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TURNING THE BARRELS

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A new regular feature on some of the legends of the sport. This issue: **Dave Lewis**, as remembered by **Rick Fraser**.

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The tarp auction can be exciting but in the past it's also been exhausting, with some auctions clocking in at over six hours. Learn how the WPCA is working to improve the auction and decrease the amount of time it takes.

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THE NASHVILLE SCENE

The WPCA recently sent four representatives down to Nashville for a media tour to promote the sport of chuckwagon racing. They got great coverage, and met a few country music superstars along the way.

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...AND MORE!



Dave Lewis at the 1993 Calgary Stampede.

From Our Archives



Dave Lewis was a “great man, a wonderful Dad, a great role model and a pretty fair wagon driver,” according to world champ Rick Fraser.

The team shown here won the 1982 Calgary Stampede and is considered by many to be one of the greatest teams of all time.

I HAD A chance recently to sit next to **Rick Fraser** on a two-hour flight from Dallas to Nashville. I took the opportunity to ask him about the legendary driver **Dave Lewis**, the man he lovingly calls Dad. An emotional Rick described how when he was 10 or 11, his mom married Dave Lewis. Dave became his dad in every way, and he was a “great man, a wonderful Dad, a great role model and a pretty fair wagon driver.”

Rick stated that they can say what they want about Dave Lewis but when it came to horsemanship, he probably did more with less than any driver of the modern era. He just knew when it came to picking out good wagon horses. Rick remembered buying his first outfit. Dave told him to go see **Ray Croteau, Sr.**, because Ray was honest and wouldn't sell him any bad horses.

When Rick pulled into the yard with his new horses, Dave took one look while they were unloading and said that little chestnut (**Fancy Oats**) is your horse. He is going to be worth more than all the rest of your

outfit. Rick says Dave was right, as he won a lot of money with that horse.

Eddie Melville, who has been around racing his whole life, says that he considers Dave Lewis to be one of the top five wagon drivers of all time. He also stated that there has probably never been a driver that looked less like a wagon driver than Dave Lewis. You never saw him in a cowboy hat except in a race, and with his glasses he just didn't fit the typical wagon driver look.

Rick said “I knew Dad was a good driver. One example is that there was a time in Red Deer where another driver had to leave the track for personal business, so Dave took them out. When the horn went, the lead horses never moved and the wheel horses lifted the wagon right up. Dad still got them straightened out and finished fourth in the day money. With the same outfit, their regular driver was 28th the next day.”

Dave's mentor was **Ralph Vigen**. They were racing in Cloverdale when Dave was just starting. Ralph took the wagon through

LEGENDS: Dave Lewis

The first in a series of articles that will look back at some of the legends of our sport.

By Ed Wittchen



Dave Lewis with his 1982 outrider crew, featuring three future world champion chuckwagon drivers!

From left: Jerry Bremner, Rick Fraser, Dave Lewis, George Normand and Ross Nelson.

the barrel turn and told Dave “just follow those tracks and you’ll be okay.”

In 1982, Dave assembled one of the greatest horse teams ever. It consisted of right leader **Freddie**, left leader **Gray Hawk**, left wheeler **Muscles** and right wheeler **Anderson**. He went to Calgary that year with only six horses: four wagon horses and two outrider horses. He borrowed two outrider horses from **Joe King** and totally dominated the Stampede. They won day money 6 days out of 10.

Rick said his Dad lost interest in going down the road after Rick’s mom died. For a number of years, he would lend his horses to other drivers after the Calgary Stampede. He would loan them to drivers he liked and who he thought needed a horse or two.

Starting in 1983, he went to the Calgary Stampede on a special invitation and won the Rangeland Derby twice more. There were drivers who lobbied the Stampede to quit issuing the special invitations to drivers,

and eventually Calgary quit inviting them. That ended Dave’s career.

Rick reminisced about what Dave taught him about driving. Dave thought Ralph Vigen and **Hally Walgenbach** were the best drivers. Early on, Rick had problems with running over barrels. Dave figured Rick and **Mike Vigen** needed a lesson. They spent the afternoon watching him tie the lines to a truck mirror and showing them how to get around the barrels.

His favourite advice from his dad? “Just go for it. Let them go and they will do what needs to be done.”

LEGENDS: Dave Lewis, continued



Dave gets his bronze at the 1982 Stampede.



Tarp Auction Improvements

WHEN WPCA PRESIDENT **Arnold McKernon** and officer **Ed Wittchen** visited the various committees last September, the length of the tarp auction was the most common issue raised. For several years now, lots of people have complained about the length of the auction. An example is the 2013 Tarp Auction, which was over six hours long.

The WPCA Board of Directors is committed to trying to find a way to reduce the length of the evening. Over the winter, officers and driver directors had several meetings to examine various options with its partners at CLSA and the Deerfoot Inn. The result is a one-year trial of the following process:

1. Drivers who had tarps sold prior to the auction were to submit the location and tarp amount to the WPCA office by the end of day on March 31, 2014. No late forms were accepted.
2. On April 1, the WPCA office sent a report to each venue committee listing the driver's name and the price it had been conditionally sold for. The committee had 24 hours to respond back to the WPCA with which sales they were accepting and declining. All accepted sales were then removed from the live auction and the tarp sponsor was invoiced for the tarp price

submitted. All declined sales were moved to the live auction with the starting bid owned by the venue committee at the tarp sale price listed plus \$500.

3. On April 2, the WPCA office contacted all drivers who submitted forms to let them know where their bids were accepted and would be removed from the live auction, and which sales were declined.
4. The live auction was held April 8 for all remaining tarps.

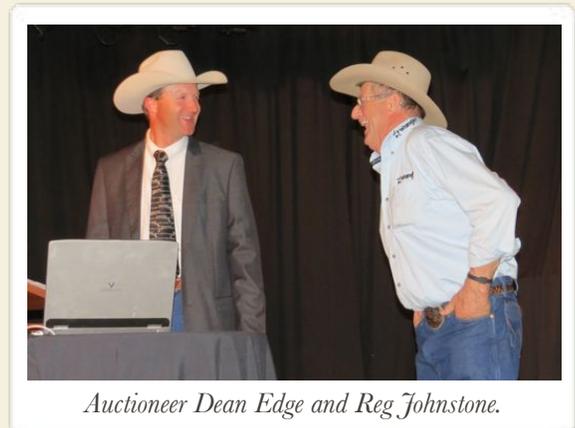
Of the 36 drivers, 24 submitted pre-sales. The WPCA officially sold 138 tarps of the 288 available. Of the 138 pre-sale bids, 10 were not accepted by the committees and so went back in the auction at \$500 higher than the pre-sale bid, with the bid being owned by the committee.

For the most part it was a good strategy, as 9 of the 10 tarps sold for a higher price. The only exception was in Saskatoon where the committee did not attract a higher bid for **Kelly Sutherland**. This meant the WPCA as the committee owned the tarp and is working on selling it to other sponsors.

The Rocky Mountain House Committee declined four bids. They

declined **Rae Croteau** at \$6,000 and he went for \$7,750 in the live auction. Kelly Sutherland was declined at \$7,000 and was sold for \$8,000. **Kirk Sutherland** was declined at \$6,000 and was sold at \$8,000. **Mitch Sutherland** was declined at \$4,000 and sold in the auction for \$7,000.

The Strathmore Committee declined four bids as well. **Chad Harden** was declined at \$4,000 and sold in the auction for \$4,750. Kirk Sutherland



Auctioneer Dean Edge and Reg Johnstone.

was not accepted for \$6,000 and then sold for \$8,000. Mitch Sutherland was turned down for \$3,000 and then sold in the auction for \$7,000. The Bonnyville Committee also declined a bid on one tarp. **Mark Sutherland** was declined at \$4,000 and then sold for \$6,000. The Saskatoon Committee declined the bid of \$4,000 for Kelly Sutherland.



Tarp Auction Improvements, continued

It is important to note that both Saskatoon and Medicine Hat tarp sales are operated by the WPCA, so for those two we are the committee. In this case the committee bid was \$4,500 and there were no additional bids at the live auction. As a result, the WPCA owns the Kelly Sutherland tarp.

Reaction to the revised format was mixed. The auction was over before 9pm, which cut two and a half hours out of the process. That was good. Drivers and their longtime sponsors were happy because they were able to make the commitment to each other and not have to worry about someone bidding them up with little or no intention of buying them.

Admittedly, venue committees are not universally happy with the results of the new process. The total revenue went down, with the exception of Bonnyville. Attendance at all sites was down. This needs to be analyzed. There will be meetings and discussions between the WPCA and the various committees to look at this year's process and see where we go from here.

The auction took place at the Deerfoot Inn and Casino in their Chrome Room. Remote sites included Grande Prairie, Saskatoon, Rocky Mountain House and Bonnyville.

Early in the afternoon **Tammy Kristiansen**, WPCA office manager,

worked with **Chris McRobbie**, the audio visual coordinator for the

fresh-off-the-presses 2014 *Spectator's Guide*.



Jessica Hoy and Les McIntyre.

Les McIntyre arrived about 4 for sound check and to review his notes for the evening. The last to arrive were the auctioneers, who set up and went over the process with Les.

Finally at 5:15pm, the live auction started. To the casual observer it might seem like everyone just shows up and away we go, but as you can see, a lot of people have to do a lot of things first.



Billy Melville and Craig Jacklin.

The same processes were repeated in the remote sites as they got ready to do their part. Computers had to be set up, the link to the auction site had to be checked, registrations taken and more.

Deerfoot Inn, and **Craig Jacklin**, the coordinator for Canadian Satellite Live Auctions (CSLA), to get the technical details working. A practice session was held with each of the remote sites if they wished to take part to make sure that things would go smoothly.

The auction went smoothly and the new process took almost three hours off the previous time.

There were some issues, however, that we will have to work out with the various committees, the drivers and sponsors.

By 4pm, Craig's team and Tammy's team were on site, ready to go. **Billy Melville** arrived about 3pm and set up to do live updates on the website and Facebook, and to distribute the

Now we need to review with the committees whether we actually accomplished the other objective: Overall, did we improve the tarp auction or not?



Promoting the WPCA in Nashville and Across North America

OUR NEW BROADCAST partners recently asked the WPCA to send a team to Nashville to help with preseason radio and television promotion on the races.

The team consisted of two-time (and current reigning) world champion driver **Rick Fraser**, five-time Calgary Stampede champion outrider **Eddie Melville**, broadcaster **Billy Melville** and WPCA officer **Ed Wittchen** as part of that team. (Billy and Ed were heavily involved in getting the broadcast contract in place.)

Our objectives were to spread word about the broadcasts to our partners' audiences across North America and to inform fans about the WPCA races and personalities.

It was interesting watching people react to the three wagon personalities on the way to Nashville. The guys talked to people about what we were doing and racing in general. Fans from Alberta recognized them in the line-ups, Billy passed out copies of the *Spectator's Guide* to anyone who showed an interest, and Rick and Eddie even signed autographs for new fans at the Dallas and Nashville airports.

The first task when we got to Nashville was to do an interview on the radio program "Western Sports Roundup" on Rural Radio Channel 80 (our host station this summer) with **Amy Wilson** and veteran rodeo announcer **Steve Kenyon**. This is the premier sports news show on Rural Radio, broadcast every evening.

To hear the interview, visit <https://soundcloud.com/wpcaruralradio-interview-thu-apr-24-2014>.

Randy Bernard, president and CEO of Rural Media Group, and several other Rural Radio executives were on hand to meet the team and plan some strategies for getting the word out about our broadcast schedule.

The next few hours were spent with the RFD TV crew. On-air host **Mark Oppold**, the show's producer and director, sound technicians and video coordinators were all involved. Mark got up to speed about chuckwagon racing, which allowed him and the director to plan the show and select the videos they wanted to use to illustrate key things about wagon racing that they wanted to feature. We were all impressed with how quickly he picked it up and how smoothly he was able to integrate everything into the show.

Next up was a session with **Cherokee Hart**, a professional make-up artist, who was preparing us for an upcoming appearance on "Rural America Live," a



Making new fans at the airport.



Live on the air on Rural Radio.



The WPCA and Rural Radio teams.



Promoting the WPCA in Nashville and Across North America, continued

weekly hour-long television show featuring viewer call-in segments.

Billy then did some voice promos for Rural Radio to play during the day to remind listeners that starting May 28 they can tune into the races every day during the season. There will be a 135-minute show every night even if there is a rainout. On those days, Billy and **Arnie Jackson** will host a show featuring interviews with key personnel. They'll also use some pre-taped features that will have been prepared specifically for those occasions.

At 9pm, Billy and his obviously nervous sidekicks went on live with host Mark Oppold. Randy Bernard and Ed went to the control room so they could help monitor and screen the calls and then pass on the best questions to the host. After a 10-minute introduction and some selected video clips, the phone lines were opened up.

The switchboard lit up right away! Calls were expected to come in from the northern bordering states like Montana, Idaho and North Dakota, and maybe Wyoming because of Cheyenne where they were already familiar with wagon racing. It was a pleasant surprise, however, to see that calls were coming in from across the USA.

The first call came from Minnesota from some of Eddie's old hockey buddies who were watching the show. (Did you know that Eddie played for Bemidji State University and they won three national championships

while he was there? Ask him to show you one of his huge championship rings.)

Over the next 45 minutes, the switchboard stayed lit up as people called in with their questions. We selected the best ones and put them on hold. Randy Bernard and Ed worked with the telephone operators to respond to others personally if the questions weren't ideal to put on air because they were not as relevant or were repeat questions.

RFD TV executives were impressed with the quality of the questions and the fact that they were coming in from across the country. We ultimately accepted questions from Minnesota (two), Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Texas (three), Oregon, Colorado (two), Oklahoma and Nebraska.

The quality of the questions made it easy for the three on-air team members to respond and to explain the sport. Some of the questions included

- How do you choose where to put the horses on the team?
- Where do you get your horses from?
- How old are wagon horses and outrider horses?
- What does an outrider do?
- What do these horses cost?



Cherokee Hart preparing Rick Fraser.



Live on "Rural America Live."



Promoting the WPCA in Nashville and Across North America, continued

- Where would you buy your wagon and what did it cost?
- Can you explain the canvas tarps and the logos that are on them?
- What do you do to train your horses to pull a wagon?
- What diet do you feed your horses? Do they get any nutritional supplements?
- Will you ever come back to Cheyenne? Does Buddy Bensmiller still race?
- Do any of your drivers race in the Houston show?

Calls were still coming in even after the show ended, and they told us that they continued to get calls the next day asking about the broadcasts to come.

We were fortunate while we were there to get to go to the famous Bluebird Café. Fortunate because we were on a waiting list and got the last four spots—it only holds about 40 to 50 people. The featured songwriter was **Don Schlitz**. You might very well ask who is Don Schlitz? Well, the answer is he is a Songwriter Hall of Fame member with over 30 number one hits recorded by a wide variety of artists. His song list includes

- “The Gambler” – **Kenny Rogers**
- “The Greatest” – **Kenny Rogers**
- “On the Other Hand” – **Randy Travis**
- “Forever and Ever, Amen” – **Randy Travis**
- “When You Say Nothing at All” – **Keith Whitley, Alison Krauss, Ronan Keating**
- “Rockin’ with the Rhythm of the Rain” – **The Judds**
- “Forty Hour Week” – **Alabama**
- “If You Can do Anything Else” – **George Strait**
- “One Promise Too Late” – **Reba McEntire**
- “I Feel Lucky” – **Mary Chapin Carpenter**
- “I Watched It All On My Radio” – **Lionel Cartwright**

With over 30,000 visitors in town for the Music City Marathon, it was no surprise that the Grand Ol’ Opry was

sold out. However, Randy Bernard found a way for us to go. Country music star **Marty Stuart** is one of the main on-air personalities for RFD TV. Marty is married to Country Music Hall of Fame member **Connie Smith**, who was performing on the Opry that night. They arranged for Connie to host us with backstage passes. As a result, we had the unique opportunity to sit right on the stage with the performers and to be able to go backstage to the dressing room area to visit with the stars that night, including **Larry Gatlin** and **Vince Gill**.

As we’ve reported in previous issues, Rural Media Group, Inc. is the world’s leading provider of multimedia content dedicated to the rural and western lifestyle. RMG is the parent company of RFD-TV, FamilyNet, Rural TV, RFD-TV the Magazine and RFD-TV the Theatre.

RFD-TV, the flagship network for RMG, launched in December 2000. RFD-TV is the USA’s first 24-hour television network dedicated to serving the needs and interests of rural America with programming focused on agriculture, equine and the rural lifestyle, along with traditional country music and entertainment. Corporate headquarters are in Omaha, Nebraska, and production operations are in Nashville.

Rural Radio is found exclusively on SiriusXM Channel 80, the Agribusiness and Western Lifestyle Channel. Rural Radio launched on July 15, 2013, as a 24/7 satellite radio station for the United States and Canada. Rural Radio’s program schedule revolves around original productions focused on agriculture, equine, hunting, fishing, western sports, and living the country life in small towns and ranches. Rural Radio has recently signed deals with the PBR, National Finals Rodeo and ProRodeo Live, and the WPCA to provide live western sports coverage. Thanks to our new partners for taking such good care of us.



Rick, Eddie, Ed and Billy at the Bluebird Cafe.

Nashville Stars and Sights



Eddie and Billy with hit songwriter Don Schlitz.



Eddie and Billy with musician Connie Smith, a member of the Country Hall of Fame.



Ed Wittchen with country superstar Vince Gill backstage at the Grand Ole Opry.



Eddie with legendary singer Larry Gatlin.



Behind the Scenes

INFIELD CAMERA/COMPUTER OPERATOR GAYLENE GROENEVELD

MOST FANS AND perhaps even most drivers don't really know and understand what goes on in the judges' booth before, during and after the day's races. This is the first in a series of articles to showcase the good work these people do for the WPCA.

Last year **Gaylene Groeneveld** served as the infield camera/computer operator. To the average fan, it might seem like a pretty easy role to go and film the races for 90 minutes each evening. It isn't that simple. This is what a typical weekend at the races looks like for her.

Let's assume the races start at 6:30pm. At 5:30pm, Gaylene assembles the WPCA computer and three cameras in her back pack and meets the other judges to travel to the infield judges' location. During that hour, they set up their equipment. Gaylene's equipment involves a tri-pod, three cameras and a computer.

When the races begin, she has one camera set on the infield, one on the first turn chalk line and one that she holds by hand to video the entire race. She starts all three cameras as the race starts and shut them off when the race is completed. She also holds the light

bar in front of the camera so it records that the four judges have pushed their "ready at the barrels" button. This records any false starts that may occur.

Following each race, any of the judges may request to view the photo disc for any infractions that may have occurred during the race.

Gaylene then takes the disc out of the camera and puts it into the computer for the judges to review. When that is complete, she places the disc back into the camera and the procedure continues for all heats.

After the races, the whole crew goes back to the judges' area. The camera operators from the four corners bring their cameras to Gaylene.

The designated three head judges and Gaylene then go into a trailer and use the big slide screen to view any of the races that may be in question to them.

When they have finished doing that, the three judges leave the area and she proceeds to copy all seven of the camera discs on to the computer. She then gives the four corner cameras back to the race secretary to charge for

the following day's racing. The evening usually ends about 10:30.

The following morning, Gaylene opens the computer and brings up the prior evening's races. She then puts each race from all seven cameras into chronological order on the computer: folders for the race venue location, the day of the race, the heats by number and video by camera number. Saving these videos to the computer takes about an hour and a half.

She then has to re-charge her computer and three cameras so they will be ready in the evening for the races. The process starts all over again. The entire process for a day of racing takes about six to seven hours of time.

Gaylene is not just a casual race fan who decided to spend her summer following the wagons. She has more than one personal connection to the sport. She is the mother of **Shannon Flad**, mother-in-law of driver **Troy Flad** and grandmother to up-and-coming future WPCA driver and current Western Association driver **Blaid Flad**.

Keep up the great work, Gaylene.