

The season for human pillars

The traditional Catalan spectacle of building human towers called castells kick-off in Terrassa this weekend

NEIL STOKES

Building castells, or human towers, is a widespread passion in Catalonia and this weekend the season gets underway in Terrassa. Originating in the 18th Century in Valls in the Tarragona province, castell building is currently experiencing a golden age, with more than 60 colles, or groups, dedicated to this activity throughout Catalonia. On Saturday, as part of the town's annual summer festival, two groups of castellers, the local Minyons and the Capgrossos from Mataró, will battle it out to construct the first nine-level towers of the year.

As every year all over Catalonia, colles will be competing during the summer months to create the highest and most original human towers possible. The castells are categorised according to the number of people forming each layer and the number of layers. A 4/8 castell is, for example, a human tower made up of eight layers with four people per layer. At this weekend's event, the Minyons hope to complete the whole range of 3/8 castells as well as the 4/9.

"A key weekend," is how Jordi Caus, head of the Minyons, describes this beginning of the castell season. The Terrassa group, who are also celebrating their 25th anniversary, are one of the strongest contenders in Catalonia and have prepared an ambitious programme for the weekend. According to Caus, rehearsals have gone well, causing a spirit of optimism among his group: "Everyone looks up for it to me," he said.

As for the highly-considered Capgrossos of Mataró, they will attempt the first 3/9 castell of the season. "There are a few nerves but I think we've got a good chance," said head of the group, Xevi Castellví. The Sunday event will start at 12pm in the Raval de Montserrat.



Two groups of castellers will be battling to build the highest tower in Terrassa with the aim of reaching nine storeys / EFE

WHERE TO GO

Figueres

► Saturday at 6pm in carrer Sant Pau, the Colla Castellera de Figueres.

Sant Andreu de la Barca

► Saturday in Plaça de Anselm Clavé, the Castellers de Sant Andreu de la Barca, the Castellers de Sarrià and the Xerrics d'Olot.

Terrassa

► Saturday at 8 pm in Plaça Vella, the Minyons and the Castellers de Terrassa. Sunday at 12 noon in the Raval de Montserrat, the Minyons, the Castellers de Terrassa and the Capgrossos de Mataró.

Valls

► Saturday at 10:30 pm, the Colla Joves Xiquets de Valls at the local festival of the Santa Úrsula district.

Vilafranca del Penedès

► Saturday at 10pm in Plaça de la Verema, the Xicots de Vilafranca.

Barberà del Vallès

► Sunday at 6:30pm, the Castellers de Sabadell, the Castellers de la Vila de Gràcia and the Marrees de Salt.

L'Hospitalet de Llobregat

► Sunday at 12 noon in Plaça Ocellers, the Colla jove de l'Hospitalet de Llobregat, the Castellers de Sants and the Xicots de Vilafranca del Penedès.

(information provided by Joan Borràs)

The force feel the full monty of stripping cop

NEIL STOKES

Calling the police has just taken on a whole new meaning for the Catalan police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra. They are currently looking into the accusation that a Mosso policeman from the Maresme has been wearing his uniform, although not for long, as part of his nocturnal activities as a stripper.

It all started in February when six photos arrived anonymously at the Tarragona police station. The images showed a uniformed policeman removing his clothes at the back of a coach. But unlike in the Full Monty, the uniform did not appear to be a fake, thus instigating an investigation by the Internal Affairs department. The first and most delicate task was to pick the man out of

a force of more than 8000 officers.

While it is not clear how inspectors went about identifying the policeman, he was eventually discovered to be working at the Maresme police station. Investigators then went on to stake out the officer, secretly following and observing him as he plied his trade in hen nights, restaurants and bars. Whether to their relief or disappointment, the Internal Affairs department report that the officer did not use his uniform during this process, preferring to stick to Batman and Mad Max costumes. This has caused the Ministry of the Interior to cling to the hope that the photos may be false.

It has still not been decided whether the case will go to court or not. Other cases have already estab-

lished the rights of policeman to pursue "artistic activities" in their spare time. Even if it is difficult to define this policeman's activities as artistic, the only recourse open to the authorities may simply be a fine for an improper use of the uniform.

The officer is said to be 27 years old with a well shaped abdomen. Internal Affairs have concluded that the officer carried out his out-of-hours activities only sporadically. They said that the officer in question still has not been asked to testify before his superiors and neither does he know that the photographs have been seen by Internal Affairs. Some officers in the Mossos have expressed private annoyance over the incident claiming the officer's actions might discredit the police

force in the public eye. "The principle of authority and respect that the police force deserve could be undermined by actions such as this. I'm not saying it is bad to be a stripper but that the officer in question is a Mosso, but after his stript act, he has to wear the same uniform during his job and should be earning the respect and confidence of the citizen," said a Mosso.

Other officers are more forgiving about the incident and claim the Mosso did not insult the uniform of the police force. "One has to avoid passing judgement using an established moral criteria saying that taking off one's clothes is bad," said another police source. The final decision has yet to be taken on what course of action to take.

Bongo players wrecking tranquility of park residents

Angry residents are fed up with bongo drummers disturbing the peace of their neighbourhood in the centre of Barcelona. About 300 residents living next to the Ciutadella park want the city council to clamp down on the excess noise caused by loud instruments, particularly bongos, coming from the park. Protesters are furious that the city council gave bongo players the green light to use the park last month. Protestors have met with leaders of opposition groups from the city council and are demanding a curb on the activities of the musicians in the park.