



Turning the Barrels

WPCA Newsletter

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 4

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WPCA Welcomed By Saskatoon

Wagon fans, there's a new stop on this year's WPCA Tour: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

WPCA President **Arnold McKernon** recently announced that the WPCA is bringing chuckwagon racing action to Saskatoon from June 6 to 9, 2013.

Negotiations with Saskatoon Prairieland Park Corporation have concluded, McKernon said, and were successful. He expressed his appreciation to the Prairieland Park staff directly involved in negotiations and to the WPCA driver directors and staff working to make this new stop a reality. **Brenda Sapergia**, Livestock Manager for Prairieland Park, said that they're pleased to partner with the WPCA on this venture. Both look forward to a long and successful partnership.

WPCA drivers and staff will attend the Saskatchewan Equine Expo from February 15 to 17 to introduce themselves to the larger community. They will also take the opportunity to meet with potential sponsors and fans. Saskatoon has been added to the WPCA Tour Auction on April 9. A hosting venue in Saskatoon is yet to be determined; information will be made available once a location is secured.

Saskatoon Prairieland Park Corporation's vision statement is for it to be a world-class destination for major programs, events and entertainment. In keeping with their mission and vision, Prairieland Park has added the excitement of professional chuckwagon races to its busy calendar. The WPCA will provide that world-class entertainment by bringing its 36 amazing drivers and their athletic and superbly trained horses in a uniquely western spectacle.

Saskatoon Prairieland Park Corporation is a membership-based, non-profit corporation. It was established as an agricultural society in 1886, the same year the

first annual fair was held in Saskatoon. Since its origins as a centre for agricultural excellence, it has evolved into a provincial leader in the development of trade shows, conferences, special events and concerts.

WPCA 2013 Race Schedule

The WPCA 2013 Tour will include eight tour stops, plus Ponoka and Calgary, with over 50 days of racing.

Grande Prairie Stompede

May 29-June 2

Saskatoon Prairieland Park Championship

June 6-9

Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede

June 13-16

High River Guy Weadick Professional Rodeo and Chuckwagon Races

June 20-23*

Ponoka Stampede

June 26-July 1

Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby

July 5-14

Lloydminster Colonial Days Fair

(joint WPCA/CPCA show)

July 10-12

Bonnyville Chuckwagon Championship

July 18-21

Strathmore Heritage Days

August 2-5

Dawson Creek Battle of the North

August 7-11

Rocky Mtn. House Battle of the Rockies

August 14-18

Bashaw Tour Runoff

August 30-September 2

*May also include June 19

President's Corner

I thought I would update what we have done and thank everyone who has helped us over the past few months.

First, I would like to thank all the driver directors for the time they have given us to negotiate contracts and travel to new venues to make sure that racing standards are being met.

We are currently in negotiations with Ponoka and hope to have this contract in place prior to any of the tarp auctions. **Jason Glass, Kelly Sutherland, Troy Dorchester** and **Codey McCurrach** have been assisting us at these meetings.

As noted in our recent press release, we have just signed a contract with Saskatoon for the 2013 season (June 6 to 9). **Kelly Sutherland** and **Luke Tournier** played a big part in making this possible.

Bonnyville has signed a three-year extension. **Kurt Bensmiller** and **Doug Irvine** were instrumental in getting this done. A key provision was that track repairs requested by drivers would be completed prior to race season.

We are currently negotiating with Edmonton regarding a possible return to Northlands Park in the future. **Chad Harden** and **Rick Fraser** are spearheading this initiative and are optimistic that we may get something in place as early as the 2014 season.

I would like to thank all our new Director Board members for letting their names stand to become volunteers on our board. **Harvey McKernon, Tim Taylor, Glenda Summers** and **Ed Wittchen** have all stepped up since last summer and have been busy helping us with marketing planning, financial controls and new media planning. **Maureen Henderson** has also been involved and will be appointed to the board at the next meeting.

The Advisory Board has two active subcommit-

tees working at this point: the Animal Code of Care Committee and the Media Committee.

The Animal Code of Care Committee has been meeting regularly. Committee Chair **John Lee** and members **Eddie Melville, Ed Pajor, Jennifer Woods, Kevin Fraser, Mark Sutherland** and **Codey McCurrach** are making sure this will be a landmark document, aligned with the Calgary Stampede document and designed to make the WPCA an industry leader in this regard.

The Media Committee, under Chair **Maureen Henderson**, is reviewing all of our WPCA media contracts and making recommendations for the future. Committee members include **Billy Melville, Arnie Jackson, Russ Peake** and **Cheryl Madden**.

The Sponsorship Committee consists of **Tim Taylor, Harvey McKernon, Jim Bottomley, Maureen Henderson** and **Cheryl Madden**. This committee is reviewing all of our current sponsorship agreements and initiating potential new ones.

The Operations Committee is headed by **Glenda Summers, Harvey McKernon, Ed Wittchen, Bill Murray** and me.

The Strategic Planning and Governance Committee is still in the formative stages and will meet in April.

In other news, we have signed consulting contracts with **Billy Melville, Darrell Johnston** and **Gary Gross**. **Billy Melville** will continue to provide information, communications, website assistance and on-site assistance at all tour stops.



Arnold McKernon
WPCA President

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President's Corner, cont'd

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Darrell Johnston becomes the new WPCA Field Representative. He will assume some duties of the former GM and arena director positions. He will also be involved on the operations side at all tour venues, and will provide some off-season services as required.

Gary Gross will be the new WPCA Alternate Track Announcer, taking over those duties when **Les McIntyre** is not available. For this year, Gary will announce races in Saskatoon, Medicine Hat and Bonnyville.

Mike Vigen has volunteered to look after all parking. He will work in conjunction with WPCA Field Representative Darrell Johnston to make sure that driver parking goes smoothly at all venues.

The 2013 race schedule appears on the front page of this newsletter. To fit Saskatoon into the schedule, a couple of other changes were necessary and we need to recognize and thank the show committees for making that possible. Medicine Hat agreed to move their schedule back a week later; High River agreed to go back to a one-weekend show over four or five days.

Initial discussions have been held with committees in Brooks, Alberta, as well as Fort St. John, British Columbia, for potential new shows for next year.

Vice-President Jim Bottomley and I are overwhelmed with all the time and support the driver directors and the new Director Board members (all volunteers) have given us this past winter. We could not do this without them.

I would like to think that next year at this time we will be able to look back and say we are having success. We should be able to have our business plan rolled out for the next newsletter. There is a lot more to talk about but the newsletter only allows us limited space.

All the best to the entire WPCA family for the 2013 racing season.

Meet Billy Melville

Billy Melville was born and raised in Calgary. His family has been active in chuckwagon racing since 1939—he is the grandson of legendary wagon driver **Orville Strandquist**.



Billy graduated from Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan, with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Business Marketing. Billy first appeared as a radio colour commentator for the chuckwagon races in 1999. He pioneered the *WPCA's Spectator's Guide & Yearbook*, chuckwagon racing's most informative publication. He is a regular contributor to publications such as *Canadian Cowboy Country Magazine*, *Horses All* and even the Calgary Stampede's nightly souvenir program.

Billy works in the oilpatch doing downtown sales for **Bico Faster Drilling Tools Inc.** Billy has been involved in the marketing, managing and media end of many high-profile events throughout Canada and the United States involving hockey and music. Billy is the unofficial historian of chuckwagon racing, with a personal collection of photos, videos and articles that he readily shares with drivers and fans.

Chuckwagon Racing: It's a Family Tradition

By Ed Wittchen

Reprinted courtesy of the *Bonnyville Nouvelle*

There is no other sport that is as family oriented as chuckwagon racing. From the generation after generation of some families that have been involved to the total family immersion all summer long in the daily life of a wagon camp, there is nothing else quite like the family atmosphere around the sport. It is amazing how many drivers have connections to other drivers.



Gary Gorst

Dustin Gorst

Logan Gorst

Chuckwagon racing is an Alberta and Saskatchewan sport for the most part, with a small group of BC enthusiasts. It is a sport with a long history in mostly small, rural communities in western Canada. Drivers and outriders come from places like Dewberry, Hand Hills, Bodo, Bashaw and Meadow Lake.

It's a family-oriented sport, with fathers passing on their passion and in many cases their outfits to their sons. The history of wagon racing is filled with familiar names as grandfathers turn the reins over to sons and grandsons.

Current drivers **Gary Gorst**, **Logan Gorst** and **Luke Tournier** and outriders **Quaid Tournier** and **Dustin Gorst** are the key characters in another of these multi-generational family stories. Someone who got hooked on racing around those barrels started every one of these family tradition stories. One of those old-timers is **Art Gorst** of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, who started driving wagons in 1967. Art qualified to drive at the Calgary Stampede from 1979 to 1981. He then retired, passing the chuckwagon tradition on to his sons **Chester** and **Gary** and daughter **May**, the first female outrider to ride at the Calgary Stampede. Gary began

outriding when he was just 14 and started driving at 15.

In 1971, Gary won the Lloydminster event with two young outriders who later went on to become two of the most famous names in wagon driver history: **Buddy Bensmiller** and **George Normand**.

In 1981, Gary's barn contracted swamp fever and he lost all of his racing horses. He retired from the big wagons and raced ponies for several years. In 1996, another driver, **Bill McEwan**, was in a wreck and was injured. He asked Gary to fill in as a driver. The Northern Chuckwagon Association (predecessor of the Canadian Association) required him to take a driving test with the wagon before they would re-certify him. McEwan hadn't done well the first few races. Gary told him he would do it as long as he allowed him to change two bits that he didn't like and that he thought were hindering the horses' performance.

In the winter of 1996, driver **Jim Knight** asked Gary to drive a third wagon for him on a contract basis. Jim and **Ross Knight** each had a stable of horses that they used for racing and each gave Gary four other horses from their barn to race with. All three qualified for the Calgary Stampede, but because of the longer race meet the Knights needed all their horses. Gary was stuck looking for different horses than those he had used all season. **Ray Croteau, Sr.**, and **Wayne Knight** gave him horses from their barns. As it turns out, he beat both Jim and Ross Knight in the Calgary Stampede standings that year.

Gary was going to retire again that winter but his sons talked him into staying with it because they had developed an interest. They started buying their own horses that

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Chuckwagon Racing: It's a Family Tradition, cont'd

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winter and haven't looked back. He indicated that buying Woody, his best lead horse ever, was the major difference in his subsequent success. He matched Woody with 21 different horses over the years and that horse trained them all.

Gary says his best memory is winning the CPCA championship with his two sons outriding for him. He has had some bad experiences over the years too. He remembers driving for **Stu Napper** in North Battleford in the 1970s and rolling his wagon coming onto the track. Strangely, the very next year while driving for Ray Croteau, Sr., he did the same thing. Not surprisingly, his worst experience was being involved in one of the worst race crashes of all time at Calgary in 2007.

The other grandfather in this family story is Luke Tournier. Luke's daughter **Shalyn** is married to Gary's son Logan. Luke says it is great to have everyone on the same circuit now. They get to spend lots of time with the grandchildren as compared to previous years when Gary, Logan and **Layne** were on the CPCA circuit. Luke's son Quaid is also an outrider and Layne does so occasionally when he isn't working at his regular job. Luke started driving in 1988, and his career highlights include being a two-time Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby champion and a two-time Calgary Stampede Aggregate Champion. Over the years, Luke has won 14 CPCA shows and 11 WPCA show titles.

Luke says that his favourite wagon memories are the two Calgary Stampede championships. He admits that having the entire family along for the whole season this past year is a close second. Luke is one of the few remaining drivers on the circuit who raced in Cheyenne when the famous Frontier Days still had wagon racing. He remembers that it was difficult to race there because the barrel set-up was different than they were used to.

One of the real advantages to this extended family relationship for Luke is that outrider Dustin Gorst is the one who shoes all the horses in the family

barns. He makes a good part of his living doing that for drivers.

Of course the other relationship that is important to Luke is the one he has with his son Quaid. Twenty-three-year-old Quaid started outriding for Luke in 2008 and had immediate success, winning shows in Drumheller and Strathmore. He suffered a setback in 2010 when he broke his leg in a training accident. He quickly rebounded in 2011 with a title in the first event of the season riding for **Rick Fraser** at the Grande Prairie Stompede.



Luke Tournier



Quaid Tournier



Lane Tournier

Third-generation driver Logan Gorst and brother Dustin, who is an outrider, make up the rest of the family tradition. When Gary started driving again in 1996, Logan was 13 and wanted to be an outrider. He started at 16 and rode successfully until he was 25 and took up driving full time in 2008. As an outrider he captured four CPCA championships and two Calgary Stampede titles.

Both Logan and Gary wear helmets as drivers, which is still fairly rare. Logan said he found it easy to make the transition as he wore one as an outrider. However, he and brother Dustin had to talk Gary into it. They did so by agreeing to wear safety vests if he would wear a helmet.

Logan and Shalyn met on the rodeo/wagon circuit when Luke was still with the CPCA. They have two daughters, **Danika** and **Tayva**, who are queens of the Gorst/Tournier wagon barns.

Logan had been thinking about trying to join the

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Chuckwagon Racing: It's a Family Tradition, cont'd

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WPCA. When Gary indicated he would try as well, they both began preparing for the longer season in that circuit. Logan said he found the competition on the CPCA to be tough as well, but finds it a lot of fun to get to race against drivers whom he considers legends of the sport. Logan buys his horses off the racetracks in Winnipeg and Saskatoon, and says they probably average about \$2,000 each in price. He trains them in the spring and runs them right away in the first year he has them.

Dustin Gorst knew he wanted to be involved in the wagons since he was very young and wants to join his family as a driver some day. He is getting ready for that day by handling horses on the young teams in morning workouts. He has already bought eight horses to start his team. Dustin's best memories are winning the CPCA outriding title in 2010 and winning the Calgary Stampede riding for Luke in 2007. He says his worst memory is from a wreck in Cold Lake in 2009 where he broke both legs.

It must be quite a sight when this extended family goes down the road with their horse trailers, equipment vans, barns and motor homes. I can tell you it is a delight to sit down with any of them and hear their stories about the wagons. Every one of them makes you feel welcome and readily shares stories.



Members of the Tournier/Gorst family, from left to right, back row: **Jaycee Gorst, Dustin Gorst, Quaid Tournier, Leah Vanson, Lane Tournier.** Middle row: **Danika Gorst, Janice Gorst, Gary Gorst, Michelle Tournier, Luke Tournier.** Front row: **Logan Gorst, Tayva Gorst, Shalyn Gorst.**

Photo by Ed Wittchen

Bonnyville's Cowboy Gala Fundraiser

The main fundraiser for the Bonnyville Pro Rodeo and Chuckwagon Association (BPRCA) is the Cowboy Gala held every spring. This is the sixth year for the Gala and the theme is "Gettin' Back to Our Redneck Roots."

The proceeds from this year's event will be going towards a new building at the grounds to house bathrooms, concessions and a new beer gardens, as well as other improvements including the track.

The Cowboy Gala fundraiser will be held on April 20 at the Bonnyville Curling Rink with cocktails at

5pm, supper at 6. There will be live and silent auctions. A dance with music by the Opry Boys will follow the live auction.

The BPRCA appreciates any and all contributions to the auction from WPCA members or sponsors. These tend to sell very well at the auction.

For information about tickets or how to donate to the auction, please contact **Tina Kissel**, BPRCA President, at (780) 815-0264 or tinakissel@mcsnet.ca.

A Look at WPCA Tarp Auctions in 2012 and 2013: Will This Be Another Record-Breaking Year?

It won't be long before the 2013 tarp auctions are underway. The first auction of the year is the Calgary Stampede GMC Rangeland Derby Canvas Auction. It will be on March 21 in the Boyce Pavilion on Stampede Park. Tarps for the 25 drivers who will compete on the 2013 WPCA Pro Tour will be auctioned off along with those for 11 drivers who will run on the CPCA circuit.

For more information on the 2013 Calgary Stampede Canvas Auction, call (403) 828-0226 or visit the Calgary Stampede website at www.calgarystampede.com.

Records were broken at the tarp auction for the Centennial Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby last year. **Kelly Sutherland** set a record for the highest single bid when Tervita paid \$300,000 for the 12-time champion's tarp. The overall total for the sale was a record \$4,015,000, beating the 2007 record total of \$4,003,500.

Almost \$3 million—\$2,895,000 to be precise—of the total was bid on the tarps for 25 WPCA drivers for an average bid of \$115,800 per driver. The average bid on all 36 wagons was \$111,527.78, which was the highest average bids of all time.

The WPCA Pro Tour Canvas Auction will be held April 9 at the Deerfoot Inn & Casino in Calgary, with satellite locations to be announced shortly. This is where advertisers can take advantage of a truly unique opportunity to purchase prime advertising space on a chuckwagon's canvas at race meets throughout western Canada.

This auction includes the tarp auctions for Grande Prairie, Saskatoon, Medicine Hat, High River, Bonnyville, Strathmore, Dawson Creek and Rocky Mountain House. There will be a reception at 4pm with the auction to follow at 5pm. For additional information, contact **Tammy Kristiansen** at (403) 236-2466 or email tammy.kristiansen@wpc.com.

Last year was a great year for the WPCA Tarp Auction. The overall total came in at \$1,679,900, up \$134,650 over the 2011 total for the same shows. All seven shows were up over 2011 totals, and for the first time in history,

each show crossed over the \$200,000 mark. Kelly Sutherland had the top-selling wagon tarp at each of the stops, with \$16,000 per show bid at all seven shows, for a \$112,000 total.

The top-selling show of 2012 was for the Grande Prairie Stompede. It totalled a very impressive \$275,450, up \$35,950 over its 2011 total. The second-highest total of the 2012 auction was the Bonnyville Chuckwagon Championship. It totalled \$263,400, up \$32,400 from 2011.

The final canvas auction of 2013 will be for another of chuckwagon racing's marquis events—the Ponoka Stampede—and will be held on May 3 in the Stagecoach Saloon on the Ponoka Stampede grounds in Ponoka, Alberta. Once again, the tarps of the 36 best chuckwagon drivers in the world will be auctioned off. There will be a reception at 5pm with the auction to follow at 6:30pm. For additional information, contact Tammy Kristiansen or contact **Rick Wierzba** at (403) 785-6088.

At last year's Ponoka Tarp Auction, prime advertising space on the wagons sold for a whopping \$497,500, the second-highest total in Ponoka Stampede history. The 36 drivers who competed at the 2012 Ponoka Stampede got an overall raise of \$85,000 over the 2011 total of \$412,500. For the third consecutive year, the Ponoka Stampede sale was the highest of all of the shows that comprised the 2012 WPCA GMC Pro Tour. Eight-time Ponoka Stampede Champion Kelly Sutherland was the high bid at \$30,000. The average bid was \$13,819.44.

Good luck to all the drivers and to all the bidders as well for the 2013 tarp auction season.

Meet Dr. Ed Pajor

Dr. Ed Pajor is a key member of the WPCA Code of Animal Care Committee. He is Professor of Animal Welfare and Ethology at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine. He also serves as Leader of the Pain and Animal Welfare Research Group. This is a multi-disciplinary group dedicated to understanding basic pain mechanisms, as well as discovering ways to minimizing animal pain and maximizing welfare. During his career, Ed has served on numerous committees and is often invited to present to national and international audiences.

Ed is recognized internationally for his research as well as expertise in animal welfare standards and legislation. He has been a member of McDonald's Advisory Council for over 10 years. He also advises the National Pork Board and the Calgary Stampede.

Ed lives in Calgary with his wife **Julie** and their two children, **Melina** and **Kaelen**.



Meet Darrell Johnston

Darrell Johnston was raised in Rimbey, Alberta. He attended Olds College to study Agricultural Mechanics from 1992 to 1994. After college, he attended the Western Canadian School of Auctioneering in Calgary, and competed as a bull rider and bare-back rider from 1988 to 1998.



Darrell volunteered with the Grande Prairie Stompede from 2000 to 2005. He was the track announcer for the Taste the Dust Pony Chuckwagon Tour from 2006 to 2012. He also volunteered at the Red Deer WPCA event in 2009 and for the Rocky Mountain Chuckwagon Association from 2010 to 2012. He became a Certified Personal Property Appraiser in 2009.

Darrell currently resides near Ponoka, Alberta, with his girlfriend **Theresa Odenbach**, where they operate 5 Star Auction & Consulting Inc. He has been a Lacombe Kinsmen since 2010 and a director of the Auctioneer Association of Alberta since 2005. He is looking forward to a new career with the WPCA and working with everyone to make the 2013 GMC WPCA Tour and those of future years successful.

Meet Gary Gross

Gary Gross is a 26-year-old rodeo and chuckwagon announcer who grew up on a farm near Ponoka. From the first time he saw a chuckwagon race to being invited to announce the run-off in Bashaw last fall, it's always been a dream of Gary's to be part of the WPCA family. He's had the fortune of meeting and learning from mentors such as **Dr. Lynn Phillips**, **Les McIntyre** and the late **Bill Kehler**.

Gary has announced chuckwagon races from Fort McMurray, Alberta, to Albuquerque, New Mexico. He has announced the International Indian Finals Rodeo four times and is a former North American Indian

Rodeo Association Announcer of the Year.

Gary prides himself on bringing a great deal of knowledge, colour, entertainment and delightful insights into his job of announcing the sport of chuckwagon racing.

When he is not behind the microphone, he enjoys golfing and cheering on the Oilers.

