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**ROCKY MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT**



Sierra Cup Series presented by



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# TURNING THE BARRELS

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## One for the Archives



*"Catch me if you can"—that seemed to be the theme to Kirk Sutherland's outstanding 2014 season.*

*Photo by Ed Wittchen*



## 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence

THE 2014 WPCA Equine Outfit of Excellence champion right leader is **Kirk Sutherland's Chief Encounter**. This 10-year-old black gelding was bought from former driver **Rod Salmond** in 2009 as a green 5-year-old prospect. Although he never raced on the racetrack, Chief found his true calling as a wagon horse and was inserted in his now familiar right leader position. In 2011, Kirk paired him with **Cougar** (who eventually became the 2013 champion left leader) to form one of the greatest lead teams in recent memory. Together they powered Kirk to three show victories on his way to winning the 2014 world championship. Other drivers acknowledge that when this team was on the wagon, Kirk was a heavy favourite to win races.

Joining Chief is this year's left leader champion, **Roger Moore's Arizona Dream**. This 10-year-old bay gelding was purchased in the fall of 2008 from Marquis Downs Racetrack in Saskatoon after a relatively unspectacular racing career that saw him win just two races. Arizona proved to be a natural leader after making the switch to chuckwagons in 2009. He has led Roger to show wins on both the CPCA and on the WPCA since he joined in 2012. Arizona led Roger to the prestigious Ponoka Stampede title in 2013. Canadian "snowbirds" might see Phoenix in the winter as Arizona's dream, but Roger Moore found his Arizona Dream right here on the WPCA Tour.

Backing up Arizona and Chief on the right wheel position is **Rick Fraser's First Law**. This nine-year-old California-bred bay gelding was bought off the Alberta B circuit in the fall of 2011 after a racing career that saw him win 9 times in 31 races. Law made his wagon debut in 2012 and has proven to be a hard-starting and fast-running wheeler ever since. He loves to hear the horn blow and has been used primarily on the short barrels for Rick, and has shown his versatility by running as both a left and right wheeler. The Team 23 camp



*Kirk Sutherland's Chief Encounter, the 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence champion right leader. Photo by Char Woodman Photos*



*Arizona's Dream, the 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence champion left leader, part of Roger Moore's team. Photo by Shellie Scott Photography*

was definitely on the right side of the law when they bought this horse and put him in the lineup.



## 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence, continued

Law's partner on the left wheel is **Rae Croteau, Jr.'s Caboose on the Loose**, nicknamed **Chip**. This nine-year-old South Dakota-bred horse was bought in the fall of 2009 in Winnipeg after a 10-race career that saw him win four times, including the 2008 North Dakota Stakes by a whopping 12 lengths. Used primarily on barrels three and four because of his natural speed, Chip has become a mainstay on the Rainbow wagon for the past four seasons. This Caboose on the Loose showed the way to an equine championship for Rae this year.

Two veteran horses make up this year's equine champion outriding pen. **Mike Vigen's Frosty Prince** added to his royal legacy by becoming just the second horse in the 10-year history of the award to be crowned a champion two years in a row. Prince is in his seventh year on the WPCA Tour. This 15-year-old Minnesota-bred grey gelding was once again a consistent fixture as the lead outrider horse on Mike's barrel one and two outfits. Before he joined the Vigen barn in 2008, Prince rang up an impressive record on the race track by winning 11 races and almost \$100,000 over a six-year career. That career included starts in Minnesota, Iowa, Arizona, Kansas and North Dakota before finding a permanent home in Alberta. He has proven to be just as good and just as durable and consistent in his second career with the WPCA. Prince is a favourite among the outriders because of that consistency.

Prince's partner in the outriding pen is **Layne MacGillivray's Wild Caribe**. This 13-year-old Kentucky-bred chestnut gelding was purchased in the fall of 2007 after a five-year race career that saw him win four races on the Alberta and BC B circuits. Caribe made his debut as an outriding horse in 2008 and proved to be a natural, quickly establishing his reputation with the outriders as one of the fastest and best working outriding horses on the WPCA Tour.



*Rick Fraser's First Law, the 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence champion right wheeler.*

*Photo by Char Woodman Photos*



*Caboose on the Loose, better known to wagon fans as Chip, the 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence champion left wheeler, part of Rae Croteau, Jr.'s team.*

*Photo by Shellie Scott Photography*



# 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence, continued



*Frosty Prince, a 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence outriding horse, owned by Mike Vigen.*

*Photo by Shellie Scott Photography*



*Wild Caribe, another 2014 Equine Outfit of Excellence outriding horse, owned by Layne MacGillivray.*

*Photo by Shellie Scott Photography*



*Back row, left to right: Rick Fraser (holding photo of First Law), Kirk Sutherland (holding photo of Chief Encounter), WPCA president Ed Wittchen (standing in for driver Mike Vigen and holding photo of Mike's horse Frosty Prince), Layne MacGillivray (holding photo of Wild Caribe), Eddie Melville representing Import Tools.*

*Front row, left to right: Rae Croteau, Jr. (holding photo of Caboose on the Loose, also known as Chip), Roger Moore (holding photo of Arizona Dream).*

*Photo by Easton Wagon Photography*



# The Story of the Equine Awards

“Eddie Melville wouldn’t be able to tell you how many miles he’s chased chuckwagons on horseback, but he’d quickly tell you that no matter how smooth or rough the ride, his love for the sport and the thoroughbred never diminished.”

~*Calgary Herald*,  
October 26, 2008

**EDDIE MELVILLE** ALWAYS thought that the horses of our sport deserved better recognition but were never sure what that should look like. It had been talked about many times before, in particular when **Kelly Sutherland** was winning the Calgary Stampede five times in six years with the same great lead team but no recognition for them. He was also inspired by **Norm Cuthbertson**’s outfit from the mid-2000s.

In the winter of 2004–05, Eddie decided it was finally time to do something about it. He recruited his brother **Billy Melville** to help him develop the criteria for an award. Eddie figured out the basic outline and Billy played the devil’s advocate until the two of them felt they had a rock solid and, most importantly, an objective system. Interestingly enough, their original idea is still the format used today. Eddie arranged for his employer Import Tool to sponsor the horse award with a cash award at the end of the season. They presented a complete package to the WPCA Board and got approval to proceed.

That first year, the drivers did not know what was happening when Eddie went around to the barns to collect the names of horses. As the year was winding down, Eddie got **Greg Wiseman** of Zoom to produce a video for the awards (in later years, Billy would help to produce the video). The video has now become a featured attraction of the evening. After Eddie wowed them with the videos at the banquet that first

year, drivers would get upset when they made a top five run and Eddie wasn’t over at the barn immediately after a race. It became a sign of prosperity when Eddie came by after the races, especially if he wasn’t outriding for that driver.

These days, the Equine Award of Excellence is an integral part of the WPCA’s annual awards banquet. The drivers think of it as one of the premier awards because it recognizes the true athletes of the sport.

There’s an old saying that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. That applies here, as this outstanding program has since spread in the sport. Both the CPCA and the Calgary Stampede now feature their own Equine Award of Excellence awards based on the one that Eddie developed for the WPCA.

Eddie quickly organized and operated a system that would fairly dole out points to the 700 or more horses harnessed and saddled by the 36 drivers each season. A key feature of the format has always been that it would have six different winning drivers with one horse each, so one driver couldn’t dominate the award in any given year.

During the season, Eddie goes around the barns every night to get the names of the horses from the top five outfits that night. To earn points, the driver has to run in the top five. The horses on the day money team get five points down to



# The Story of the Equine Awards, continued

the fifth place team, which gets one point for each horse on the outfit that night. Billy then enters the data into a computer file so they can see current standings at any time.

At the end of the season, the horse with the highest number of points, regardless of position when it is hitched, earns the first award spot. That means all other horses of that driver are removed from consideration. For example, this year **Rick Fraser's First Law** was the highest pointed horse and became the champion right wheeler. The next highest was **Kirk Sutherland's Chief Encounter**, so he became a champion, thus eliminating any of Kirk's other horses from consideration. There are a number of tie-breaking rules, just in case the standings get too tight. Another good rule is that since some horses run in more than one position, their points count for the position where they earned the majority of the points. For example, if they earned 40 points as a right leader and 20 as a left leader, they are considered to have earned 60 points as a right leader.

Import Tool has remained the sponsor for this award since its inception in 2005. They see a strong connection between their own corporate values and traditions, having been in business for 54 years, and the western traditions inherent in the WPCA. Import Tool is not even concerned if their sponsorship results in more tool orders. Over the years they have become synonymous with the Equine Award of Excellence, so it is quite likely that wagon fans in their business connect with them regularly.

Everyone connected to the WPCA wants to thank and recognize Import Tool for 10 years of their outstanding, ongoing support for the outstanding achievements of the true athletes of chuckwagon racing, the thoroughbred horses. Thanks also to Eddie and Billy for the countless hours they put in all season long gathering the statistics and producing the outstanding video and website photos of these equine champions. Congratulations, too, to the drivers and outriders associated with this year's top equine athletes.

# Tsuu T'ina Nation Honours Kurt Bensmiller

THE TSUU T'INA Nation followed up their outstanding partnership with **Kurt Bensmiller** by honouring him for his winning performance at the Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby this year.

In a tribute on the evening of October 3 in front of a large crowd of Kurt's friends and family and members of the Tsuu T'ina Nation at Grey Eagle Resort & Casino, the First Nation presented him with a war bonnet in a special ceremony.



Tsuu T'ina Nation also bestowed the 2014 Calgary Stampede champion with the name **Fast Horses**.

Their bid of \$140,000 for Kurt's Calgary Stampede tarp was the third highest for the 2014 Rangeland Derby. It was also the first such partnership for Tsuu T'ina Nation and Kurt. His Calgary win was only the second time a wagon sponsored by a Treaty 7 Nation has won the Rangeland Derby.

*Kurt Bensmiller wearing a war bonnet given to him by the Tsuu T'ina Nation.*

*Photo by BJ Normand*



## Honouring Our Past: Ernie Irving

By Billy Melville

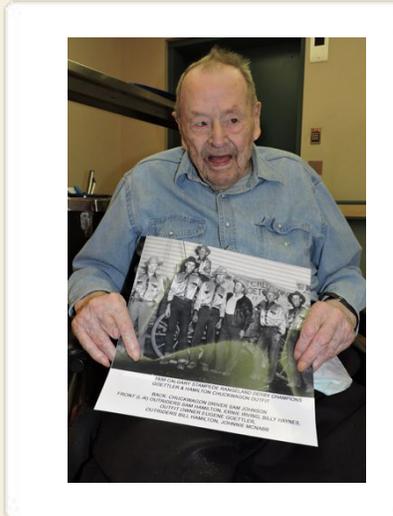
IN OUR LEGENDS series, we typically look at the more well known and famous drivers of the sport. It is important for chuckwagon racing fans to remember, however, that they didn't succeed on their own. From time to time, we will feature some of the folks who supported those drivers.

At 98, **Ernie Irving** is likely the oldest known living outrider. He was born in 1915 and grew up in the Davisburg district, south of Calgary.

Ernie started outriding at the Calgary Stampede in 1935, first riding for **Eben Bremner**. Eben won the Stampede the year before as the driver for Gene Goettler's outfit, but went on his own in 1935; he was replaced by **Sam Johnson**.

When Eben sold out to **Sam** and **Bill Hamilton** and **Gene Goettler** after the 1938 Stampede, Ernie went along and outrode for the Goettler and Hamilton outfit in 1939.

From 1935 to 1938, **Dick Cosgrave** dominated the Calgary Stampede, winning four times in a row. But in 1939, the Goettler and Hamilton outfit, with **Sam Johnson** driving, put in one of the most impressive shows ever up to that point. Ernie outrode for that 1939 Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby championship outfit. Ernie threw tent



*Ernie Irving, age 98, holding an archival photo from his outriding days. Photo by Billy Melville*



*Ernie Irving in 1939, second from left in the black cowboy hat. Other outriders here include Sam Hamilton, Billy Haynes, Bill Hamilton and Johnnie McNabb. Photo care of Billy Melville.*

pegs for the outfit. It was a five-day competition that year, and they won first place four times in five nights. They broke the track record twice and tied it once in five runs, including taking top time with a broken rear wheel. (I have a photo of this run!)

That 1939 run was the last time Ernie outrode. Today he lives in a seniors care facility in south Calgary, and I think he enjoyed talking chuckwagons with me.

It should be noted that many of the outriders of the day were working cowboys and the Calgary Stampede was a bit of a holiday for them. Outside of one year at Black Diamond, Calgary was the only place Ernie outrode, as was the case for many of the competitors back then.

It's been 75 years since Ernie won outriding at the Stampede, and I think he appreciates the fact that someone remembers who he is and what he accomplished for our sport.