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Japan Screen Topics

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TWO TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS

68 feet 1 min. 53 sec.

1. (LOG ROLLING) An ancient and exceptionally colorful festival takes place each year along the Sumida River in Tokyo, as wood-workers compete in log rolling and various acrobatic stunts. Crowds gather along the river bank to watch the displays, as competitors vie in events that severely test their balance and agility.

Among the most popular of the events are demonstrations of log rollings by competitors wearing 'geta' -- wooden clogs -- with very high platforms. Headstands and other acrobatic displays from the precarious perches of floating timber draw applause and admiration from the audience.

This annual festival has continued among the workers in the traditional lumber processing district of downtown Tokyo for some 300 years; and it has been designated an "Important Intangible Cultural Property" by the government.

2. (THROWING RICE BALES) One the same day, just a few blocks away, another old contest takes place as rice dealers vie in a 'Strength Contest'.

Each of these bales of rice weighs 60 kilograms, and the dealers compete in balancing and tossing the heavy bundles. The highlight comes when one champion allows more than 1,000 kilograms to be loaded on his stomach in a display of superb muscle control.

DREAM FIRE-FIGHTING EQUIPMENT

76 feet 2 min. 11 sec.

1. (MORNING INSPECTION) The Chiba City Fire Department is famous in Japan for its exceptionally fine equipment. The department orders its equipment to its own specifications, from manufacturers able to deliver just the right items..

2. (WATER CANNON) For maximum fire-drenching power, the department has this large water-cannon, capable of throwing water at long-range.

3. (SUITS; RESCUE PLATFORM: FOAM) Other major items of special equipment include flame-resistant suits for the fire-fighters...this special rescue platform able to reach as high as a 10-story building.....and a foam machine which can smother fires with thousands of cubic feet of a special foam in just seconds.

4. (HOVERCRAFT: MINI-TRUCK) Over broken ground, firemen sometimes have difficulty bringing equipment to a blaze. This hovercraft water-cannon can go almost anywhere..... With its two-man crew, this mini-firetruck is capable of reaching even the smallest corners to douse flames.

Mobile food and living quarters for emergency use by fire victims are another service provided by the department.

By ordering such special equipment, the Chiba City Fire Department has been able to obtain the right items it needs to provide full protection to local residents, and has become famous for its 'dream' capabilities.

SUBURBAN SHOPPING MALL

65 feet 1 min. 48 sec.

1. (ENTRANCE: AERIAL SHOT) Matsudo is a rapidly-growing city just outside Tokyo. For centuries it remained one of many small agricultural centers in Chiba Prefecture, but its convenient location just across the Edogawa River has turned it into one of Tokyo's major residential suburbs. Today Matsudo has a population of 400,000, many of whom commute to work in the capital each day, and is continuing to expand.

And as Matsudo grows, it naturally attracts commercial development. Various services required by local residents have led to the construction of many new shopping and entertainment facilities.

2. (URBAN HILL: INTERIORS) Urban Hill Matsudo is the latest, and most advanced, of these new facilities. It is a full-service shopping mall, providing nearby Matsudo residents with a wide range of shopping and entertainment possibilities in a single location.

Urban Hill's open-mall design provides a comfortable central plaza for relaxation, with the shops situated for easy access inside the elegantly designed buildings.

3. (SHOPS: RESTAURANTS) The first and second floors of the five-story mall complex offer full shopping facilities, with everything from home necessities to high-fashion designs in chic boutiques. The top floors are given over to entertainment, particularly to a wide range of restaurants and fast-food outlets specializing in cuisine that ranges from traditional Japanese dishes to the latest Western-style snacks.

An excellent example of the rapid growth of commercial services in Tokyo's suburbs, Urban Hill Matsudo provides full shopping, dining and entertainment convenience for local residents in a single, tasteful location of the most modern, comfortable design.

MASTER METALSMITH

139 feet 3 min. 52 sec.

1. (INTRO: TEACHING CLASS) Michiyo Watabiki, 38, is one of the finest metalsmiths in Japan. In order to help preserve this fast-disappearing craft, he teaches once each week in a local cultural center, promoting metal-working as a hobby and keeping an eye out for those with exceptional talent.
2. (FORMING BOWL) Working primarily with copper, Watabiki begins a new piece by first painstakingly shaping the bowl, beating together thin copper sheets, one by one, until the metal begins to take the perfect form he demands in all his work.
3. (DESIGNING COVER) But it is the cover which requires the most delicate work, and this is where Watabiki's skill becomes most apparent. He first draws the design on paper, then begins to trace it carefully onto the metal, slowly etching in each of the design elements.
4. (MELTING ROSIN) The next step is to firmly fix the metal cover into a rosin base, so that he can work without fear of a slip. Then comes the careful chiseling out of the metal, working with various tools to remove large portions of the cover and leave only the basic design elements in place.

Finally, using a very thin power saw, he cuts out the finished design to exactly the right proportions.

5. (BLOWTORCH) With a flaming torch, Watabiki begins the decorative phase of his work, adding silver or gold filigree to the design for artistic beauty.

The final stage is careful polishing in a special solution to bring out the burnished glow of the copper and the inlaid decorative elements.

6. (EXAMPLES) Michiyo Watabiki is one of the few true craftsmen in this field today, a field which is fast disappearing due to modern mass-production techniques. His work reflects the artistic spirit and attention to detail which marks the true craftsman capable of bringing great beauty to his work.