Horny camels learn to keep their cool

By NICK CALACOURAS

HORNY Territory camels have learned to keep their cool in the search for love.

A team of scientists working in Central Australia found that camels would voluntarily go into hypothermia to conserve energy before they fight to impress a herd of up to 30 females. University of Queensland Emeritus Professor Gordon Grigg said the male camels compete in strenuous games of machismo to contest “ownership” over the herd.

He said this fighting — or “rutting” — was an energetic display and can cause weaker camels to die. “By starting each day cooler, a bull can postpone heat stress, compete for longer, win contests and sire more offspring,” he said.

Prof Grigg said amorous animals lower their temperature in the morning so they don’t overheat and burn out in contests and “increase their chance of winning a harem”. “By starting the day cool, a bull will enhance his capacity to store heat generated by the strenuous activity, thus prolonging the onset of heat stress.” “A bull that can sustain a contest for longer is more likely to win it and, so, control a herd of females and get more matings.”

Prof Grigg said the male bulls perform elaborate, ritualised and intense competitive behaviour, which includes strutting, jostling, running and fighting.

He said scientists previously believed camels dropped their body temperature to conserve water in very hot and dry conditions. “But what we saw cannot be for saving water. We saw it only in winter, only in bulls during rut and, anyway, they had water freely available and used it routinely.”

KISS OFF: Our camels are keeping their cool in the search for love ... and that’s what Spur seems to be doing as Marion Taylor tries to kiss him.