

TRANSCRIPT: GIANT PUMPKIN WEIGHT-OFF AT THE TOPSFIELD FAIR

BY LINDSEY LARSON

TRACK:

<ANNOUNCER'S CALLING.....ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED POUNDS...>

THIS ARENA HAS A DIRT FLOOR, AND IT'S CROWDED WITH PEOPLE. SMALL CRANES ARE BUSTLING BACK AND FORTH. THEY'RE CARRYING GIANT PUMPKINS TO INDUSTRIAL SIZED SCALES. EVERYONE'S EYES ARE FIXED ON A SCREEN OVERHEAD WHERE RED NUMBERS BLINK BRIGHTLY.

<IT'S NOT A BEAUTY CONTEST FOLKS, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WEIGHT>

THESE PUMPKINS LOOK SWOLLEN, LIKE GLOBS ABOUT TO BURST. THEY'RE AWKWARD, OVERWEIGHT VEGETABLES.

<ALSO, THEY'RE LUMPY; THEY'RE KIND OF SCALEY LOOKING, MOST OF THEM. THEY'RE NOT REAL PRETTY BUT THEY'RE HUGE.>

THE SIZE OF SEVERAL BEANBAG CHAIRS.

<YOU'RE GROWING WHAT I CALL A FREAK OF NATURE.>

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE GROWING THESE VEGETABLE FREAKS. AND, A LOT OF THEM GOT INTO THIS BY ACCIDENT. HERE IS A TYPICAL STORY. AN AVERAGE GARDENER PLANTED A PATCH WITH PLAIN OLD PUMPKIN SEEDS. THEN, JUST BY CHANCE, ONE OF THEM GREW INTO WHAT LOOKED LIKE A WHOPPER.

<OURS WEIGHED A HUNDRED AND TWENTY NINE POUNDS>

SO THE EAGER GARDENER ENTERED A CONTEST EXPECTING TO WIN...ONLY TO GET SQUASHED BY PUMPKINS TEN TIMES BIGGER.

<WE GOT SYMPATHY CARDS FROM OUR FRIENDS THAT FIRST YEAR, I MEAN, AND YOU TALK ABOUT ABUSE.>

SOME ADMIT DEFEAT. FOR OTHERS, THOUGH, THE SEED OF AMBITION HAS JUST SPROUTED.

<IF YOU GROW ONE, YOU GET ADDICTED BECAUSE YOU SAY, OOH, I COULD'VE DONE THIS, AND I'M GONNA TRY THIS NEXT YEAR. I CAN GROW A BIGGER ONE; I KNOW I CAN.>

MANY OF THE PEOPLE WHO GROW PUMPKINS LIVE INCONSPICUOUSLY IN AVERAGE SUBURBAN HOMES. BUT, INSTEAD OF A MANICURED LAWN, YOU SEE BACKYARDS CARPETED IN A SEA OF BRIGHT GREEN PUMPKIN LEAVES. AND JUST TWO OR THREE MELLOW ORANGE BLOBS.

<THEY'RE JUST SO HAPPY.>

PRIZE WINNING PUMPKIN SEEDS COST OVER FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS EACH, SO GROWERS CARVE OUT A BUDGET AND SPEND BOTH MONEY AND TIME.

BABY PUMPKINS WILL GUZZLE FIVE HUNDRED GALLONS OF WATER A DAY. AND THEY GROW

<I STARTED GROWING PUMPKINS THAT WERE GAINING LIKE 20, 30, I HAD ONE DAY THAT WAS IN THE FORTY POUNDS, PER DAY. AND WHEN YOU SEE A PUMPKIN GROWING THAT FAST, IN THAT LITTLE TIME...JUST THINK OF A PERSON PUTTING ON 40 POUNDS A DAY.>

FORGET SUMMER VACATION. SERIOUSLY. THERE'S ENDLESS WEEDING. PEOPLE ERECT LITTLE BURLAP TENTS TO SHIELD THE PUMPKINS FROM THE SUMMER SUN. AT NIGHT THE PUMPKINS ARE COVERED IN BLANKETS-- LITERALLY TUCKED IN.

AND THAT'S NOT ALL.

<AND I SAID TO GEORGE I WANT TO TRY THE MUSIC IT MIGHT STIMULATE, OR DO SOMETHING.>

<EVERY NIGHT I MAKE THE SIGN OF THE CROSS OVER EACH PUMPKIN...MAYBE THAT'LL HELP SOME FROM THE MAN ABOVE.>

HARVESTING COMES IN OCTOBER. GROWERS CUT THE FIST-THICK STEM AND IMMEDIATELY ATTACH IT TO A GALLON JUG OF WATER, SO THE PUMPKIN CAN KEEP GAINING WEIGHT.

LIFTING THIS GIANT IS AT LEAST A TWO PERSON JOB. AND IT TAKES SPECIAL EQUIPMENT...SOME PEOPLE USE AN OLD TRIPOD THAT ONCE MOVED GRAVESTONES.

THE PUMPKIN IS THEN WINCHED ONTO A PICKUP. AND IT'S OFF TO THE FAIR!

MC: ARE YOU SEEING...OK, LET'S LOWER IT DOWN...LET'S WATCH THE NUMBERS.

THE WINNER THIS YEAR?

<ONE THOUSAND, THREE HUNDRED, AND FORTY SEVEN POUNDS.>

EVERYONE SWARMS THE UNSUSPECTING PUMPKIN. IT WILL NOW REST ON A PEDESTAL IN A GLASS CASE FOR PEOPLE TO WONDER AT.

RON WALLACE, IS STANDING ON THE SIDELINES, OVERWHELMED BY HIS WIN.

WALLACE: WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE WHEN YOU PUT SIXTEEN YEARS INTO DOING SOMETHING.

WALLACE: PUMPKINS DON'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. IT'S EFFORT; IT'S WORK; IT'S HEARTACHE...TO FINALLY GET SOMETHING THAT WINS, WHAT CAN YOU SAY?

A WEEK LATER, ANOTHER PUMPKIN FROM WALLACE'S PATCH TIPPED THE SCALES AT A RHODE ISLAND WEIGH-OFF. THAT ONE SET A NEW WORLD RECORD...OVER FIFTEEN HUNDRED POUNDS...A RECORD THAT WILL PROBABLY LAST UNTIL THE NEXT GROWING SEASON.

THIS IS LINDSEY LARSON FOR INTERN EDITION.