubt these three days were the ultimate high in my life—so far.

—Roberta Grant

*Call the Russell Racing Drivers School, (707) 939-7600, or write Sears Point Raceway, Arnold Drive, Sonoma, CA 95476. The three-day course costs \$1,995 (accommodations not included).*

**Michelle Lodge** is a senior editor at *Victoria* magazine; **Roberta Grant** is the articles editor at *Los Angeles* magazine.

RON McQUEENEY