



# Turning the Barrels

## WPCA Newsletter

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### Behind The Scenes: A Day With The WPCA Broadcast Crew

Story and photos by Ed Wittchen

I used to assume that the WPCA radio broadcast crew had a pretty simple gig: show up a few minutes before show time, plug in the mics, do the live show and then leave.

Even factoring in the extra half hour after the broadcast is done so co-host and colour commentator **Billy Melville** can put the final race results on the website, I thought the entire crew must have had a short work day.

After spending several days with the crew, I can tell you it is quite different in reality.

The crew's day starts around 10am with a production meeting with the host committee and other WPCA reps. All aspects of the previous day's show are reviewed and that day's show is planned out to the minute.

A typical production meeting goes like this: WPCA field rep **Darrel Johnston** and the show director (one of the driver directors) review any concerns about the track with the host committee's track person. Billy and/or **Arnie Jackson**, the broadcast's producer and co-host, are there to gain insights into those conditions. They can use what they've learned during the broadcast later that night.

In Grande Prairie, for example, the broadcast team had a couple of issues they needed resolved. There was no local radio station broadcasting the races this year and the location is out of range for both stations that were broadcasting the races,



WPCA race broadcast producer and co-host **Arnie Jackson** and 1060 AM engineer **Justin Azevedo** in the broadcast booth.

Classic Country AM 1060 from Calgary and The Wolf 99.7 FM from Bonnyville. Drivers in the barn area depend on the broadcast to know when to start hooking their horses. A solution was found: **John Vold** of Vold Sound offered the use of his low-watt transmitter so that the broadcast could go out over a short radius, including the barn area. This solution will also be used at other venues during the season.

Arnie spends the afternoon scripting the entire 135-minute show, making sure that all sponsor commercials are included. The broadcast booth is often in a high place, requiring a steep climb to the press box. Getting people live on air is sometimes difficult. The broadcast locations tend to be small and crowded with the four team

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members sometimes all in there at once. Arnie will often interview people during the day and then insert these interviews into the show.

Occasionally a guest will join them in the booth. When outrider **Dustin Gorst** was injured with a concussion, for example, he came to the booth and shared his insights for a few nights in Medicine Hat.

Billy drafts the summary sheets for the night's races so all he has to do is fill in the names and times. That showed me how he is able to get the heat results and the nightly results online so quickly.

During the day, Billy and Arnie are often called away to do public relations events, such as a UFA barbecue or Encana Race against Hunger. They can also take that time to interview local people for inserts into that night's show.

About 90 minutes before broadcast time, the crew arrives to get set up and connected to Calgary. Thirty minutes before race time, they are joined in the "Eye in the Sky" booth next door by track announcers **Les McIntyre** or **Gary Gross** and race secretary **Norm Braybrook**. For the broadcasts to start on time and end on time requires close cooperation from Norm and Darrel.

As race secretary, Norm Braybrook is responsible for all aspects of the judges and official results. He also makes sure that the track announcer has information on any tarp changes for that night's show. He has to make sure that the judges have the cameras charged, set up and working, and that the timing equipment is in place and working.

After the show, he has to field any protests from drivers, get the judges to review films from any



Arnie Jackson interviews WPCA driver **Jason Glass**. These types of interview segments are used later in the day during the live broadcast.

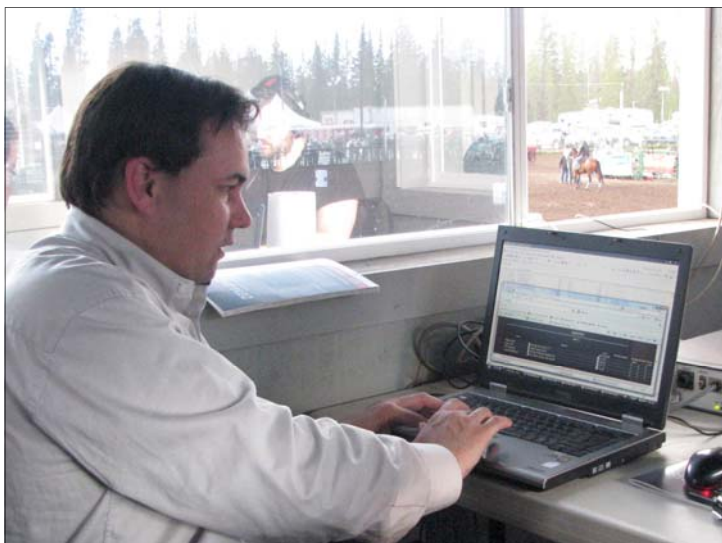
protests or any judge's inquiries, and then coordinate with Billy Melville to get the official results posted.

As WPCA field representative, Darrel Johnston has to put up 130 feet of sponsors' banners along the infield fence every night. Then, in conjunction with **Mark Sutherland** and **Codey McCurrach**, he has to set the barrels according to the rules and get the lane markers in place. During the show, Darrel is responsible for the infield and for making sure they stick to the tight schedule. He has to get the barrels in place to start heats and get them off the track once the heat has started. He has to get the infield crew to put the turn back barrier in place before each race and get the next heat ready to go.

Once the broadcast starts, the booth is a blur of activity. **Justin Azevedo**, the engineer from 1060 AM, is focused on the tech-

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**Billy Melville** entering the results so the fans can have quick access to the latest race information.

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nical equipment. He rarely sees more than a few minutes of the actual races. Similarly, Arnie is focused on making sure all aspects of the broadcast go smoothly, all commercials are aired and there is no dead air time. Billy is focused on the infield. He is able to recognize the outriders by sight and, using his historical knowledge, provides excellent colour commentary. At the same time, he is doing the web updates on heat results so fans can see what is happening.

I always thought the day ended when the last heat ended. That's not the case. When the heat finishes, it's off to the judges' trailer where they review films and rule on any driver protests or judges' inquiries. Once a decision is made, Norm and Billy make the adjustments and double-check to make sure their statistics match. Norm then gets the results out to each driver and Billy posts them online to the WPCA website, Facebook page and Twitter feed, and sends them to various media outlets for use the next day. Most days end around 11pm with a late dinner.

WPCA chuckwagon fans can listen to the broadcasts live throughout the season on Classic Country AM

1060 from Calgary or on The Wolf 99.7 FM out of Bonnyville. For fans outside these listening areas, you can also tune in online by visiting the live streaming link under the multimedia section at [www.halfmileofhell.com](http://www.halfmileofhell.com). The broadcasts are produced by JSA Sports and cover every race of the season.

It takes a lot of work by a lot of people to get these races broadcast out to fans. Let's take a closer look at the people behind the show.

The producer and co-host is veteran radio announcer Arnie Jackson. Arnie has 50 years of experience as a broadcaster and on-air personality. Arnie has covered the chuckwagon races on Shaw TV in both Edmonton and Calgary for many years. In his long and distinguished career Arnie has reported on every level of sport, from local amateur level to the Calgary Stampede to the National Finals Rodeo. He is considered one of North America's foremost rodeo broadcasters. His success includes not only the three traditional mediums of radio, television and newspaper but these days he also keeps current with social media.

Co-host Billy Melville grew up around chuckwagon races and is considered the historian of the sport. He is the grandson of legendary driver **Orville Strandquist**. He has been the colour commentator for the WPCA since 2001. He is arguably the most complete and trusted source of information on the sport of chuckwagon racing today.

Billy has worked on Shaw TV's coverage of the Ponoka Stampede, Edmonton Chuckwagon Derby and the Calgary Stampede. He has also worked on television coverage of the Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby. Billy writes a regular column called "Wheel to Wheel" for *Can-*

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*dian Cowboy Country Magazine*. Billy also produces the WPCA's *Spectator Guide*, a favourite of fans everywhere.

**Jessica Hoy's** role is WPCA public relations and media liaison. Jessica is a licensed practical nurse who is currently back in school working toward a communications degree with a focus in radio broadcasting. She has been going to chuckwagon races with her grandpa since she was little, and is thrilled to be joining the WPCA team for the summer.

Jessica does radio broadcast support for the team with behind-the-scenes interviews and offers interactive opportunities for fans with the WPCA Twitter account during the races. Watch for Jessica's Twitter contests (@WPCAChucks) to win great prizes.

Justin Azevedo is the 1060 AM engineer in the booth. It's his job to make sure the broadcast gets back to the station in Calgary to be transmitted on air and on the website streaming link for both 1060 AM and The Wolf 99.7 FM in Bonnyville. Justin is also a sportswriter who contributes to the Flames Nation site among others.

Track announcer Les McIntyre has called well in excess of 10,000 chuckwagon races in his career, which is closing in on 30 years. The majority of his race calls have been on the WPCA Pro Tour, but he has announced a few shows on the Canadian Professional Chuckwagon Association (CPCA) circuit as well. He was named the WPCA's Chuckwagon Person of the Year in 1998, and has been the professional voice of the Canadian Finals Rodeo in Edmonton.

"Les is an outstanding ambassador for both the sport of chuckwagon racing and the sport of rodeo," said **Paul Rosenberg**, former Calgary Stam-



Hard at work, even after the races are done. **Norm Braybrook** and Billy Melville wrap up the day by completing the day's results.

pede vice president. "With his experience as both a competitor and announcer, we know that our fans are professionally entertained and informed every heat and every night."

Les is calling the races in Grande Prairie, High River, Ponoka, Strathmore and Dawson Creek this year.

Gary Gross is the track announcer in Saskatoon, Medicine Hat, Bonnyville, Rocky Mountain House and Bashaw. 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. Gary 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 chuckwagon races.

Hats off to this hard-working crew!

## The Dakota Dunes Breakfast And Radio Show

Despite the rain-shortened show in Saskatoon this year, there was still plenty to do for wagon race fans. That's thanks in part to Dakota Dunes Casino, one of the WPCA's newest partners, who hosted two events in Saskatoon.

Friday morning saw drivers and outriders attend a buffet breakfast. Fans were able to meet them and get photos or autographed posters from their heroes. This was a great chance to get close to and learn about the cowboys in the WPCA. The Stevenot family from Meadow Lake, for example, showed up early in the morning to support the Gorst family. They had heard about the breakfast the night before on The Wolf 99.7 FM while driving down and listening to the opening night races.

The guys are genuinely appreciative of the fans. As soon as the first fans showed up, for example, **Jerry Bremner** went around to their tables, introducing himself and signing posters. Way to show true western hospitality, Jerry!

When the races were cancelled on Saturday night, **Arnie Jackson** and **Billy Melville** arranged to do a live on-air radio show from Dakota Dunes during the race time slot. Several drivers were interviewed, as well as key Dakota Dunes management staff. The broadcast



Billy and Arnie live on the air with Hugh Sinclair.



"We came down to cheer on Gary!"

was set up just inside the main doors to the Casino. Patrons were able to stop by to watch and listen for a few minutes on their way in or out of the casino.

## A True Community Ambassador Is Recognized

**Reg Willick** of HJR Asphalt was recently presented the UFA Community Ambassador Award Buckle for his work in making Saskatoon a success. He was instrumental in supporting the tribute to **Ashley Richards**, who was tragically killed in a roadside work accident. He was also key in lining up several sponsors to make the Saskatoon show a success. His staff took turns working the turn back barrier in the infield.

Every show needs a Reg Willick, working tirelessly in the background for the good of the community—just what this prestigious award recognizes.



WPCA and Prairieland Park management staff present Reg with his award while HJR staff look on.



## Rick Fraser Wins Medicine Hat

**R**ick Fraser won his second championship of the 2013 season and his second Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede Championship on June 16.

Rick has now won 17 titles in his 17 years as a driver on the tour. In addition, Rick was the 2004 World Champion and won six Calgary Stampede outriding championships. Rick has had a great start to his season, winning both Grande Prairie and Medicine Hat.

**Billy Melville** described it as “a classic sudden-death final” that featured **Gary Gorst**, Rick Fraser and **Colt Cosgrave**. When the dust settled on what was an exciting final, it was Rick Fraser, driving the Hellfire Suppression Services/Northwell Oilfield Hauling outfit along with outriders **Chase Vigen** and **Chad Fike**, who captured the 2013 Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede Championship.

Obviously it doesn't hurt your chances of winning when you have two outriders who between them have won six of the last nine World Outrider Champion titles.



Left to right: Outrider **Chad Fike**, driver **Rick Fraser**, Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede's **LeRay Pahl** and outrider **Chase Vigen**. Photo by Jessica Hoy

Coming off barrel number one in the feature heat number 12, Fraser's penalty-free run of 1:00.75 was 1.22 seconds faster than Colt Cosgrave's penalty-free run from barrel number three. Gary Gorst ran second in the race from barrel number two, but a late outrider penalty bumped him back to third place overall in the winner-take-all final. Congratulations to Rick and his team!

## Pictures From Ponoka: At Work And At Play



Left: **Roger Moore** at work fixing a wagon wheel during the Ponoka Stampede.



Right: Roger (right) taking some time for some grub during a sponsor barbecue in Ponoka.

## Roger Moore Claims Ponoka Stampede



Left to right: Outrider **Shawn Calf Robe**, driver **Roger Moore** and outrider **Quaid Tournier**. Photo by Billy Melville

Story by Billy Melville

**I**t was Semi-Final Sunday on Day 5 of the Ponoka Stampede, and the races were run under a few clouds and a warm 22°C.

Tension ran high as eight drivers running in two heats were trying to survive the semi-final round and looking for a spot in Monday's winner-take-all final.

When it all played out, **Kelly Sutherland**, **Roger Moore**, **Jerry Bremner** and **Luke Tournier** survived the semi-final round and comprised the \$50,000 Tommy Dorchester Winner-Take-All

Championship final heat. **Ross Knight** just missed the winner-take-all final by a mere 5/100ths of a second.

This highly anticipated championship takes place during one of chuckwagon racing's most prestigious events from June 26 to July 1. In one of the most exciting chuckwagon races of the year, Roger Moore, driving the Pidherney's outfit along with outriders **Shawn Calf Robe** and **Quaid Tournier**, collected the first place winner's cheque, a new GMC Sierra Pickup Truck and the 2013 Ponoka Stampede Championship title.

Coming off barrel number 2 in the sudden-death final, Moore captured the Ponoka crown with a penalty-free run of 1:14.27. Luke Tournier placed second in the heat from barrel number 1 just 38/100ths of a second behind champion Roger Moore, followed by Jerry Bremner and Kelly Sutherland from barrels 3 and 4 respectively in a penalty-free championship final heat.

Roger Moore has won nine times during his time on the Canadian Pro Circuit. The Ponoka victory marks not only his first on the World Professional Chuckwagon Association Pro Tour since joining in 2012, but his first in a major chuckwagon event. A big congratulations to Roger and his team!



Roger Moore driving the Pidherney's outfit with his outriders **Shawn Calf Robe** and **Quaid Tournier**.



## The Making Of A New Chuckwagon Fan (Who Ultimately Became A Sponsor)

Story by Jim Hammill,  
president of Roadtrek

I have been following the wagons for about three years now, after seeing them first at the Calgary Stampede in 2010 with my two boys, then 10 and 8 years old, and with **Jim** and **Denise Bottomley**, whom we are very lucky to know as friends and business partners.

How did I end up as not just a new fan but a wagon sponsor too? Well, it is the usual story with me—it was spontaneous.

In 2009, Jim Bottomley came to the Roadtrek factory to visit us, and I was pleased to bring him to visit my family and my home. We even went to one of my boys' soccer games, and the kids fell in love with Jim. Jim told them stories about the Stampede, and frankly, I was so busy with work, I did not pay attention. Apparently, during that visit over dinner, I committed to bring the boys to the Stampede.

A year later, I came home one Friday afternoon and there was my son **Jack**, looking ticked off with me. He said, "Hi Dad, you promised you would take us to the Calgary Stampede!"

Well, I must admit, I didn't remember saying that, but I must have or he would not have said it. So I said, "Oh yeah, let me call Mr. Bottomley and find out when it is!" I pulled out my trusty Blackberry and I called Jim and said, "Hey Jim, when is that Stampede you mentioned to me?"

"Funny you mention that, Hammill," Jim said. "Denise and I are going down tonight."

"Tonight? You mean it is on now?"

"Yep, the next 10 days," he confirmed.

I looked over at Jack, who was standing there with

his arms crossed, looking at me closely. I said, "I will call you back, Jim."

Of course Jack was waiting for the typical dad excuse or a reason why I was failing in my promise. I hung up and put the phone down.

Jack said, "Dad, I could have told you it started tonight, why do you think I brought it up? I saw it on TV!"

I looked at my wife, and looked at Jack, and looked at **William**, who had bumbled into the room, and I said, "OK, let's go right now." I called and got three seats on a jet in Toronto, loaded the two kids in my truck and took off for Toronto airport. Seven hours later, we were looking around for a hotel at 11:30pm in Calgary (I had no reservation).

Surprising none of you, there were no rooms to be had in Calgary, on the first night of the Stampede. Of course, I had followed my usual planning procedure—none.

We stopped in the Radisson Airport, near the airport, and I unloaded our three bags. I went to the front desk with my two boys. I walked right up and handed her my credit card, and said, "Hi there, **Jim Hammill** checking in."

The woman behind the desk looked at the computer and said, "Did you have a reservation?"

"Yep," I said, "three nights!"

She looked and looked at the computer and apologized to me. She said, "I am going to

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## The Making Of A New Chuckwagon Fan, cont'd

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have to get my manager.” This lovely lady in a cowboy hat came out of the back and said, “I am so sorry this is happening to you, sir, with these two little ones with you, but we can’t seem to find your reservation.”

I looked at the boys and said, “Well, boys, we may have to sleep in the car tonight! Not these ladies’ fault, sometimes these things happen!”

The boys were so tired they did not care, and I turned to head out to the car with them when she said, “Wait, hold on. We will find something.” They literally put a room together for us, with cots and a couch (it was a conference room).

The next day, our first order of business was to get chuckwagon tickets for all of us and for the Bottomleys. We waited in line for about an hour, and then the rain started and the cold started (Calgary in July 2010 was freezing for some reason). We finally got tickets sorted out. It was 120 bucks a head, and I thought, “Wow, that is pricey!” (Little did I know how much it would cost me over the next few years.)

That day was busy. We watched a hypnotist and The Barenaked Ladies, and we rode the overhead cable car. Then we made the most expensive mistake of my life. We met Jim and Denise and went to the wagon races. To make a long story short, we watched the wagon races and we were all blown away by the competition, the action and the cowboys. We were completely blown away that this sport existed and we had not even known about it. I had spent many years in the army, and had been to Alberta (Edmonton and Wainright) many times, but I had never even heard of the chuckwagon races.

We went to the barns afterward where a couple of



**Barry Hodgson's** wagon, which is sponsored by Roadtrek. The sponsorship came about after Roadtrek president **Jim Hammill** unwittingly became a chuckwagon racing fan, thanks in part to his two sons and a couple of wagon race-loving friends.

drivers took the boys on a tour and gave them pins and posters. My kids fell in love with the wagons, the horses and the drivers.

When the races started, I had no idea what a chuckwagon was, what a thoroughbred was (I had heard the term) and I had no idea what was about to happen on the race-track. I did not even have a cowboy hat back then. I thought I would be acting inappropriately to put one on. (I don't like pretending to be somebody I am not.) I grew up around barns and quarter horses, and my wife grew up on a dairy farm, and yet we had not heard of the chuckwagons.

I entered the race building with the boys and Jim and Denise. We were a bit early so we went to the concessions to get a bite and a beer. Jim introduced us to a man named **Kelly Carson**, who asked me why I did not have a hat. I said, “Well, we are not cowboys, we are from Ontario, and we

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## The Making Of A New Chuckwagon Fan, cont'd

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came to see the Stampede with Jim and Denise.” That Kelly Carson looked me in the eye and said, “If you are going to be here at the Stampede, you should have a hat. We would sure appreciate it if you would wear one.”

I thought about it, and I looked at Jim, and he said, “Yep, I told you, Hammill, you should have hats on you and those boys.”

The boys were, of course, by this time bouncing up and down, having asked me for a hat about 5,000 times that day. Realizing I was now cannon fodder, I agreed to go buy them hats. I looked for one for me as well.

Like any Ontario boy (not a city boy, but an Ontario boy), I ended up with the most ridiculous **John Wayne**-size hat. It cost me a couple hundred bucks and I looked like what I was...a big guy from Ontario who just bought a hat. But the boys, well, they loved their hats and they looked great.

It got worse, because the next day at the Stampede it started to hail and got freezing cold. Like the dad I am (and not listening at all to my wife), I had only t-shirts and shorts for the boys. I ended up in Lammle's buying them jeans, long-sleeve shirts, western jackets and boots. Now the two boys were all duded up. Of course, I was still in shorts with my funny looking hat and sandals.

On Saturday night, an outrider horse broke a leg and collapsed on the final sprint. The trailer and the tarps were brought out to block the crowd's view of the horse as it was euthanized. It was clear to me that the people taking care of the horse were greatly concerned about it. The driver had immediately dismounted after the race and sprinted all the way back out to the horse to be with him for his final moments, and the crowd was sombre. It was clear from watching the driver, even from a great distance, that he was very distraught.

I remember hearing the announcer calling the races

that night, and thinking how good he was, probably the best I had ever heard in any sport. After the horse's injury and death, he was openly talking about how these men care so dearly for their horses, and how much it hurt when they lost one.

The emotion of the moment was overwhelming. Today I know that announcer was **Les McIntyre**. He managed to convey the sincere emotion of the moment for this wagon family. He also managed over the next week to demonstrate to me how important the sponsors were, and how damn exciting the races were. We stayed for seven days instead of three, and we went to the wagon races every single night. My addiction and my family's love for wagon racing was born.

How did I move from that uninformed eastern dude to being an active sponsor? Like most tarp sponsors, I invest money, in most cases without any promised return.

We are goodwill sponsors who do so because of a few factors:

- Friendship (that's why I do it)
- Ego (not me—in Ontario, people think I am deranged for doing it)
- Social life and family way of life (critical to me)
- Love of the western/rural way of life (that one is important to me too)
- The belief in the sport (we all love the wagon races)
- The concept that this is like a charity (wrong, in my opinion)

Thank you to my fellow WPCA sponsors!