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TURNING THE BARRELS

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Watch for our new series of profiles starting in the December issue of the newsletter.

YOUR ARCHIVES

Do you have old chuckwagon racing photos you'd like to share with other fans? Consider submitting them to the newsletter to use in the "One from the Archives" front page feature.

To contact the Newsletter Editor, email ed.wittchen@telus.net.

One from the Archives



The late, great Dave Lewis at the 1969 Calgary Stampede.

Photo courtesy of Billy Melville archives



Equine Outfit of Excellence

OUTRIDER **EDDIE MELVILLE** developed the Import Tool Corporation Equine Outfit of Excellence award. It was designed to recognize the outstanding achievements of the true athletes of chuckwagon racing: the thoroughbred horses.

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 55 years, and the western traditions inherent in the WPCA. Over the years, they have become synonymous with the Equine Outfit of Excellence award.

Every race night during the season, Eddie goes around the barns 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 and it goes down from there to the fifth place team, which gets one point for each horse on the outfit. **Billy Melville** then enters the data into a computer file so they can see the current standings at any time.

At the end of the season, the horse with the highest number of points, regardless of position, earns the first award spot. That means all other horses belonging to that driver are removed from consideration. For example, this year **Kirk Sutherland's Chief** was the highest pointed horse and became the Champion Right Wheeler. None of Kirk's other horses can be in contention for this year.

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.

The 2015 Equine Outfit of Excellence award winners were the most consistent performers during the 2015 season.



Kirk Sutherland's Chief's Encounter

For the second consecutive season, the 2015 WPCA Equine Outfit of Excellence champion Right Leader is **Kirk Sutherland's Chief's Encounter**. This 11-year-old black gelding was bought from former driver **Rod Salmond** in 2009 as an inexperienced five-year-old prospect. Although he had never raced on the track, Chief has proven to be the premier Right Leader on the tour over the past several seasons. This year saw Chief help Kirk get to the top of the WPCA standings with a resounding dash-for-cash win off barrel four at the Ponoka Stampede. He wrapped up the first half of the season as the high-pointed horse on the tour.

The remainder of the 2015 season proved to be challenging for "the Chief," as an injury forced him to the sidelines for over a month. In true champion form, he made his way back to the races in Strathmore with a top-five performance before being tucked away for the remainder of the season. Once again, this horse proved to be the head Chief among this year's Right Leaders.

Joining Chief as Left Leader is **Evan Salmond's Kerrisdale Comet**. Evan bought this 10-year-old BC-bred



Equine Outfit of Excellence, continued



Evan Salmond's Kerrisdale Comet

gelding from Jack Bolin after a rather unimpressive race record on the track. Evan picked him up as a green prospect for the Right Leader position. As it turned out, Evan badly needed a Left Leader so Comet was asked to change sides. Like a lot of experiments conducted out of desperation, this one worked. Since then, Comet has been used exclusively in the Left Leader position and has not looked back. He may not be pulling a sleigh at Christmas like that famous reindeer, but this Comet has proven to be just as important to this wagon.

Backing up Comet and Chief in the Right Wheeler position is **Jason Glass's Mootoo**. Jason purchased this 10-year-old Kentucky-bred chestnut gelding from Bar None Ranches in the fall of 2011 after a racetrack career that included four wins and four second-place finishes in 11 starts.

Mootoo made his debut in 2013 as a Right Wheeler and quickly found himself on one of Jason's top outfits. An honest horse that always runs hard, Mootoo proved his versatility as he was moved up to the Right Leader position for the last part of the 2015 season.



Jason Glass's Mootoo

Mootoo's partner Left Wheeler is **Colt Cosgrave's Mental Giant**, nicknamed **Baffert** because he was bought from this year's Triple Crown-winning trainer **Bob Baffert**. Colt purchased this six-year-old grey son of legendary Kentucky sire **Giant's Causeway** as a yearling in 2010 for \$275,000.

Injuries prevented Baffert from a productive career on the racetrack, so he was bought by outrider **Reo King** in 2013 and sent to the Cosgrave ranch for a second career as a wagon horse after some rest and care. Baffert flourished almost immediately as a Left Wheeler and gave the Cosgrave outfit an extra element of speed and finish to turn Colt's good outfit into a great one. This horse has proven to be a Giant in the Cosgrave barn.

Two first-time winners make up this year's outriding pen.

Gary Gorst's Victory is a veteran of the WPCA and CPCA circuits. Jason Glass bought this 17-year-old bay gelding nine years ago from former driver **Rod Salmond**. He was a stalwart behind the Glass outfit for five seasons. Gary Gorst then purchased him in 2012 as a 13-year-old to add some



Equine Outfit of Excellence, continued



*Left:
Colt Cosgrave's
Mental Giant*

*Right:
Gary Gorst's
Victory*

*All photos by Shellie
Scott Photography*



depth to his outriding pen. Victory provided a lot more than depth. He soon became the go-to outriding horse in the Gorst barn. A favourite among the outriders, Victory has shown that age is just a number, as he loves his job and still has the heart and desire to compete year in and year out. Buying this horse proved to be a monumental victory for the Gorst outfit.

Victory's partner in the outriding pen is **Kurt Bensmiller's Boone**. Kurt purchased this 14-year-old chestnut gelding in the fall of 2007 out of South Dakota, following the horse's successful career on the racetrack in Chicago. Like most good outriding horses, Boone began his chuckwagon career as a Left Wheeler before finding his place as a lead horse for Kurt. A natural from day one, Boone has been a big part of Kurt's success, including final heat victories at the 2014 Ponoka Stampede and the past two Calgary Stampedes.

Jason Glass took over the all-time lead in Equine Outfit of Excellence winners with his sixth winning horse. He has now won at every position except Left Wheeler. **Rick Fraser** and **Kelly Sutherland** have both won the award five times. Four-time winners include Kirk Sutherland, **Jerry Bremner**, **Rae Croteau** and **Luke Tournier**. Three-time winners include **Obrey Motowylo**, **Hugh Sinclair**, **Leo Tournier** and **Grant Profit**. Celebrating two wins are Kurt



Kurt Bensmiller's Boone

Bensmiller, Evan Salmond, **Chad Harden**, Colt Cosgrave, **Reg Johnstone** and **Neil Walgenbach**. Five horses have won multiple Equine Outfit of Excellence awards. The first to win two titles was Luke Tournier's famous **Port**, who won as Left Leader in 2006 and 2008. The most recent is Kirk Sutherland's Chief, who was the Left Leader champion in 2014 and 2015. In between the two, there have been three outriding horses with two wins each: Leo Tournier's **Phillip** in 2007 and 2009, Obrey Motowylo's **Ben** in 2008 and 2010, and Jason Glass's **Ratt** in 2012 and 2013.



A Tribute to Dave Lewis

THE WPCA PAST Member Tribute Award is given to any past member of the WPCA or its predecessors in recognition of their outstanding achievements, dedication, or contributions as they relate to the WPCA and chuckwagon racing in general.

This year, we are proud to pay special tribute to **Dave Lewis**, one of chuckwagon racing's all-time greatest mentors, individuals and champions.

Dave Lewis was born to **Joseph** and **Emily Lewis** in Grande Prairie on September 3, 1936. His love of horses began at a very young age, and as a youngster Dave started jockeying his father's racehorses.

Through the encouragement of world champion chuckwagon driver **Ralph Vigen**, Dave partnered up with **Max Sutherland** in 1965 to purchase some horses. Together the two men assembled their first chuckwagon outfit and Dave's career in chuckwagon racing was born.

With his sponsor **Lyle Adam**, Dave Lewis joined the Canadian Rodeo Cowboys' Association in 1967. He drove his first show as a professional that spring at the Hand Hills Stampede. He also drove at his first Calgary Stampede that same year. He hit the money twice and placed fifth in the Calgary Stampede consolation chuckwagon races.

The year 1968 was a breakthrough for Dave. In just his second year as a professional, he won his first career day money at the Hardisty Rodeo. By the time the Calgary

Stampede rolled around, he had posted additional day money runs at the Stettler Stampede and the Wainwright Frontier Days. At the 1968 Calgary Stampede, even with eight seconds in penalties, Dave still managed to finish the show in fourth place overall, just 3.5 seconds behind the eventual champion **Garry Dorchester**. Dave finished out the 1968 season in fifth place overall in the world standings.



Dave Lewis

Photo courtesy of Billy Melville archives

On February 17, 1969, Dave married **Joan Dorchester** and became father to her three children, **Dallas, Rick** and **Corrine Fraser**. Soon after, the Lewises welcomed son **Greg** into the family.

The 1969 season saw Dave outrun the biggest names in the sport. He surpassed **Tom Dorchester**, **Ralph Vigen** and **Hally Walgenback** to capture his first career show championship at the Wainwright Frontier Days. He established a new track record on the final night of the Calgary Stampede and was runner-up to his new father-in-law **Tom Dorchester** for the world championship.

The next few seasons saw Dave become a regular winner on the professional circuit at smaller shows in places like Rimbey, Coronation and Wetaskiwin. He placed inside the top five in the world standings in 1971 and again in 1972.

The start of the 1973 season, however, was dismal to say the least. Dave failed to place in any of the shows over the first half of the season until the Ponoka Stampede, when he finished second overall to **Ralph Vigen**. This good result



A Tribute to Dave Lewis, continued

proved to be the catalyst for Dave, as he roared into the Calgary Stampede in the right frame of mind. Top-five runs in seven of the first nine nights, including a day money run on night six, propelled him into a seemingly insurmountable lead at the Rangeland Derby with just one to go.

On the final run, Dave had the luxury of nursing his outfit around the barrels to guarantee a penalty-free race. He chose not to do so and that decision, gallant though it may have been, cost him. In one of the most stunning finishes the Calgary Stampede has ever seen, Dave's lead vanished when his wagon swung wide at the bottom barrel, causing interference. To add more insult to injury, one of his outriders failed to finish the race. Altogether seven seconds in penalties were more than enough to hand the championship to the **Merle Anderson** outfit driven by **Slim Helmle**. Dave was forced to settle for second place overall.

With half a season still to go, many wondered if he could recover from his slow start. Would the devastating loss at the Calgary Stampede be a knockout punch that would take away any motivation he might have in completing the season on a high note? As former world heavyweight boxing champion **Jack Dempsey** once said, "A champion is someone who gets up when he can't."

Not only did Dave get up but by season's end he was crowned the 1973 world champion chuckwagon driver while driving the **Lyle Adam** outfit. This was the lone world championship of his career.

In 1975, Dave started driving for **Doug Streeper** as well as the Lyle Adam outfit. The remainder of the 1970s saw Dave capture an incredible 15 show championships in six years between 1974 and 1979. Four of those were with the Lyle



Above, right: Dave Lewis and his outriders Jerry Bremner, Rick Fraser, George Normand and Ross Nelson holding their bronzes following a big win at the 1982 Calgary Stampede.

Above, left: The 1982 Dave Lewis outfit.

Left: Dave Lewis races around the barrels at the Calgary Stampede in later years.

Photos courtesy of Billy Melville archives



A Tribute to Dave Lewis, continued



Dave Lewis and Rick Fraser sharing the reins in the wagon during spring training in April 2000. Dave died of a heart attack within days of this photo being taken.

Photo courtesy of Billy Melville archives

Adam outfit and the rest were with the Streeper Transport outfit.

Among his wins were major stops in Alberta at the Ponoka Stampede, Grande Prairie and Lethbridge. He also had wins in British Columbia at Prince George, Dawson Creek and Cloverdale. Dave broke or tied eight track records, and he was the reserve world champion in 1977.

Despite all of his success throughout the 1970s, winning the Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby was the one thing missing from his resume. When philosophical differences arose between the Calgary Stampede and the Canadian Rodeo Cowboys Association, it was unclear whether he would ever have the opportunity again, as the pro cowboys association prohibited their members, both rodeo and chuckwagon, from competing at the Calgary Stampede.

Between 1979 and 1981, Dave accompanied the professional chuckwagons to High River to compete in the

Battle of the Giants, an alternate event to the Calgary Stampede.

Late in 1980, the wagon men decided to leave the pro cowboys association and go out on their own as the World Professional Chuckwagon Association. Dave was not only a founding member but in the WPCA's first season of 1981 he won three times and finished the year in fourth place in the world standings.

When the 1981 season finished, the Calgary Stampede announced that they would invite the top nine wagons from the WPCA to compete at the 1982 Rangeland Derby. That gave Dave the opportunity to compete at Calgary once again.

But on May 6, 1982, just before the start of the chuckwagon racing season, Dave's wife Joan lost her battle with cancer at the young age of 42.

Dave soldiered on. He won the Wainwright Stampede for the third time in his career and placed fourth overall at the Ponoka Stampede. His race results were looking pretty good for him heading into Calgary but he suffered a setback when, after Ponoka, he discovered he had a fractured wrist. He wore a cast for a week before the Calgary Stampede and then modified it so he could drive. He subsequently turned in a performance that is still talked about to this day.

Over the first nine nights, Dave piloted the Panee Memorial Agriplex rig to five first-place runs, one second and one third. He set a new track record. Had it not been for a one-second penalty for the fly flapping, he would have placed inside the top 10 on nine consecutive nights.

He qualified for the Rangeland Derby's championship in first place overall, and would face **Tom Glass**, **Reg Johnstone** and **Kelly Sutherland** in an all-WPCA final. He drew barrel number one and when the race was complete,



A Tribute to Dave Lewis, continued

Dave, along with outriders **Jerry Bremner**, Rick Fraser, **George Normand** and **Ross Nelson**, had captured the 1982 Calgary Stampede Rangeland Derby with his sixth day money run in 10 days.

He was also awarded the Frank D. Bean Memorial for having the best 10-day aggregate time, over seven seconds clear of his nearest rival. It was arguably the most dominating performance the Rangeland Derby has ever seen in a 10-day show, and it was all done while he was competing with a broken wrist.

When the 1983 season rolled around, Dave found himself in a dispute with the World Professional Chuckwagon Association and ran at the 1983 Calgary Stampede as an independent chuckwagon driver. For the second consecutive year, he took the aggregate title but placed fourth in the Rangeland Derby's championship final.

At the conclusion of the 1983 Calgary Stampede, Dave sold his entire outfit and looked to retire. He said he would consider competing at the Rangeland Derby if he received an invitation. The dispute with the WPCA would never be resolved but the invitation from the Calgary Stampede did come about. The Rangeland Derby was the only show Dave would continue to compete at for the last 12 years of his career.

Although he only competed at one show for the last part of his career, with his special companion **Betty Sinclair** supporting him, Dave continued to make history.

In 1988, Dave partnered up with the White Spot Restaurant and with outriders **Mike Vigen**, **Hughie Sinclair**, Rick Fraser and **Jeff Hallwachs** won his second Rangeland Derby championship over Jerry Bremner, **Ray Mitsuing** and **Dallas Dorchester**, adding the aggregate title as well. He became the only chuckwagon driver to win the Rangeland



Rick Fraser speaks about his dad Dave Lewis at the 2015 WPCA Awards.

Photo by Ed Wittchen

Derby championship and the aggregate trophy while competing on a special invitation from the Calgary Stampede.

In his retirement, Dave continued to stay involved with horses and chuckwagons. He trained thoroughbreds at the racetrack and helped some of the chuckwagon drivers from the Grande Prairie area with their outfits.

Following an afternoon of spring training with his son Rick Fraser, Dave Lewis passed away suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart attack on April 27, 2000. He was 63 years old.

Besides his own success, Dave's legacy also includes his role as a mentor. His talents live on through the successes of the champion drivers whose careers he influenced. This includes the likes of Kelly Sutherland, Rick Fraser and Hughie Sinclair.

With 30 victories in a 30-year career, many at chuckwagon racing's most storied events, Dave Lewis is among the sport's all-time most decorated champions.