INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this project was to examine my role as a journalist covering a community of interest through the creation of a website that enriches dialogue about the barrel racing and rodeo community in the Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia region. The website provides a space for works of journalism that cover barrel racing events and issues in the area, and my research included a thorough analysis of the role of community journalism in a community that is both virtual and regional.

For The Barrel Racing Blog, I regularly conduct interviews and profile some of the top barrel racers around the region and across the country to provide my audience with insight into the mindset of these competitors. For the website I also use multimedia tools to enhance my written content for reviews of shows and arena conditions. For example, each week that I attend a competition or an event, I photograph the ground conditions, take video of the event and interview fellow competitors for their opinions of the arena. I compile photo slideshows and produce short videos to accompany a full journalistic story on the event.

The key to this research was the examination of my role as a journalist who is also a member of this community of interest. A thorough literature review examined objectivity, journalistic distance and community journalism in order to gain a better understanding of a journalist's role and challenges in a community of interest when participating in and covering it simultaneously.

This work had two major end goals. Academically, the end goal of this professional project was to examine the role of an immersed journalist within a community of interest. Similar to geographic communities, this form of community journalism presents possible
challenges with objectivity and conflicts of interest. Throughout the year I identified and reflected on these challenges and considered the issues raised within the literature review to develop a sense of my own role as a journalist in the barrel racing community. The conclusion presents a reflective essay that discusses the issues I faced.

As a work of journalism, the professional goal of the project was to develop, maintain and promote a usable website for barrel racers in the Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia region. The website is a resource for barrel racers and a place for dialogue about issues within the community. It also provides a unique service to the barrel racers of this area by specializing in multi-media content targeted to competitors. Completing this goal involved various forms of advertising and marketing, using social networking like Twitter and Facebook, and more traditional advertising techniques such as promotion at events with competitors wearing shirts advertising the site.

The research and development process of this project was multi-step. First, a lengthy literature review covers the relevant research and writing on community journalism, journalistic distance, objectivity, conflicts of interest and blogging as a form of journalism. Next, I completed a competition analysis of other publications and websites covering the barrel racing community. I analyzed their content, writing styles, advertisers and Internet usage in order to help target my website to the very specific regional audience I am striving to reach.

Along with the competition analysis, I completed an audience profile. In order to write most effectively, I needed to come to understand my specific audience. As a member of this community, I combined my own anecdotal information with membership numbers from
regional barrel racing organizations, show and rodeo entry numbers and statistics from Google Analytics, a web-based service that allows website operators to track details about visitors to their sites, and Wordpress.com analytics to build a profile of my audience. I also used the audience profiles compiled by related websites and publications to add to my summary.

As for the actual blogging, I spent the summer of 2009 analyzing content that draws in the widest audience. I followed my Google Analytics statistics and developed a specific editorial formula that lays out the content categories I cover. By developing networks of equine professionals that I have had all my life, I am building a strong pool of interviewees and interview subjects. I post an average of three times per week. As the website developed, I moved from a Blogger format to a Wordpress format, which allowed for more posting and archiving options and allowed me to purchase my own domain name, building on the credibility and branding of the site.

This research and professional work will be useful for journalists who find themselves in the position of trying to cover objectively a community of interest while also being active participants in the community. The work will be particularly helpful to those interested in sports or hobby journalism because although I am researching one particular community of interest, the themes covered in the literature and the lessons I learn will ring true for other areas of journalism as well.
LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive literature review of the three areas most pertinent to this field -- community journalism, journalistic distance and conflict of interest, and blogging -- was necessary in order to gain a full theoretical understanding of the medium. This literature review provided both academic backing and considerations for this professional undertaking and a framework from which to understand this project's role in the larger scheme of the journalistic profession. In the area of community journalism, I examined what "community" really means and how scholars define it. I analyzed how these scholars interpret community journalism and the World Wide Web. With objectivity, conflict of interest and journalistic distance, I examined historical context for the development of these ethical norms, covering the views different scholars have on the merits of each practice. Importantly, I explored how they affect community journalism. Finally, in the last section of the review, I discussed what the blogosphere is and how blogs help foster online communities. I also touched on the ethical implications of blogging. In summary, my literature review covered the relevant literature on objectivity, conflicts of interest and journalistic distance, as well as highlighted a few key studies about journalistic blogs and blog ethics.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

Many scholars debate the term "community journalism" and even struggle to define what "community" really means. Some suggest a utopian definition for community journalism, while others suggest community journalism is a process rather than a field of journalism unto itself. This section examined the literature that searches for a definition of community and of community journalism in order to develop a better understanding of the
context in which a community of interest exists. I also looked at how web-based communities communicate and form cohesive social bonds and how practices of community journalism can transfer to the World Wide Web in order to examine The Barrel Racing Blog's role in the barrel-racing world.

DEFINING "COMMUNITY"

In searching for a definition of community journalism, community itself must be defined. According to Lauterer (2006), sociologist Amitai Etzioni defined community as "webs of social relations that encompass shared meanings and above all shared values" (p. 84). In their literature review, Lowrey, Brozana and Mackay (2008) reviewed 65 studies that defined community, finding that 30 of those studies used a specific geographical location to define the term. These geographical definitions, according to the authors, focused on areas of commerce, administrative regions, geographical boundaries and governmental boundaries. The authors also noted that through their literature review other scholars emphasized communities as places "to meet or connect" (p. 208).

Furthermore, 27 of the studies reviewed by Lowery, Brozana and Mackay (2008) defined community outside of a geographic context. The authors listed imagined communities and interpretive communities as two other possible forms of communities that do not rely on a shared physical location. Imagined communities, according to the authors, are those that share physical characteristics such as land area and shared government, while interpretive communities rely upon shared cultural symbols for connections. They share interests, values or goals. Interpretive communities, or communities of interest, are “a space for identity formation apart from mainstream culture” (Sakamoto, 1999). Communities of interest, then,
though spread out over a geographical space and are linked by shared values and shared meanings (Lauterer, 2006).

This geographical definition of community is remiss to neglect other functions of communities that do not rely solely on a physical space. Some scholars contend that community is more of a state of mind rather than a geographical space. Friedland (2001) argued that in the last 35 years communities have changed due to macro-factors, and these new, more complex communities rely on communication technologies as ways to remain connected through shared values. Lowery, Brozana and Mackay (2008) argued that the social structure once limited to physical communities now extend beyond the original geographical boundaries:

The forms of tightly bounded, well-integrated community that we associate with the rural village, the city neighborhood, and even the suburb no longer correspond to a social structure characterized by more complex patterns of mobility and migration, the use of communications technologies to sustain certainties (but not others) over time and space, and, more generally, voluntary patterns of association based on personal networks rather than ties of loyalty to social groups based on community and kin.

For the purpose of this paper, I moved away from definitions of community that rely solely on geographical space. While The Barrel Racing Blog is targeted towards the Ohio-Pennsylvania-West Virginia region, its position on the Internet among other national barrel racing websites makes it available to a national and even international audience. The community shares some characteristics of geographical communities, but much of the audience relies heavily upon forming identities within the barrel-racing world.

ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Virtual communities can be both communities of interest and actual, physical
communities. Hollander (2002) called communities that are both physical and virtual digital community networks. These networks enhance the physical community by providing an online outlet for communication. They also can allow for the inclusion of people with shared interests not necessarily located in the same geographical area.

In 1999, Lasica suggested that "enlisting people with shared interest to connect and with each other and the outside world in new and powerful ways" would be a key in the development of the web, and he was right (p. 92). These people with shared interest have indeed come together online. Much of Web 2.0 involves social media, like blogging, and this social media is essentially a community of people on the web (Finin, 2008).

Reader and Moist (2009) also examined the role of virtual communities through their study of letters to the editors of publications serving dispersed communities of interest. The authors found that readers of these publications are drawn to the web to interact with other members of their community.

DEFINING COMMUNITY JOURNALISM

Lowery, Brozana and Mackay (2008) found that community "is a process of negotiating shared symbolic meaning;" therefore, community media should "facilitate the process of negotiating and making meaning about community and ... reveal or ensure understanding of community structure" (p. 275). The authors insisted that community journalism is not a nostalgic, idealistic form of journalism that many other journalism scholars sometimes categorize it as. They argued that community journalism is not a separate sub-type of journalism but a continuing practice that has varying degrees of use.

Still, though, many others in community news insist readers like "neighborly" content
and are put off by journalists who serve the greater journalistic virtues rather than the actual community (Rowe, 2008). A deep understanding of the community's values and an intimacy with important community issues are necessary for a community media outlet's success. Journalists must find a community's essence by engaging its residence and learning what issues are important to them, rather than just setting their own journalistic agenda (Lowman, 2008). A community news outlet must be needed by its community in a reciprocal relationship in order to survive (Lauterer, 2006).

Community journalism scholars emphasize and re-emphasize that community journalism does not mean lower quality big-city journalism. Linda Gilmore, former assistant director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at the A.Q. Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Kansas State University, said that community journalism creates ties that help bond a community together and implies a certain interactivity for all community members (Lauterer, 2006).

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM AND INTERACTIVITY

The interactivity Gilmore pointed to is what helps cultivate the sense of community that readers feel when they open their community newspaper each issue. Community newspapers serve as public forums, where people receive acknowledgment – their first buck of the season, the largest pumpkin, their opinion on a school board decision and even their obituary. Community papers are small enough that their readership can feel engaged because community papers have the space to print most if not all of the letters they receive (Lauterer, 2006). This provides space for discussion about community issues and events, and an editorial page where readers feel comfortable writing is a sign of a vibrant community paper (Reader
Virtual or digital community networks also can gauge their connectivity through their reader interaction, either from their letters to the editor or through web feedback like comments. An analysis of letters to the editors in two community magazines (*Small Farmers’ Journal* and *Shambhala Sun*) signified a strong connection of readers to the community. The readers and the staff of the magazines, as per the analysis of the letters, connected with the magazines as if the publications were a physical community themselves (Reader and Moist, 2008).

The best web-based community news outlets, whether they are blogs, online newspapers, forums or magazines, are themselves online communities (Fanselow, 2008). He equated them to local coffee shops where community members can debate everything from Friday night football to property taxes. While these communities may or may not meet face to face, they can discuss issues important to their community through commenting functions, forums or instant message exchanges provided by the community's website (Hew, 2009). Hew's research examined how online community's interactivity affected the professional success of those participating in online discussions. He found that the web participation helped member's professional development by "(1) making more informed decisions about professional practice, (2) maintaining current professional knowledge and (3) fostering a clearer sense of professional identity" (p. 439). In online communities, like that developed by *The Barrel Racing Blog*, others interested in the same subject can function like peer reviewers in academia and can add on to others' knowledge (Hew, 2009). The author also discovered that the most vital aspect in this professional development is a willingness to share
knowledge, something that *The Barrel Racing Blog* looks to foster.

People are willing to share knowledge on the Internet for various reasons. First, readers may feel unthreatened and not competitive with others spread out over the web. This allows them to share "secrets" and open up to others in online communities (Hew, 2009). Hew identified reciprocity and a desire to better the profession as a whole as two other reasons for sharing knowledge across the web.

Community interaction online can also signify the public's attitudes towards journalists at a community news outlet (Chung, 2009). Site users who utilize interactive features like forums and questions and answers tend to have an adversarial view of the media, while those who are customize their own content like news tips or CNN's iReport tend to endorse civic journalism and enjoy participating in the process (Chung, 2009).

**OBJECTIVITY, CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND JOURNALISTIC DISTANCE**

Within the realm of community journalism, different ethical questions arise that would not be of concern to national reporters or foreign correspondents. The immersion within a community and the membership within the community affect the journalist's ability to act as an "objective" observer. A journalist's ability to distance himself or herself from the community is impaired. Within the regional barrel racing community, I am both a member and regular participant in the community on nearly every level. However, I continue to produce journalistic work surrounding this community. In this section, I explored the definition and use of the term "objectivity," conflicts of interest and the role journalistic distance plays in niche publications.
DEFINING OBJECTIVITY

The once highly accepted journalistic norm of objectivity is now a questionable term in the minds of many journalists and scholars alike. However, the word objectivity has not always been on the minds of journalists.

Objectivity, the practice, began with scientists, mathematicians and philosophers some two thousand years before journalists began seeking it (Ward, 2010). According to Ward, “Three senses of objectivity have played a major role: ontological, epistemological and procedural” (p. 138). Ontological objectivity involves something that absolutely exists in reality, independent of one’s beliefs, thoughts or imagination. Epistemological objectivity is derived through proof and observation – essentially, “how we know what we know” (Ward, 2010, p. 138). Procedural objectivity involves decisions that affect public affairs processes, such as court decisions, which rely upon minimal amounts of bias or subjectivity. All three of these forms of objectivity combine to form what journalists began striving for two thousand years after some segments of society enacted these methods (Ward, 2010).

The term, in the journalistic sense, emerged out of the cultural movement of scientific naturalism of the 1920s through a desire to see scientific method applied to reporting practices (Streckfuss, 1990). Newspaper readers and many journalists were growing tired of with the jingoistic and emotional journalism of the World War I era and looked towards science for an alternative. Other scholars, such as Schudson (2001), suggested that objectivity emerged out of necessity in the 1920s, as newspapers became commercial engines and editors had more news and reporters and less time to edit. Schudson added that reporters made considerable efforts to distance themselves from advertisers and public relations specialists, who were
growing in numbers.

Streckfuss (1990) insisted that objectivity, as it was originally intended, was based on the belief that humans could not look at the world objectively so instead they needed to apply a scientific method to the process of news gathering, attempting to completely remove themselves from any attachment to the situation. Originally, objectivity meant "finding the truth through the rigorous methodology of the scientist," and while many spoke of the need for such a practice, the term did not arise until late in the 1920s (Streckfuss, 1990, p. 975).

Walter Lippman dealt with problems in democratic theory and the press, and his work helped shape the definition of objectivity. It was his essay in 1920, "Liberty and News," Lippman provided commentary on what would become known as objectivity. "Good reporting requires the exercise of the highest of scientific virtues," Lippman said (quoted in Streckfuss, 1990, p. 978). Lippman saw the scientific role of the press as essential for democracy to thrive.

Since the popularization of objectivity, though, the practice – or the moral code, as Schudson (2001) suggested – of objective reporting has proven difficult if not impossible for reporters to master (Myrick, 2002). Charles Kloster, editor and publisher emeritus of the St. Louis Journalism Review, argued that "objectivity implies an absolute," making it an impossible task for journalists to achieve (Kloster, 2002). True objectivity would require journalists to ignore necessary biases like maintaining a pro-public slant in reporting, writing briefly and judging the importance of facts and crafting compelling stories that captivate readers' attention (McManus, 2009).

McManus (2009) also contended that the pursuit of objectivity inhibits truthful writing
and reporting. According to the author, objectivity means accepting an official source's statement as "an adequate representation of reality." This leads to simply covering what public figures say or do, rather than reporting on the story behind the story (McManus, 2009). The failure of journalists to report "objectively" in the eyes of the public can also lead to distrust in the individual media outlet and in the media as a whole (Myrick, 2002). The public has been conditioned to look for "objective" reporting rather than fair, accurate and truthful reporting (McManus, 2009).

While some argue that objectivity is a goal, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), similar to Streekfuss (1990) made the argument that objectivity must be more of a scientific method rather than a goal, since the idea of what objectivity really means is so skewed. The authors outlined the discipline of verification as the method of dealing with objectivity, listing five important principles of scientifically reporting a story: “1. Never add anything that was not there. 2. Never deceive the audience. 3. Be as transparent as possible about your methods and motives. 4. Rely on your own original reporting. 5. Exercise humility” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 89). Journalists must take these practices as seriously as scientists testing a theory, rather than simply attempting to follow these guidelines. It is this verification process that separate “serious” media outlets (blogs included) from other, less formal news sources (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

While Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) argued for a scientific approach to news reporting, Ward (2010) prescribed a philosophical approach to the news. Traditional objectivity, Ward said, focuses on “just the facts” reporting, while his prescription, pragmatic objectivity, comes from the idea that journalism is “an active, interpretive, cultural activity”
(p.146). Journalists then must develop methods for testing story elements and sources that detect bias and challenge facts and viewpoints (Ward, 2010). Aside from having this pragmatic attitude, journalists must follow three steps, Ward said: “First, criteria that test the stories for correspondence with carefully obtained and collaborated evidence. Second, criteria that test the coherence of claims in the story with existing knowledge and expertise. Third, criteria that test the story for how well it has framed the issues, and whether it has consulted a diversity of perspectives” (p. 147). Pragmatic objectivity separates itself then by seeking well-supported interpretations, while traditional objectivity simply seeks facts (Ward, 2010).

Regardless of its current validity, though, the ideal of traditional objectivity is deeply ingrained in both journalists and the public. Anyaegbunam and Ryan (2003) found that even journalism students believe objectivity, above all else, to be a top journalistic goal. In a survey of core values conducted by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007), eight out of ten national journalists and seven out of ten local journalists believed in the true and accurate account of an event, while seven out of ten new media journalists also agreed.

In community journalism, true objective reporting is even more difficult. Community journalists, be they parts of communities of interest or communities of geography, are by their very nature a vital part of their community, and their emotional biases are impossible to completely shake (Lauterer, 2006).

DEFINING CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The conflicts that arise, then, from a journalist's role in a community as both a reporter and as a community member can be classified as conflicts of interest. As professionals, journalists are expected to exceed the moral standards of ordinary citizens (Wilkins &
Brennen, 2004). Conflicts of interest occur in a professional role and often consist of 
"exploitation of a professional position for private advantage...allowing financial, collegial, 
social or familiar loyalties, both past and present, to interfere with professional loyalties... 
(and) placing self-interest above one's duties to others" (Wilkins & Brennen, 2004, p. 302).

Two dimensions of actual conflicts of interest exist (Wasserman, 2010). The first dimension has to do with “the degree to which they arise from the ways in which journalism is practiced and institutionalized” while the second has to do with “the degree to which they have discernible, direct consequence on information and commentary delivered to the public” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 257). The first dimension ranges from endemic to extraneous conflicts of interest. Endemic conflicts “arise from the nexus of institutional, professional and personal relationships in which the journalist works,” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 255) while extraneous conflicts come from outside those relationships. The second dimension of conflicts of interest ranges from conflicts with clear impact to those without. Some conflicts have clear ethical implications, while others seem to be non-consequential.

Categorizing conflicts as such provides hints as to how to handle these ethical questions, by providing insight as to whether or not to eliminate, disclose or manage the problem (Wasserman, 2010). Eliminating a conflict of interest is the most effective response to a true conflict of interest, Wasserman (2010) said, especially in non-endemic situations. Disclosure, though, is “rarely satisfactory,” because it does not specifically address how outside entanglements affect journalistic work. It also does nothing to eliminate the conflict from the actual work (Wasserman, 2010). It is the endemic conflicts, then, that must be managed, likely the most challenging of the ethical dilemmas and solutions presented.
Managing conflicts of interest means a long-term commitment to solving the problem, and include actions like fostering in-house disclosure, providing internal oversight, segregating functions (such as separating news-gathering from financial responsibilities), superintending duties and widening ombudsmanship (Wasserman, 2010).

While actual conflicts of interest are problematic enough for journalists, perceived conflicts of interest can be equally if not more difficult to handle. Perceived conflicts of interest may not exist at all, yet if a portion of the public perceives the journalist as violating a moral standard or taking advantage of their professional position, the effects can be just as negative (Wilkins & Brennen, 2004). "Conflict of interest is one of few areas of professional ethics where perception of 'reality' has equal standing in a moral sense with the actual reality" (Wilkins & Brennen, 2004, p. 302). The solution to disarming perceived conflicts of interest, as Wasserman (2010) pointed out, is to explain to the audience how and why no conflict exists, so that a reasonable outsider would agree.

In a community of interest such as the barrel-racing community, conflicts of interest could arise when the journalist covering the community is also a competitor. Wilkins and Brennen (2004) suggested that disclosure of the conflict is paramount in dealing with it up front. They caution, however, that it is only a partial remedy because it does not prevent the journalist from still taking advantage of his or her influence.

Community journalists often face the conflicting role of being an advocate for their community and being a fair and balanced reporter (Lauterer, 2006). Journalists as members of a community are advocates for what they love about a community. However negative things happen within communities, and journalists must find ways to deal with them in writing.
Lauterer (2006) maintained that no easy answer exists for dealing with conflicts of interest that arise from a journalist's involvement in a community, but that conflicts of interest should be handled on a case-by-case basis. "People are what really matter," Lauterer (2006) asserted.

DEFINING JOURNALISTIC DISTANCE

One concept that scholars and journalists use to recognize conflicts of interest is journalistic distance. Journalistic distance is "the ideational and figurative distance between the producer and the consumer of media form," and a way journalists separate themselves from the community that they cover (Abrahamson, 2007, p. 669).

Journalists at large newspapers like The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal can best utilize journalistic distance. A detached reporter with no community connections can maintain journalistic distance when covering a large city. However, in small community settings, journalistic distance is much more difficult to maintain. Community journalists, by their very nature, are unable to be detached editors and reporters (Lauterer, 2006).

In communities of interest, a journalist does not just share geography with his or her community, the journalist shares values, interest and sometimes competition with his or her readers. Reader and Moist (2009) also contended that a journalist in a community of interest is also a member of the community, using evidence presented in a study of letters to the editor to prove the connectedness of the community. This journalist as a member of the community out of necessity must disregard journalistic distance. Abrahamson (1996) emphasized this point:

Because one of the central motivations for readership is the audience’s need for advice, assistance and instruction, it was essential that the editorial persona of each special-interest magazine be an authority on the publication’s subject. It had to be the voice of knowledge and experience. The knowledge, moreover, had to be of a
practical, hands-on sort, with less practical, more intellectual considerations kept to a minimum (p. 56).

He continues:

Most of the specialized publishers assumed that one could teach an automotive engineer accomplished photographer or experienced pilot the necessary journalistic skills of writing and editing. In contrast, they believed it far more difficult to hire general-purpose journalists with no strong personal interest or individual experience in the avocation, and then instruct them in the history, traditions, social attitudes, shared values, and skilled required by the particular sport (p. 65).

While in some forms of journalism, like war reporting and national or regional public affairs, journalistic distance is a necessary way of managing conflicts of interest. In such reporting, major journalistic standards are easier to follow when dealing with celebrities, politicians and a faceless public. Yet, when working in a community where you know a majority of the people by name, this luxury slips by and leads to more complex realities that must be handled on a case-by-case basis.

**BLOGGING**

In online communities, the notions of journalistic distance, objectivity and conflicts of interest are often ignored all together. In the development of the Internet, weblogs, or blogs for short, have moved into the forefront of online communities. Blogs provide a space for discussion, ideas and, sometimes, traditional journalism. At The Barrel Racing Blog, the blog is both a place for true journalistic content and community discussion. In order to gain a full understanding of blogging and its place in journalism, I examined the state of the blogosphere, what draws readers to blogging communities, how blogs can be forms of journalism and the ethical implications of blogging. Finally, I discussed why I chose the blogging format.
THE BLOGOSPHERE

A blog provides a publishing outlet for much of the world that once was relegated to a passive role in the media process (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Far from just acting in this role today, blogs provide nearly unlimited possibilities for what people can share on the web. According to Technorati, the leading blogging aggregator, 184 million people worldwide have started blogs, and some 346 million people read blogs (Technorati, 2009). Most (70 percent) of the bloggers Technorati surveyed are college educated, and a majority of bloggers blog on personal topics rather than politics or news. Some 66 percent of bloggers are male, and 36 percent of bloggers are between 25 and 34 years old (Technorati, 2009). While these statistics represent just a small sliver of who is out in cyberspace blogging, they are helpful in providing context for a discussion on the scope of the blogosphere and the potential for community development within it.

BLOGS AND COMMUNITY

Human beings need to feel like they belong somewhere in this massive world of technology. It is an innate need, something that humans have been dealing with since their very evolution (Phillips, 2008). Human brains created Web 2.0, with all its interconnectivity and interactivity, in order to gain the feeling of community and a place to belong (Phillips, 2008). Blogs developed out of a need for such interconnectivity on the Internet, in part because traditional media, in its quest for objectivity, abandoned communities and took a far too detached position (Singer, 2005).

Blogs, a part of Web 2.0's social media, allow for self-expression in ways that traditional media do not (Phillips, 2008). Blogs can link to other forms of social media, like
Twitter, Facebook and Myspace, creating a web of different communities (Phillips, 2008). According to Phillips, "We as humans are a complex blend of private and social selves and the textured interconnections offered by social media provide a compelling platform for which we can express these multiple personalities" (p. 80).

Phillips (2008) also insisted that online groups must have a finite size in order for individuals to feel a part of a community. For example, a blog may have a specific number of followers, and on Facebook, a user has a specific number of friends. Furthermore, as blogging and other forms of social media are becoming less complicated, more people will begin to use them, creating new communities and links (Phillips, 2008).

Online communities, such as blogging communities, can help connect out-of-town readers as well as locals through providing them with a sense of connectiveness (Lauterer, 2006). Blogging can help provide a sense of community to distanced members who had lost that sense of community because of geography (Lauterer, 2006).

While The Barrel Racing Blog shares somewhat of a geographical community with its readers, it also is open to forming new communities of bloggers and readers across the country and indeed across the world. Thus far, The Barrel Racing Blog is part of the WomenTalkSports.com online network and is regularly linked to by various other barrel-racing websites, such as TheBarrelRacingBuzz.com and OnTheRodeoRoad.com. These sites help form multiple smaller communities of online connections.

Blogs can form both virtual and geographic communities. In many ways, blogs are a very specific type of community journalism. Blogs can create a feeling of belonging, as Phillips (2008) asserted, and blogs can help enhance a community's connectivity through a
place for vibrant, coffee-shop-like discussion, as Fanselow (2008) suggested. While typically one main blogger moderates the discussion, blogs can be a forum through comments that allow for discussion of issues, much like a story and then subsequent letters to the editor in a traditional news outlet. The difference in a journalistic blog, however, is that this discussion can be immediate and does not necessitate any letter monitoring processes by an editor. This is key in fostering debate, which is ever so crucial to blogging communities (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008).

Lauterer (2006) suggested that blogs enhance community news outlets. Blogs reintroduce immediacy into print journalism by allowing reporters to publish up-to-the-second coverage on their website or blog, a sense of immediacy that was lost by print journalists in the last century to broadcasters. Blogs are also a way that readers can get to know community journalists' opinions and perspectives, allowing for more transparency and, hopefully, trust (Lauterer, 2006).

Domingo and Heinonen (2008) distinguished four different types of journalistic blogs. They label citizen blogs as those that are written by the public, not working for any traditional media outlet. These blogs cover the mainstream media and monitor its work. They also can practice sustained reporting but do not move into the role of a traditional journalist (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Audience blogs are a second form of journalistic blogs, generally hosted on a media outlet's website but written by the audience of that outlet. These blogs can foster a sense of community by giving readers a place for expression (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). Journalist blogs are written by professional journalists but hosted separately from a journalist's outlet of employment. Journalists are drawn to write for this type of blog in order
to express opinions and write without the same restrictions that a traditional news outlet may enforce (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). *The Barrel Racing Blog* fits neatly into this category, as I am currently an employee of *The Athens NEWS* but write for *The Barrel Racing Blog* as an outlet for my more creative writing side. The last form of journalistic blogs listed by Domingo and Heinonen (2008) is the blog produced by the mainstream media. These blogs could be special event coverage, columns or commentary, and generally are sponsored by mainstream media outlets.

**ETHICS AND BLOGGING**

While some blogs are sponsored by mainstream media outlets and subject to traditional ethical codes, most blogs are unregulated. Given that *The Barrel Racing Blog* fits into the category laid out by Domingo and Heinonen (2008) as a journalist blog, it follows similar ethical practices that a traditional community journalist follows. While objectivity, journalistic distance and conflicts of interest have been discussed at length in this work, the ideas developed in those sections carry over into blogging ethics.

Many journalism scholars and individual bloggers suggest that the blogosphere is too fluid and vast to have a set form of ethical standards (Mitchell & Steele, 2006).

Individual bloggers will have to make their own decisions about whatever principles and processes guide their behavior, of course. The most effective standards and codes are not imposed from the outside. The idea that the journalism establishment would have the standing or influence to impose ethical standards on the blogosphere seems especially disconnected from reality (Mitchell & Steele, 2006, p. 7).

As Mitchell and Steele (2006) asserted, transparency is key in developing trust with readers in blogging. In a community where journalistic distance is impossible, the disclosure of personal biases is vital in maintaining a trusting relationship with readers. They added,
however, that transparency alone will not make a blogger ethical.

Disclosure in all three areas -- principles and processes as well as the personal -- can help you move beyond transparency to accountability. That means not simply the disclosure of personal information you’re willing to share, but the justification of your actions that comes with discussion of principles you uphold and processes you follow on your blog (Mitchell & Steele, 2006, p. 18).

Kuhn (2007) suggests that bloggers themselves must maintain the focus on interactivity between blogging community members. He argued, “Any useful code of blogging ethics must emerge from a dialogic process and be predicated upon recognition that a shared commitment to the norms of promoting interactivity and fostering human relationships via CMC are shared among the broader universe of bloggers without regard to specific blog functions” (p.19).

The role bloggers play, then, functions differently than the traditional “gatekeeper” role of traditional journalists, according to Friend and Singer’s Online Journalism Ethics (2007). It is the interactivity that bloggers in their very essence promote, which leads to a slightly different set of ethical standards and values (Friend & Singer, 2007). Those values, which for some follow closely along the lines of traditional media, encourage that all users to a site have a chance and a space to post comments, enhance ideas and contribute to the general knowledge of the subject matter (Friend & Singer, 2007). The authors pointed out that a common problem with this high level of user access is a lack of accountability for what is written, but they added that part of the problem of accountability can be mended by transparency, the “golden rule of the blogosphere,” as outlined by Mitchell and Steele (2006).

Furthermore, like in much of community journalism, the values and ethics of
the audience must be taken into account throughout the blogging process. Using ethical standards from a community like the pleasure horse community would be a big mistake in serving the barrel racing community, for example. Community blogs in general tend to more frequently outline a set of posting principles and ethics on their sites, showing the audience what will be tolerated for user feedback and posting alike (Debatin, 2010). Those ethical standards, then, are usually similar to the community’s ethical standards.

WHY A BLOG

In selecting a medium that will best serve the needs of the regional barrel racing community while also exploring journalistic distance through communities of interest (in this case, online communities of interest), I chose to use blogging as the main format through which I disseminate my information. For The Barrel Racing Blog, I chose to create a blog in order to provide the regional barrel racing community with an interactive web space for discussion about all issues barrel racing. The blogging format allows for immediate debate because of its comment features (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008), and it helps to create a "coffee-shop" feel. Blogs form communities, and a major goal of this project was exploring my own community and helping to provide another place for my community to come together on the web.

The blog setup also allows for constant updating. Using a blog, I can update immediately from a horse show or rodeo, providing up-to-the-second information to a community hungry for "scoop" on what is happening at shows they could not attend. Using WordPress.com’s templates, I can develop a blog that looks professionally designed.
EDITORIAL FORMULA

*The Barrel Racing Blog* fills a void in online content available to barrel racers in the Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia region. To do so, the site must offer more than just results listings. As a journalist, I must tell the story behind the results in order to best serve the community. I have set out a specific guideline of regular content to provide to the community.

**WEEKEND REVIEWS**

One of the biggest decisions a barrel racer makes each week is which rodeo or barrel race to attend. Her decision depends on many variables, such as the ground conditions, the amount of money available to win and the competition that will be there. In order to aid in this decision-making process, I regularly write full description of the arena conditions of any show I attend.

The Weekend Reviews always include photos of the ground at the event as well as images from around the arena. Since so many factors contribute to a great run, the images of grandstands, alleyways and ground conditions are included to help barrel racers decide if the arena would be right for their horse.

Also, videos of runs at a particular arena draw in a larger audience than most other features on the website, offering viewers a chance to see for themselves how horses handled the ground and the arena's set up. For Weekend Reviews, I include as many videos as possible in order to give competitors a clear view of what a winning run looks like in a particular arena's ground conditions. Weekend Reviews are written the day following an event and are posted as often as I can attend barrel races, which usually is at least once every week.
INTERVIEWS

While national publications like *Barrel Horse News* offer question and answer sessions with only the top competitors on a national level, *The Barrel Racing Blog* offers interviews with those barrel racers who have been successful regionally. The interviews generally run in weeklong series of question and answer interviews with a barrel racer who has had success at a recent event. This is not limited to professionals or trainers, just somebody who can provide insight into his or her own barrel racing successes and, at times, failures.

The interviews are not simply a template interview; each set of questions is specifically targeted towards what a person's skill set offers. Youth who are particularly successful are asked about life as a young person living barrel racing lifestyles, while some older cowgirls are asked to reflect on their careers and on their training methods. A key part of each interview touches on each barrel racer's training methods and ethical standards. Steroids and other performance enhancing drugs and techniques are the purple elephant in the room, and *The Barrel Racing Blog* attempts to uncover competitors’ true feelings on the subject through these interviews. *The Barrel Racing Blog* offers interviews whenever experts are available to answer questions, and at least one interview is published each month.

MULTIMEDIA CONTENT

*The Barrel Racing Blog* provides space for videos and photos that are not available anywhere else. While *Barrel Horse News* offers videos of winning runs at many of the top barrel races across the country, *The Barrel Racing Blog* takes videos at rodeos and horse shows at local events in the region. Many stories on the site will also include video features to
enhance the text and photos. These videos will all be self-produced using iMovie, unless an interview subject submits videos of his or her runs. Also, with many Weekend Reviews I include slideshows using Picasa of the arena and ground. The multimedia content has already proven to drastically increase page views on The Barrel Racing Blog. Also, videos and slideshows take time to watch, so the audience also spends more time on the site on pages with such content.

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

The Barrel Racing Blog's readers have participated in discussion on the site. Readers have begun commenting on many posts and have made suggestions about what they would like to see on the site through personal interactions at barrel races and through comments on stories. Blog comments range from critical posts disagreeing with assessments of the ground to funny stories related to the posts. Also, readers have engaged one another in discussion via comment posting. Readers have also utilized the post section to solicit feedback, both from one another and from me. Posts are monitored and approved, but anything that is not hate speech or spam is generally approved.

COMMENTARY

Commentary and personal views will be mixed in with The Barrel Racing Blog's regular content. This adds to the personality I have throughout the barrel racing community and lets readers know who is working behind the scenes on the blog. It adds to the ever-important transparency so that readers know who is producing the content and what I am all about.
MARKET ANALYSIS

The genre of Western journalism – that is, journalism for an audience interested in the Western cowboy lifestyle – features magazines covering a wide range of topics. Some reflect on the cultural values of Western life, while others focus on event coverage of rodeos and specific rodeo events. Magazines such as Cowboys & Indians feature high-end ranch resorts, Southwestern cooking and celebrities at home on the ranch. Spin-to-Win and Barrel Horse News, on the other hand, provide national coverage of the top rodeo competitors and competitions, as well as technical advice to help their audiences compete in the sport as well. The range of topics covered under Western journalism is as broad as the open range itself once was. Yet, room exists to create a unique niche in the area. Not all barrel racers and rodeo competitor compete at the highest levels in the West, yet these magazines cover the top professionals running in that region. Many top barrel racers live and work in the Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia region, yet their competitions and personalities are rarely covered in the “mainstream” Western media. The Barrel Racing Blog will make up for this lack of coverage by featuring barrel racers in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio and covering issues of immediate concern to them.

METHOD

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the type of stories that appeal to the barrel racing community, I completed a content and market analysis of Barrel Horse News, Spin-to-Win Rodeo and Cowboys & Indians magazines. While these are not the only magazines that cover the barrel racing and rodeo industry, they each offer a particular glimpse into the
types of journalism produced for this community. For each magazine, I examined their regular departments and feature articles, specifically addressing the types of articles presented, authors' affiliation, main sources used and points of view. Also, I noted the advertising content of each publication. I also listed the web content available for each print publication. Using these variables plus media kits available from these publications, I compiled a demographic and psychographic profile for each publication. I then addressed how each variable will be represented on The Barrel Racing Blog.

While print magazines do serve a significant portion of the community, my main audience will be web-based; therefore, I chose two online barrel-racing sites to provide comparison. OntheRodeoRoad.com is a website focusing on rodeo news and tracking major competitors in the sport. It does not center on barrel racing in particular, but the site's most frequent contributors are barrel racers. I also chose BarrelRacingBuzz.com, a national barrel racing website and forum. While they are two very different websites, they both serve a similar target audience as The Barrel Racing Blog and do some of the things that my website aims to do.

In order to analyze these two sites, I examined the types of content they offer, their use of multimedia content, their space for reader feedback and their authorship. I also looked at their advertising and read their descriptions to understand who is using their sites and who is creating content for their sites.

Last, I addressed what The Barrel Racing Blog can contribute to the discussion. In listing what these publications and websites do, I narrowed down what they do not do and the holes that I can fill. The Barrel Racing Blog also benefits from my knowing what these
national outlets do well and replicates some of their more successful practices in a more localized way.

**BARREL HORSE NEWS**

The main magazine that serves the national barrel racing community is *Barrel Horse News*. Put out by Cowboys Publishing Group, *Barrel Horse News* is a monthly magazine covering the national barrel racing scene and sent to every member of the National Barrel Horse Association (NBHA), as well as various other barrel racers across the country. *Barrel Horse News* is the largest circulation magazine covering the industry.

*Barrel Horse News* offers lengthy monthly features on top barrel racing competitors, training techniques, events and horse health. Its regular departments are: Arena Record - the editor's column, Charmayne James - an explanatory riding or training feature with the winningest rodeo cowgirl of all times, Arena Dirt - a compilation of briefs about barrel races in the mainstream media, Your Turn - reader feedback, Youth Forum - a column by a youth competitor, Futurity Round-up and Barrel Racing Across the U.S. - major event results, Barrel Racing Results - the name speaks for itself, and Barrel Calendar and Clinics - a listing of major barrel races and clinics by top professionals. Its regular content provides dependable coverage of major national barrel racing issues. Also, its Charmayne James section is an explanatory feature that uses the same expert to give training and competition advice.

Feature articles in *Barrel Horse News* can be very lengthy. The editorial staff does not back away from running an eight-page explanatory piece on veterinary medicine or a six-page article on the NBHA World Show. Articles are generally written by the editorial staff of the magazine. At times, experts write pieces with the help of an editor. Also, in April 2009,
Barrel Horse News featured an excerpt from a book published by the magazine's own publishing company as a veterinary article.

Because of the nature of the coverage, Barrel Horse News relies heavily on expert sources for its content. While many mainstream magazines use indirect quotes, Barrel Horse News utilizes direct quotes to provide the expert's take on a situation. In event coverage, the magazine uses the winners of each event to comment on the show or rodeo. Profiles of competitors generally use the competitor and his or her close friends and family as sources, rather than finding an outside source who may be more critical. As for points of view, Barrel Horse News bounces between first, second and third person. With a relatively informal writing style, different types of articles feature different points of view. Explanatory articles and how-tos from experts like Charmayne James are in second person using the "you" form of address, while veterinary articles, event coverage and news stories are almost always written in third person.

Barrel Horse News' advertising content focuses on the higher-end barrel racing industry. Its advertisements feature expensive tack and trailer products as well as supplements and feeds. Large shows with high entry fees also buy ads in the publication.

The readers of Barrel Horse News are primarily members of the National Barrel Horse Association because the NBHA purchases a subscription for each of its members. The NBHA is "designed primarily for the local weekend competitor," according to its website, yet many professionals and top national competitors are also members.

The advertisements in the magazine signal that its readers are willing to spend large sums of money to improve their and their horses' performance in barrel racing competition. A
largely white community, readers of *Barrel Horse News* probably own or ride horses. *Barrel Horse News* provides more barrel-racing show coverage than rodeo coverage, so its audience is probably made up of people who compete at shows more than rodeos. This distinction is important within the community, as although the sport itself is the same, the events are very different and require different mentalities, horses and levels of dedication. *Barrel Horse News*, in its catering to the horse show/barrel racing community, is targeted more at weekend barrel racers, rather than rodeo cowgirls who live a full-time barrel racing lifestyle. Another important feature of *Barrel Horse News*'s audience is that they are largely female. Barrel racing originated as a woman's sport, and many of the articles and advertisements in *Barrel Horse News* are targeted towards women. The audience does, however, walk a fine line and is almost gender neutral, because many men are also in the top ranks of the barrel racing community.

Behind everything, what drives *Barrel Horse News* audience is their passion for barrel racing. For many, it is a weekend escape and an obsession. Readers are willing to spend all of their extra money and time on their barrel racing careers, although most of them have a full-time career other than in the horse industry.

*Barrel Horse News* produces a website called *BarrelHorses.com*, which is a national barrel racing portal for classified ads, event listings and forums. Top competitors as well as everyday barrel racers offer horses, trailers and tack for consignment on the website. Feature stories from *Barrel Horse News* can be read online, but departmental stories are not available. Also, major shows in the South and West are featured and linked. While it does offer space for community blogs, those blogs are rarely utilized and the editor herself does not update her
SPIN-TO-WIN RODEO

Serving a somewhat different audience than Barrel Horse News, Spin-to-Win Rodeo serves team ropers mainly but also includes rodeo results and barrel racing how-to articles. While not 100 percent focused on barrel racing, the magazine covers Western horsemanship and barrel racing in a unique way. It groups barrel racing in with other rodeo events while featuring it next to team roping. This approach targets couples and families -- as often, female barrel racers marry male team ropers and have children that do both. This way, Spin-to-Win Rodeo effectively addresses a distinct sector of the barrel racing community that regularly competes in rodeos so that they can be with their male counterparts. A major goal of the magazine is to provide readers with practical knowledge and instruction from top professionals because the magazine's audience is largely rodeo competitors. Each month, the magazine offers a specific "how-to" section for barrel racers, and it is in this section where I can learn how to write a great "how-to" piece for barrel racers.

The magazine's regular content includes - High Call - rodeo photography, Rodeo Horsepower - a profile of a top team roping horse, Freeze Frame - tips from a top team roping competitor, Barrel Racing - the magazine's main barrel racing feature (always a how-to article), At the Barrier - like Arena Dirt, a wrap up of brief news stories from the team roping industry, On the Rodeo Road with Bob Welch - provides recent rodeo news from the team roping world, All Access with Kendra Santos - features a behind the scenes look into a great team roper, New Products and Industry News - as the title suggests, The Vet's Office - a monthly column by a vet on the health of rodeo horses and One-on-One with Kendra Santos -
the editor interviews a pro-team roper and prints his first-person transcript. The list of regular
departments here is very long, mainly because the magazine's content comes almost 100
percent from its regular departments. Occasionally *Spin-to-Win Rodeo* will throw in a special
section, but the vast majority of its monthly content is formulaic.

Most of the feature stories in the departments are rather short and full of photographs.
The features usually spend a lot of time talking about technique and "how-tos" of team roping
and barrel racing. In particular, the barrel racing feature section offers a professional's profile
plus her training tips. This aligns itself with the magazine's core mission of helping its
readership improve their skills in team roping and barrel racing. Again, the vast majority of
the content is "how-to" and explanatory based, while even the profiles have a major
explanatory component as experts discuss what skills they use to accomplish their successes.
Most of the articles are written by the magazine's editorial staff of just a few people. The
sources are predominantly expert rodeo competitors with a few veterinarians thrown into the
mix, but amateurs are never cited. The point-of-view changes frequently based on the article's
purpose. First-hand accounts are used in the One-on-One section, while profiles are written in
the third-person but using a high frequency of direct quotes.

The advertising content of *Spin-to-Win Rodeo* is largely similar to that of *Barrel Horse
News*. It focuses on products that will help rodeo competitors improve their and their horses'
performance. Much of the advertising is team roping centered, but the magazine also
advertises products for barrel racers as well. Products are generally expensive tack,
supplements or ropes. Top competitions advertise their show bills in *Spin-to-Win* as well.

According to its 2010 media kit, *Spin-to-Win Rodeo's* subscribers are 92 percent male,
and most of the readers 35,887 are over the age of 30. The largest segment of the readership, 25 percent, is between 40 and 49. The media kit also reports that at least 48 percent of the readers share their magazine with another person. Often times, in a household, that other person is the team roper's wife who reads the magazine for the barrel racing segments. At least 65 percent of the magazine's readership reports riding at least two to four times each week, and 90 percent own horses. With that high percentage of horse ownership, some 96 percent of their readers own trucks and 93 percent own trailers. The readership is obviously willing to spend money on their horses and their rodeo careers.

Some 24 percent of Spin-to-Win Rodeo's readers have an average household income of over $500,000, while 48 percent of the readership's household income is between $100,000-$500,000. Given their investment in horses, trucks, trailers and barns, the readership of Spin-to-Win Rodeo is willing and able to spend large sums of money on their sport. They're driven by a desire to be in magazines like Spin-to-Win Rodeo, and they love the rodeo lifestyle of the American cowboy. The females that read the magazine are rodeo cowgirls, and they appreciate the descriptive training and competition tools in the barrel racing features.

Spin-to-Win Rodeo is part of MyHorse.com on the web and only posts minimal web content. The website lists what's in new issues of Spin-to-Win Rodeo but does not allow users to access the content. The website does offer some exclusive interviews and how-to videos from experts, but the web content is limited to team roping.

**COWBOYS&INDIANS**

Cowboys&Indians calls itself the “Premiere Magazine of the American West.” Throughout its high-gloss pages, the magazine covers the higher-end of Western lifestyle. It
offers lengthy features on fine Southwestern dining, expensive ranch lifestyle, Western fashion and Western celebrity life. With a circulation of 147,400, *Cowboys & Indians* reaches a broad range of wealthy Western enthusiasts. While it does not directly cover rodeo or barrel racing, it is a competitor of *The Barrel Racing Blog* because it covers all cultural aspects of the readers of the website. Its narrative stories are done in a similar manner of *The Barrel Racing Blog*'s, and its readership overlaps.

Each month, the magazine rotates departments. The regular sections of the magazine signify a strong connection to upper levels of Western society. The emphasis on culture mixes high society with Western life. It regularly features Home Interiors - detailing unique Western and ranch decor, Reel West - Hollywood's Western culture, Western Gourmet - Western cooking and chefs, History - a chronicle of the Old West, Native Life - history and culture of Native Americans, Open Range - a mix of news from the West and Western storefronts, Happy Trails - obituaries of famous Western actors, cowboys and cowgirls, Society - Western society pages, On the Horizon - up and coming Western fashion, Gallery Tour - Western and Native art and artists, Bookstall - a book review of Western literature, Cowboy Corner - a creative section for cowboy poetry or short stories, Showtime - a schedule of art gallery opening and Live From - an interview with a star from an event.

The magazine's features reflect an emphasis on quality long-form journalism, with everything from in-depth profiles of Western icons, musicians and movie stars to descriptive pieces about Western cooking and decor. The features are all descriptive and long, with profiles of artists reaching up to eight pages in length (with large portrait photos included.) The photographs are more than just action shots -- the images included are well thought out,
professional portraits and posed interior decor photos. The editorial staff relies on many freelance contributors to supply the lengthy articles it offers. While some staffers write stories, the vast majority of the publication's articles come from freelancers. Sources for profiles largely come from family, friends and the person being profiled, while sources for fashion, art and interior design stories are generally experts in the field. The point of view is almost always third person, but travel articles can feature first or second person narratives.

_Cowboys&Indians'_ advertising content provides possibly the deepest insight into the magazine's readership and editorial mission. On every glossy page is at least one advertisement for something wildly expensive for the average American. The magazine features advertisements for everything from Western diamond rings, $3,000-cowboy hats, designer boots and luxury ranch resort vacations.

The advertisement gives way to the demographics of the magazine - the average net worth of a subscriber is $1.5 million. At an average age of 47 with a male to female ratio of 50/50, _Cowboys&Indians_ offers upper middle class to upper class readers a taste of Western culture. Subscribers are mostly managers, owners or partners in business, and their average yearly household income is $173,000. According to the magazine's media kit, these people like to shop. Some 24 percent of readers reported spending over $5,000 in fine jewelry purchases in the last year. With 88 percent owning their own homes, 42 percent reported a home value of between $200,000 and $499,000, while 31 percent reported a value of over $500,000. Horseback riding was the number one physical activity reported by the readers with 52 percent riding regularly.

The magazine's readers are driven by a love of Western culture, but they maintain a
love for an upper class lifestyle. Most readers are not just a family farmer but a wealthy land
owner and businessman or businesswoman. *Cowboys & Indians* provides a Western escape to
its readers, a chance to get away from the city while still maintaining an upper class lifestyle.
Its readers appreciate quality Western fashion and design and are willing to spend money to
own it. As the magazine's media kit states, the readers of *Cowboys & Indians* may not be part
of the geographical West but live in a Western state of mind.

The magazine's website was recently revamped into an aesthetically pleasing web
portal for the publication. While before the site only offered a glimpse at the print content and
nothing more, it now features full print content plus blogs, multimedia, shopping and real
estate. It even offers a recipe section for Western cooking.

**ONTHERODEO.COM**

A website originally designed to help promote rodeo competitors in order to draw in
sponsorships, *OntheRodeoRoad.com* has morphed into a major national news aggregate for
rodeo news. It still maintains its core mission, though, of providing a space for select rodeo
competitors to report regularly on rodeos they attend and their performance. Developed by
two barrel racing sisters interested in rodeo and done to help promote rodeo competitors,
*OntheRodeoRoad.com* is a prime example of journalism for a community of interest by
members of that community of interest.

Its most frequent contributors are barrel racers, while they also offer other timed event
and rough stock event riders. Amber Mostoller, Ashley Whyland and Tracey Goodman are
the three barrel racers the website follows, and they report to the site with videos of their runs
from each rodeo. The girls answer a series of questions about their runs, ranging from the
hospitality of the rodeo committee to the ground conditions to a play-by-play of the run itself.

The website's main authors are the competitors themselves. Each competitor writes informally about her performance and posts it on the website. The writing is informal but descriptive, and, since barrel racers themselves are writing the stories, they cover the information that barrel racers care about most (like ground condition, times, etc.). Other rodeo related news stories are posted to the site from other online media outlets, and those stories are written by professional journalists. The website has an emphasis on multimedia content as competitors upload videos of their runs after each rodeo, allowing viewers to see the ground conditions, arena set up and various other factors that contribute to a good or bad run.

The website also allows for comments on each post. This is a chance for readers to interact with one another and with the rodeo professional. Barrel racers regularly have conversations with readers through the comment feature, allowing interested parties to discuss barrel racing and to make connections.

Being run as a volunteer effort by two passionate barrel racers, OnTheRodeoRoad.com does not have any type of advertising. Given the content of the site, though, the website seems to be targeted directly towards those with a strong interest in barrel racing and rodeo. Most likely, most readers are competitors themselves who stay up-to-date on what others are doing using the site. The information about rodeos and runs is also helpful for barrel racers because it allows them to choose where to run in the future.

**BARRELRAISINGBUZZ.COM**

BarrelRacingBuzz.com calls itself "the fastest growing barrel racing site on the web."

With its links to many of the industries top professionals, the website is able to provide
instructional videos and interviews, articles and event coverage. Its forums provide a place for barrel racers to discuss shows, rodeos, training problems and anything else they can think of related to barrel racing.

The site is an online community portal for the national barrel racing industry. Unlike forums on BarrelHorses.com, the BarrelRacingBuzz.com's forums are extremely active. The main forum has almost 19,000 posts to some 1,300 topics. It even offers a forum where riders can post videos of their runs to get help and criticism from other barrel racers. This forum has 1,625 posts to 139 topics, and every video receives responses.

BarrelRacingBuzz.com also offers a barrel-racing calendar that can be edited by anyone on the site. Adding an event, usually a barrel race, rodeo or clinic to their calendar is simple and can bring attention to an upcoming event one may be planning. The website also offers classified ads to people looking to buy or sell horses or tack.

The videos produced by the website are stored in a library on the site. They produce hundreds and hundreds of videos with top talent across the industry and cover every topic from choosing a barrel horse to taking care of cowboy hats. The videos are professionally done, easy to view and include both male and female barrel racers.

Advertising on the site is limited to horse-related companies and products, barrel races, clinics and rodeos. The site stays closely in line with its editorial mission to help foster an online barrel racing community by doing so.

BarrelRacingBuzz.com is not targeted merely at professionals. It is mainly a place for amateurs to seek advice from one another and to get help from pros via videos. The users of the website are looking for like-minded people who can help increase their understanding of
the sport. The forums allow for discussion between barrel racers of all levels.

LESSONS FROM COMPETITORS

In the field of barrel racing journalism, The Barrel Racing Blog has much to offer. All of the publications and websites listed are targeted towards a national audience and feature top-level competitors from the West. The Barrel Racing Blog can find its niche in targeting the specific Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania barrel racing community and can shine a spotlight on barrel racers experiencing success from this area. This community is largely ignored by publications like Barrel Horse News and websites like BarrelRacingBuzz.com who only produce multimedia content about top barrel racers in the West.

The Barrel Racing Blog can also take lessons from these publications. It is evident through the content of the print publications that readers like lengthy features as well as how-to articles and information on veterinary medicine. Readers also find helpful information from the pros and appreciate long, descriptive quotes. My website takes this into account when working on training features.

Through analyzing the use of the forums on BarrelRacingBuzz.com, it's clear that the barrel racing community is looking to develop online connections. The Barrel Racing Blog will continue to help enhance this community by welcoming feedback from readers through blog comments, polls and reader participation in stories.

Also evident is the barrel racing community's response to videos. Multimedia content is essential in producing a barrel racing website that attracts an audience in this community, because videos are the only way a barrel racer can really see what he or she is doing wrong and come to understand his or her run completely.
AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

With all of these popular media outlets serving the barrel racing community, the
question then arises – who is a part of the community? Rodeo is no longer an event isolated to
the West. On the East Coast, rodeo has emerged as a popular hobby and even profession for
many. What's more, the only rodeo event specifically targeted towards women, barrel racing,
has taken off as a multi-million dollar industry nationwide. Eastern barrel racers are eager to
compete and prove their status in this industry, and now men and women alike are competing
each weekend. While most barrel racing magazines stay focused on the top competitors in the
West and mainly cover events that happen there, news from East Coast events is limited to
result listings on association websites, and the story of "what actually happened" is lost. This
audience of men and women may number in the hundreds of thousands is eager to use social
networking tools to gain access to information and is willing to spend thousands of dollars in
pursuit of its sport.

The eastern audience is hungry for information - and what's more, these competitors
are just emerging as an online community. They are jumping onto the social networking
bandwagon with Facebook.com, MySpace.com and Twitter.com. Anecdotally, I have 400
"Friends" on Facebook.com that are related to the barrel racing community, and most of those
friends have been added just within the past year. They are also reading and writing blogs, a
sign of their openness to social networking.

In order to harness the momentum of this shift to online communication, I have
created The Barrel Racing Blog as a website for this specific community. To best serve this
community of interest, though, I have taken into account personal experience with this
community and organizational figures to develop an audience profile.

Though various barrel racing organizations track individual membership numbers, no association or organization has ever counted the number of barrel racers across the country. TrackMyHorse.com's founder, Mike Mahan, whose business relies on the number of barrel racers nationwide, estimates the number of barrel racers between 300,000 and 500,000, but said that nobody can actually say for sure. What is also unknown is the percentage of men versus women competing in barrel races. Barrel racing was designed as a women's sport, and more barrel racers are female rather than male. But, while rodeos only permit women to compete, barrel races at horse shows allow both genders to compete, and many of the top barrel horse trainers across the country are men.

The Barrel Racing Blog is targeted towards barrel racers in Ohio, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. According to statistics provided by Google Analytics, from April 1, 2009 until The Barrel Racing Blog’s switch to Wordpress Jan. 1, 2010, the site received 5,389 visits and 9,335 pageviews. During this time, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Texas were the top three states visiting the site. This is significant because a large concentration of barrel racers calls Texas home, meaning The Barrel Racing Blog is indeed attracting a national barrel racing audience.

Another indication of The Barrel Racing Blog’s readership is its Facebook and Twitter following. On Facebook, The Barrel Racing Blog has some 727 fans as of March 11, 2010, with 86 percent of those fans being women. Of those 727, 28 percent are between the ages of 18-24, 21 percent between 35-44 and 20 percent between 25-34. (These numbers are constantly growing and shifting.) These fans post comments to Facebook posts more frequently than they comment on the actual blog, and they regularly network with one another.
via the blog’s Facebook site. According to the Wordpress statistics, Facebook is the number one referrer of readers to *The Barrel Racing Blog*.

On Twitter, *The Barrel Racing Blog* has accumulated 579 followers as of March 11, 2010. While no specific statistical data exists on these followers, I regularly interact with followers involved in rodeo and barrel racing publishing and promotion through Twitter. These followers use Twitter mainly to stay up-to-date on what other websites or publications are doing, making Twitter another top driver of readers to *The Barrel Racing Blog*.

On September 5, 2009, nearly 350 barrel racers competed in the Open class of a barrel race at Henderson's Arena in Jackson, Ohio. This is the average number of competitors that usually shows up in Jackson when they hold an event. Also in Ohio, the All-American Quarter Horse Congress draws in some 15,000 entries, usually about 800 of which are in barrel racing events. The number of barrel racing fans that attend the Congress to watch the event is an unknown, but 650,000 come to Columbus each year for the multi-discipline event, according to the Ohio Quarter Horse Association's website.

Being a professional horse trainer and barrel racer is more common in the West than in Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia. Most competitors in this region have full-time jobs that help pay for their barrel racing habit, while many other female competitors are stay-at-home moms whose husbands earn a good living to support their wives. The sport does cover all ranges of the economic spectrum, but most competitive barrels are at least middle class. Many can be considered upper class, as horse trailers can cost in the hundreds-of-thousands of dollar range. Competitive barrel horses run between $10,000 and $20,000 on average, and the upkeep of these animals is also very expensive. A trip to the vet for a leg injury (the most
common injury among barrel horses) can cost upwards of $700, and barrel horses must have new shoes every six weeks, at a cost of between $75-$200. These are just basic horse needs - most competitors spend thousands more on their horses each year. The All-American Quarter Horse Congress itself brings in $110 million to the Columbus area each year, according to the Ohio Quarter Horse Association's website.

With all of this said, a typical reader of *The Barrel Racing Blog* is likely a white woman between the ages of 19 and 45 who is an avid barrel racing competitor in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia or Texas. She is likely a member of the International Barrel Racing Association or the Penn-Ohio Barrel Racing Association, the two organizations that cater the most to the area. Also, if she runs rodeos, she is a member of the International Professional Rodeo Association, the American Professional Rodeo Association or the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. She may work, but if she does, it's at a job where she has free time to spend on the computer. She has at least one horse, and likely owns a large truck and trailer to transport her horse. While her exact income or her family's exact income level is an unknown, she has to have enough money to afford to compete in a very expensive sport.
PERSONAL CONNECTION

As a barrel racer in the Pennsylvania-Ohio region, I have spent the past 15 years living and thriving in this community. I have been raised on the open road, traveling from barrel race to rodeo with my closest friends. I have learned the ins and outs of the community and its values, and I have been a successful competitor. Between 2001 and 2006, I placed five times at the All-American Quarter Horse Congress in barrel racing and pole bending, the largest show in the country. I was named the top barrel racer at the 2004 BullRide Mania Finals in Malvern, Pa., and have won various rodeo titles throughout my career. These successes have helped me to gain prestige and respect throughout the barrel racing community, something essential to reporting successfully in this field. What is more, I have made strong personal connections with top competitors in the industry, allowing me to gain access to interviews that others would find difficult to obtain.
CONCLUSION

Already, the website draws in nearly 2,500 visitors per month. It has received national attention on forums like BarrelRacingBuzz.com and is regularly linked to by other regional barrel racing blogs. It has caught the attention of magazine advertisers from publications such as The Horse, and its following reaches every state in the Union and many nations across the globe. Readers comment on posts and on average spend two minutes on the site every visit.

This project is more than simply a student experiment in an abstract form of online journalism. The Barrel Racing Blog serves a very real community, providing a new space for discussion and community connectivity on the World Wide Web. It draws connections between my academic, journalistic and equine industry backgrounds, creating a professional project that fulfills both my professional and personal goals. Its emphasis on interactivity in an online community grasps onto the wave of Web 2.0 while maintaining the values of community journalism. The lessons I learn while producing this website will surely lend themselves to my career as a journalist or public relations professional, regardless of which direction I take. The research I completed for the scholarly essay helped me in developing a solid foundation for the editorial work I am doing for the site, and it presents a clear picture of where The Barrel Racing Blog fits into the media landscape.

The Barrel Racing Blog has been and continues to be an undertaking that constantly challenges my skill set while at the same time playing off my strengths in the horse industry. I have developed a talent for social media marketing and have attracted a wide audience of local, regional and national barrel racing enthusiasts. It introduced me to industry professionals, marketers and competitors. This experience
has forced me to take a critical look at my role as both a journalist and a competitor in
the barrel racing world, making me a more thoughtful decision maker.

**Web Development**

This project evolved from a free-format Blogger account with daily readership
rarely exceeding 10 visitors to a paid Wordpress account that draws in between 75 and
100 readers every day from across the targeted region and across the country. When
the blog started as a project for my Introduction to Online Journalism course and then
as a project for my Advanced Editing course, I had goals of expanding the site to its
current state. I wanted to make something usable, that people I know can see
themselves in interviews and stories on the site and feel proud of their
accomplishments. I knew that a void existed in the community for a news outlet that
served the specific region, and I knew how to fill that void. In the months prior to the
creation of *The Barrel Racing Blog*, I had watched as hundreds of barrel racers
became new Facebook users, and I was lucky enough to reconnect with many old
barrel racing and rodeo friends. Lowery, Brozana and Mackay (2008) insisted that it is
online communities such as this that play a major role in community journalism. Kuhn
(2007) and Lauterer (2005) also emphasized that it is in these online communities that
geographical boundaries are broken.

Knowing the cost of producing a hard-copy publication and observing the
emerging web community of Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia barrel racers, I
decided to launch the blog. At first, the process was hit-or-miss. I experimented with
content, seeing what drew in hits (first using Google Analytics, then using Wordpress’s analytics system). I knew I wanted to maintain as much interactivity as possible, as serving the online community was a major ethical drive of the publication. As Gilmore pointed out in Lauterer’s (2006) book, community journalists (as well as bloggers serving communities of interest), must always keep in mind that they are working to foster a sense of community and interactivity with each story. So, after a summer studying equine journalism and gaining an intimate familiarity with the industry and making observations on what my readers responded favorably towards with Facebook comments, blog comments, hits and emails, I determined the content categories that would best fit a website of this nature.

I made the decision to change formats because of the increased accessibility of varied content available on the Wordpress site, and the ability to brand myself as TheBarrelRacingBlog.com was another major factor that drew me to this format. Switching formats right after I had attracted so many new readers would be a challenge, so two weeks before the switch I began posting on Facebook, Twitter and the blog itself explaining the reason for the switch and how to find the new site. When the switch occurred on January 1, 2010, many readers stayed with me. At first there was a slight decline in readership, but once I posted International Finals Rodeo Coverage, Penn-Ohio Barrel Racing Association Year-End Award interviews and the Teddy Terrific story, readership shot through the roof.

It was the Teddy Terrific story, a feature and Q&A with the Ford Family from Chillicothe, Ohio, that elevated The Barrel Racing Blog to a new status. This story,
about a 20-year-old horse who had won more titles than any other horse in the area, let alone the country, and had brought a family more joy and more connectivity than anyone could fathom, drew in at least 200 hits each day in its week-long series. Via Facebook, fan numbers jolted upwards and comments, all positive, flooded the page. The girl who owns Teddy Terrific, an Ohio University Scripps College of Communication graduate herself, posted the story on her page every day, receiving praise and comments with every post. Comments included: “I read this at work today and was tearing up the whole time. Such a great story,” “Jess, what a great article on your family and Teddy!! I know I am one of those ones who have loved watching him over the years!! Great job!!” “Great read and I'm happy to finally hear about Teddy,” and “Please keep posting this everyday! I love reading it! I can't wait to share this with my dad and my brother-in-law I know they will also enjoy it!” The comments, at least 15 per day, illustrated how much this community was dying to hear about its all-stars. Teddy Terrific and the Fords took an Ohio great and competed on a national stage but still come home to their roots in Southeast Ohio.

When I started this endeavor, I didn’t fully understand the impact Facebook would make on this site. In fact, The Barrel Racing Blog’s success is extremely intertwined with Facebook. My top referrer, day in and day out, is Facebook. Currently, The Barrel Racing Blog has over 1,200 fans on Facebook, and its Facebook page regularly receives 500-600 views each week. More than people commenting on the blog, they comment on the blog’s Facebook page. New readers are referred to The Barrel Racing Blog through Facebook, and those readers have included some of the
top editors, writers and competitors in the industry. I first contacted the Fords through Facebook, and I generally make most of my first introductions to barrel racers, like Scamper Hill, BillieAnn Sexton and Natalie Overholt, via Facebook. Facebook literally plugged me into a community in which I’m a part, but also into the larger community that the blog hopes to reach as a part of its national audience.

**Community Role**

*The Barrel Racing Blog* put me in a position as both a competitor in the barrel racing industry as well as a journalist covering that industry. Throughout the year, I have examined my role in this community from the perspective of a community journalist. Overall, I have found that it is in this role, as a true competitor and journalist, that I have gained credibility amongst my readership. Like Abrahamson (2007) said, niche audiences look to the editors of industry publications to be experts in that field. This role has given me access to some competitors I might not have had the ability to speak to if I weren’t a competitor myself, and it also gave me the perspective to report on subject matter in a relevant, more accurate manner because of my ability to use jargon and to understand the intricacies of the community. For example, I was sought out by rodeo public relations expert Mike Donnell to cover Tana Poppino’s run for the 2010 National Finals Rodeo specifically because of my level of expertise in barrel racing and because my audience of barrel racers themselves would be able to benefit from and find interest in Poppino’s stories from on the rodeo road. Also, it was my ability to ask questions that would benefit an active barrel racing readership to competitors like Natalie Overholt and BillieAnn Sexton that drew in more readers to the blog, because
readers genuinely felt as if they were gaining something useful from reading it. The goal of the blog itself was to be useful to competitors, from competitors, so not being a competitor in the industry would indeed have put me at a stark disadvantage in terms of coverage.

Given my connections within the community and my role as a competitor, rather than steering clear of stories where someone might perceive a conflict of interest because I know the interview subject, I embraced those ties and friendships to produce a better final product that was informative and honest. In this small of a community, most competitors know one another, so it would be impossible for a competitor/reporter to not have personal ties, history or relationships with another competitor. While in some professional roles, utilizing personal connections may be seen as unethical or only looking out for one’s self interest, using these ties and connections produced high-quality content. These connections served the community rather than harmed it by giving readers articles on subject matter they cared about. Today, in my professional role as an assistant editor at *Horse&Rider* magazine, we also use ties we have formed within the horse industry to secure stories, gain access to competitors and learn about new training techniques or products. In this case, utilizing these connections is a *service*, rather than a *disservice*, to readers. Our readers wouldn’t have access to these people in print or any other form if we didn’t have access to them, so utilizing these connections is of great benefit to the readers.

Given this level of connectivity with my readership, I have had to maintain an awareness of whom I am serving with this work. To simply forget about the journalistic tenets of objectivity and transparency would be doing a disservice to my readership. While I have spent the year leveraging my contacts in the industry to get
timely, accurate and interesting stories for my readers, I have not abandoned the truth. I have used my connections to get in touch with people and to report on them, and I have done so in an accurate manner. I have not come to a point where someone has made a comment that I’ve had to doctor or I’ve known someone to be lying to me and I’ve ignored it. I have written stories to the best of my ability, regardless of whom the story was about.

What’s more, when working to build this content, I was aware that I must conduct myself in an ethical manner that would develop reader trust and enhance interactivity at The Barrel Racing Blog. In doing so, I used the principles of community journalism and combined those with the disclosure and transparency principles of blogging ethics to develop a strategy for approaching ethical decisions at The Barrel Racing Blog. First, I strived to be as transparent as possible with my readership by introducing myself, my personal background and my barrel racing and rodeo experience. I linked to my Facebook page, so readers could get to know me even better. I also write occasional personal posts about my horses and my preferences so that readers understand better my personal biases. As Mitchell and Steele (2006) asserted, disclosure in process, principle and personal are important in gaining readers trust. As I explain further on in this essay, I disclose as much as possible when I review an arena or a product, and I am open with my relevant personal information with my readers as well. It would be these three principles that Mitchell and Steele asserted, combined with the community journalism ethics outlined by Lauterer (2006)
and other community journalism scholars, shape the ethical foundation of *The Barrel Racing Blog*. 

As *The Barrel Racing Blog* grew, I developed a set of ethical practices that helped maintain a sense of trust between my readers and me. Interactivity, again, took the forefront in this ethical process, as Friend and Singer (2007), along with Lauterer (2007) and Kuhn (2007), emphasized. I based decisions for story content based on what would keep readers engaged and interacting with the community. When choosing products to accept for review, I only selected those that would likely be useful to my readers, and I elected to review shows and rodeos that were in my readers’ local area, so as to maintain their interest. For the more difficult ethical decisions, like whether or not to engage in the review of two competing products, I chose, rather than to review them simultaneously, to review them consecutively, so that I was able to use the same horse to do the testing in order to show readers the best comparison. (Personally, this was a difficult decision because I would have loved to accept and use both products at once, so as to be able to use such great, expensive products on both of my horses. Unfortunately, this would have jeopardized the results and the trust of my readers, as anyone who knows me personally or follows the personal posts I write would know that my horses are very different and would react to both products very differently.)

Those pushing products, in both my new role at *Horse&Rider* and at *The Barrel Racing Blog*, do try to give me samples of products for review. This is an ethical dilemma that nearly every publication that does gear/product reviews must
encounter on a regular basis. My work at The Barrel Racing Blog prepared me for what I’d be doing as the assistant editor at Horse&Rider, were I am responsible for product and style reviews every month. At The Barrel Racing Blog, I learned that I must heed caution when accepting products to review, ensuring that I take in products to review that would benefit my readers and not just myself. Letting people know how Oxy-Gen Xtreme GI Care works was important to the barrel horse industry, as 90 percent of barrel horses face gastric ulcers that can be deadly and will certainly affect performance. This new product, which offers a less-expensive solution to ulcers, benefited my readership first and foremost, while also giving me a product to try. Had the product not worked, I would have also let me readers know. Also, I have let people know (as per blogging law) that I received Oxy-Gen for free. Every other product I reviewed was done because I saw it working, liked the style or new others loved it. Those reviews were totally organic and were done as a way to let readers know about a new product or style that they might like to try.

At Horse&Rider, we try to keep the same things in mind when reviewing a product. While the magazine has to keep in mind who is advertising, I try to always pick products that will truly be of use to the readers. Conversely, The Barrel Racing Blog does not have advertisers to deal with, so I have the ability to be much more liberal with my product reviews. My lack of advertisers serves the readership and not my own pocketbooks because I am able to be as objective and independent with my reviews as possible.
With Weekend Reviews of arenas, I have also managed to balance my own performance, which varied from show to show, with the true quality of the arena, ground and alleyway. The first protection against conflicts is the fact that my readers have access to how my horses run. As I mentioned earlier, I highly value transparency in my blog, so readers know my horses’ styles, and barrel racers know that horses perform differently depending on the arena. Given that, I have made every attempt to judge how different varieties of horses were able to perform in an arena. For example, with my review of Fox Hollow Rodeo, which had a more negative tilt, I evaluated the fact that most horses struggled with the ground conditions. I, however, did very well at that rodeo and enjoyed it (because I made a good paycheck there). That did not stop me, though, from seeing that many good horses that were likely faster than mine fell and couldn’t hold the ground. Conversely, I did absolutely terrible at Henderson’s NBHA show in September, but I wrote a great review of the show because it was a really well run show with great ground. I also always share with readers how my horses perform so that they can judge for themselves whether or not I’m letting my performance get in the way of my journalism.

A very real example of how my role as a barrel racer within this community affected my coverage is in the death of one of the barrel racing world’s legends. The largest day in The Barrel Racing Blog’s history was December 10, 2009, as I produced the first obituary for one of the biggest names in the sport of barrel racing – Bobby “Booger” Barter. Barter, a show producer, killed himself December 9, 2009. On December 9, I heard, via Facebook, about Barter’s death. I confirmed sources with
newspapers in the area (Athens, Texas) and talked to barrel racers who knew Barter. I also followed posts on online forums, getting an idea of how Barter’s death impacted the barrel racing community. The day Barter died I posted an announcement of his death and a link to a few newspaper articles that had bare-bones information. The next day, December 10, I posted a story on what Barter’s death meant to the barrel racing community and how the response showed the connectivity between barrel racers across the country. In one day, that post drew in 339 hits. That week alone, The Barrel Racing Blog received over 1,000 hits, mainly from new readers. The challenge, then was to keep those new readers coming back after Barter’s death faded into memory.

I point to this example because it truly shows how my reporting and coverage affected the community, at a very real level, during a time of need. The way the newspapers covered Barter’s death was standard. It presented the facts. The newspaper reporters did not write about what this man’s death meant to the community, and they did not know how the national community was reacting. They weren’t plugged into other barrel racers’ Facebooks or community forums. My access to those interactions meant I knew what people were saying about his death and I could write about it from a community perspective. For this article, I received extremely positive feedback from community members and from Barter’s friends and family, including these two comments:

“Thank you so much for the kindest of words. You are so right…that it’s not a question of why, when, where or how? But of how did Booger have the ability to touch and change so many lives with his big heartedness and huge spirit. The Barrel Racing and Rodeo world suffered an epic loss with the unexpected passing of Bobby "Booger" Barter. It was an honor to have worked for him and help implement many of his visionary goals that reinvented the barrel racing
industry. He will be greatly missed both personally and professionally. Thank you for your tribute.” – Sheridan Cummings, family member of Barter.

“I second Sheridan’s feelings. Excellent tribute post. I never met the man, but like many, still feel connected for reasons you eloquently put in your post. This community is more than that. It’s a family. A togetherness that you don’t get anywhere else. Whether its Texas or Ohio or anywhere in between. We’re all barrel racers, we’re all family.” – Ramsey Stoneburner, Western Web design.

Covering this small community of interest has not been unlike covering the small community of Athens, Ohio, for the Athens NEWS. Ethically, both outlets have required me to have both an understanding of common journalistic principles such as objectivity, accuracy and journalistic distance. At the same time, though, the nature of both communities also required that I develop a deep understanding of community values when making judgment calls. At the Athens NEWS, we had no specific code of ethics, but we dealt with ethical situations often in the newsroom. Each reporter used what he or she knew about ethical decision making and combined it with what he or she knew about the ins and outs of Athens life in order to make a decision. This process was safeguarded by the fact that three people who also knew about the community read the story before it went to print. While I do not have the luxury of having three other people read my work before it's posted at The Barrel Racing Blog, I do however have a readership base that can themselves be watchdogs. Most readers have tried the products I review or know someone who has, have watched the competitors run that I interview, and have ran at arenas I evaluate. Basically, I can't lie to my readers – they'd catch me on it every time.

Throughout this process, I’ve kept in mind who my audience is and why I’m producing this blog. In doing so, I balanced my objectivity and journalistic distance to
prioritize the community interactivity that this blog was hoping to foster. I maintained the ethics of the barrel racing community in the area by reporting on news the community longed for in a way that was balanced yet critical. I routinely wrote features covering competitors that the readership wanted to hear about, and I did my best to foster discussion that has continued into the “real world.” As I began competing heavily this spring, I often overheard people discussing things they read on “that barrel racing blog.”

Only a few times, though, did strangers recognize me as “the girl who writes The Barrel Racing Blog.” I was unbothered by this recognition when it did happen, and I graciously said yes and asked them what they thought of it. Not once have I heard a negative comment or received negative feedback about the site from community members.

My product reviews are organic in that I mainly buy the product myself and try it out, then write an honest review on the subject. My Weekend Reviews came from a genuine desire to tell the truth, through a vetting process I developed on how horses were able to do their jobs in the arena’s conditions. The ethical challenges I faced did not differ greatly from challenges I saw in the newsroom at the Athens NEWS. The largest ethical challenge I faced was when a competitor I strongly disliked personally won an event, and I gave her publicity on my site for her win. Ultimately, this was the only decision to make, as I was covering the event and she won it, so I did my job as a reporter, despite personal biases.
While I hope to continue this blog on into the future, it has certainly done more for me than I think I’ve done for the community. The professional contacts I made through this blog launched my career as a reporter in the horse industry, as I now have a full-time position with Horse&Rider Magazine. Those doing the hiring at Horse&Rider read the Teddy Terrific story and others on the blog, saw my social media marketing skills (for a magazine with 160,000 paid subscribers, it only has 4,000 fans on Facebook, compared to my free website with 1081) and knew I would be right for the job. Friends I had met through the blog working in the equine journalism industry wrote me letters of recommendation and helped me find this job.

The Barrel Racing Blog was the ideal professional project for me – it combined community journalism with barrel racing and social media, my three favorite things in the world. I was passionate enough to post regularly and keep up-to-date with my literature and readings, and the process flew by. Post-graduation, The Barrel Racing Blog will live on and expand to cover my new community in Boulder, Colo., but will still maintain a focus on “home” as well. For now, my readers will get to follow me as I prepare to move across the country, and hopefully they’ll all wish me the best.
WORKS CITED

*Community Journalism*


Rowe, J. (2008 Jan./Feb.) The Language of Strangers: How a hotshot editor with big ideas failed to comprehend the soul of community journalism. *Columbia*

**Journalistic Distance/Objectivity/Conflict of Interest**


Blogging


APPENDIX A

This is the story that really skyrocketed The Barrel Racing Blog onto the national barrel racing scene and solidified its status as the best place for news and features for the Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia barrel racing community. The Ford Family of Chillicothe, Ohio, eagerly agreed to the interview, and ultimately this story helped their horse, Teddy Terrific, be named to the National Pole Bending Association’s Hall of Fame. On it’s first day, the story garnered 300 hits and consistently received over 200 views each day of the series. I looked at this story as a way of highlighting one of the greatest, most consistent horses I had ever seen, while at the same time giving the community a chance to take pride in one of its own.

A Family Tradition – Teddy Terrific and the Ford Family (Day 1)

In an arena in Columbus, Ohio, a man tipped his hat to a horse. At that moment, for one family, 17 years of history came rushing back.

That man was Bryan Ford, and that horse, the horse, was 20-year-old Teddy Terrific in 2009 after his 10th All-American Quarter Horse Congress Championship – this time in Senior Pole Bending. The hat tip was a sort of “thank you,” but not just from Bryan, from the entire Ford family, since the family and the horse have been winning together for 17 years.

Teddy, as he’s called outside the show ring, has been a staple in the Quarter Horse industry for the better part of the last two decades as he has accumulated title after title and brought thousands into the Coliseum at the Congress to watch him
weave the poles in sub-20 times. But beyond his titles and championships, Teddy has brought the Ford family – father Carl, mother Peggy, sister Jessie and brothers Bryan and Marc – a measure of shared success that few other families in the horse industry, or any industry, can ever imagine.

The horse came to the Ford’s Chillicothe, Ohio, farm through a trade from an old friend. Appendix-bred Teddy goes back to racehorses like Go Man Go, Kitaman and Nasrullah, but with cow horse sprinkled throughout, like King. But, when Carl traded for the 2-year-old, he was planning on using him as a pleasure horse because he was so quiet. He started him as a snaffle bit prospect, but soon moved the “lazy” horse into barrel and pole pattern work to see if he’d pick up at all. But, at 3, that laziness slipped away and Teddy started liking his job as a pole and barrel horse.

Teddy’s first notable title came a year later at the Ford’s own arena with a young Bryan on his back at the 1993 Southeastern Pole Bending Futurity, where the pair won the Youth Classic Championship. Later that year, Bryan took Teddy to the AQHA World Show to compete in the poles, where Bryan became the youngest rider (at the time) to win a Reserve World Championship. Fifteen years later, the duo would again claim a Reserve World Championship.

In between those two runs, though, Teddy spent his life putting a name on the sport of pole bending while still staking a claim as one of the greatest barrel horses this region has ever seen. While he made his name as the dynamic pole horse that stopped the clock time and time again at the Congress, Teddy took all three Ford children to a Congress title, while winning the first division of youth and open barrels
at a state level, too. Teddy took Jessie to an Ohio NBHA Youth 1D Championship in 2001, and took Marc to a Youth 1D Reserve Championship seven years later in 2008. In 2004, Bryan was the Open 1D Reserve Champion aboard Teddy.

The family has shared Teddy throughout it all, with each member doing their part to keep the horse running. Today, though, Teddy resides with Jessie, Marc, Peggy and Carl in Ohio, while Bryan trains horses in Sallisaw, Oklahoma. Jessie and Marc share the riding time throughout the year and each get to run him at various big shows, but it is Bryan that jumps on Teddy at the Congress and at the World show in the big pole classes like the Sweepstakes and Senior Horse Poles – and those two never miss a beat.

While in that Coliseum Teddy has carved his legacy in dirt, it’s in the Ford home that the horse truly left his mark. Over the next few days, The Barrel Racing Blog will let the Ford Family tell their stories of this remarkable animal that has so impacted each of their lives. We’ve asked each one of them the same questions about Teddy, and the differences in their answers will surprise you, even if you know the Fords well. So, stay tuned all week for more on Teddy Terrific.

But, while you’re waiting to hear from the Fords about Teddy, take a look at how special this horse really is and watch this video of Teddy’s win this year in the Senior Pole Bending at the Congress:

(Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9mJSj8YS4Q&feature=player_embedded)
Day 2 with Teddy Terrific and the Fords

The Barrel Racing Blog asked each member of the Ford Family the same questions about their horse, Teddy Terrific. In today’s section, Jessie, Marc, Bryan and Carl reflect on their first memories of Teddy. Strangely enough, each of them has a different first memory to share of the horse that has so dramatically changed their lives. The family, with mother Peggy joining in, talk about Teddy’s greatest accomplishments – again, their answers will surprise you.

What is your first memory of Teddy?

CARL: He was lazy, not a lot of energy and slow about what you were trying to teach him.

BRYAN: My first memory of Teddy was when he was a 2-year-old — he wasn’t anything more than a plain-looking 2-year-old colt, nothing special. I believe our dad and grandpa traded a riding horse for Teddy and an old stock trailer full of junk.

JESSIE: I was only 5 when my family first got Teddy, so I don’t have many memories that vibrantly stick out to me. I mostly remember my dad and Bryan running him, and watching them show him at the Congress and AQHA World Shows in the early to mid ’90s. The biggest early memory that sticks out to me is Bryan and Teddy being AQHA Reserve World Champions in Junior Pole Bending in 1993. I was 7, and I remember my family standing together to get that photo taken at the World Show. I literally said to my mom, “Teddy really is TERRIFIC, isn’t he?”
MARC: One of my first memories of Teddy was when I was either 3 or 4, and Bryan walked me into the Coliseum on him, to receive a Top Ten placing in one of his classes at the Congress.

Which of Teddy’s accomplishments are you most proud of?

CARL: All three of my kids winning a class at the Congress, whether it has been a Youth, Amateur, Open or Sweepstakes class.

PEGGY: Teddy was the “drive” for Jessie to ride again after her spinal fusion in 2003. She had to wait until April of 2005 before she could ride again. That first time back in the saddle after her surgery was difficult for me. I had to trust Teddy would keep her safe. He did. In October of that year he had given her two Congress wins and an All-Around title.

BRYAN: The main accomplishment for Teddy that I’m most proud of is the fact that he has been competitive for 17 years. I’ve seen thousands of horses go down the alleyway, I’ve seen hundreds of really nice horses and I’ve seen probably a tenth of them that were great horses — you know, “household names.” There has probably been five or six times in Teddy’s career when we have hit a wall with him, and I have thought that he was done, didn’t have it anymore or needed to be retired, but each time he came back, he was stronger than before.

JESSIE: As far as showing accomplishments go, I am so incredibly proud of him winning his 10th Congress championship this past year, at the age of 20. I honestly don’t think you can find another horse that has won that many Congress titles, and/or at that age. My family and I also think he more than likely has to hold some kind of
record for being exhibited at as many Congresses as he has — seventeen — never missing one and has placed and/or won at each of those. I am also unbelievably proud of his lifetime earnings, which exceed $100,000. Aside from the titles and money won though, I am most proud of his longevity. I have no words to describe his amazing mental and physical health and pure love for his job.

I’d also like to mention that I’m so proud that he runs “clean” when a lot of the horses he’s running against don’t. Teddy does not ever get stuck with a needle, not even for maintenance. We’ve had numerous people over the years question what we give him, and what he “runs on” — and we truly just laugh and say he runs on “air” and his big heart.

MARC: The biggest accomplishment I’m proud of is when Bryan and Teddy finally won the Pole Bending Sweepstakes at the Congress in 2008. It was a long time coming because it was the only class he hadn’t won but tried to for years.

And, just in case you need to see Teddy zip through the poles again, check out the run Marc is talking about in the Pole Bending Sweepstakes at the Congress of 2008:
(Video:http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LpVlCIKnsI& feature=player_embedded)

**Day 3 with Teddy Terrific and the Fords**

*In the Ford family, Bryan, Jessie and Marc all have something different to be proud of when it comes to Teddy Terrific. They’ve each had their successes in the pen with Teddy, and below they’ll each talk about their greatest accomplishment on him. The horse affected their careers not just through their wins but through making them*
better riders and competitors, too. With Teddy, though, he has not just impacted the lives of the Fords. Quite possibly it has been Teddy’s contributions to the sport of pole bending that have made the horse so special.

What was your greatest accomplishment on Teddy?

BRYAN: My personal greatest accomplishment on Teddy was at the 2008 Quarter Horse Congress when Teddy won the Senior Pole Bending, the second go of the Pole Bending Sweepstakes and the average of the Pole Bending Sweepstakes. Each run he made he got stronger and stronger. Before he ran in the finals there was a real calmness about everything…the surroundings, the arena, even Teddy. Having that much focus along with a horse that has that much focus and confidence, coming together all at the same time — it’s a feeling like no other — one that you only get once in a great while, during a great race, with a great horse.

JESSIE: Teddy gave me the opportunity to not only have success as a youth, but also as an amateur. He carried me as a teenager and then on into my young adult years. In 2005, I won three Congress Championships (youth classes and an All Around title) on him and that was the highlight of my life, at the time. While I will always cherish those wins, because they were my first Congress titles, I love that two years later, he carried me on to win Amateur Barrels, as well. It also showed that he himself could win a big barrel class at the Congress, and not just pole bends!

MARC: My greatest accomplishment was when we won the Novice Youth 14-18 Barrels at the Congress in 2007. I consider it my greatest accomplishment on him.
because the Congress is so tough, and it’s an honor to win a title there. I also became the third and final Ford kid to win the Congress on Teddy, so that was very special to me.

*What had Teddy done for you as a person and as a barrel racer?*

**CARL:** Patience and knowing it takes a little more time in allowing a horse to give into what he can or cannot do at times…for Teddy, it’s paid off.

**BRYAN:** What Teddy did for me as a person and a barrel racer was that he gave me a chance to get out there, and go and compete at a higher competitive level. He gave me a chance to win and see that I could possibly make a living training and competing with horses.

**JESSIE:** As a competitor, I’ve officially and undoubtedly had my “one in a million horse.” I know that, and while I hope to have good horses in the future, nothing will ever be comparable to Teddy. Many people are lucky to have what I call the “good” horses throughout their lives, but few get to really experience having one of the “great” ones. Teddy is the total package with his heart, personality and incredible longevity. He has taught me how to win and be competitive against some of the toughest riders and horses in the country. As a high-caliber horse, Teddy has given me a life and lifestyle not many get to experience. He’s carried me for the last decade, taken me all around the country and put me in the spotlight. I owe my entire career to him, and everything I know. He has most certainly spoiled me! Most importantly, he gave me my life back in 2005, when I was sidelined for more than a year due to major reconstructive back surgeries. It was doubted that I would be able to ride again like I
had before the surgeries, but he effortlessly transitioned me back into barrel racing. In October 2004 I was getting used to living with two stainless steel rods, bolts and screws in my back, sitting in the stands at the Congress, unable to even swing my leg over a horse. But by October 2005, I had won two classes at the Congress, and an All-Around title. Whether it’s been for my competitive life or personal life, he’s been an amazing source of therapy for me.

**MARC:** As a person, Teddy is something that is always there for me and pulls through, even when I least expect it. He’s extremely dependable. As a barrel racer, he has taught me how to be more on top of my game. I know that I’m lucky to have experienced riding a top-level horse like him. A lot of people don’t get that in life.

*Has Teddy made you a better or worse rider? (Often, with people who have run the same horse for years, it’s easy to just get into a routine and not make yourself better. Is that the case with you and Teddy?)*

**CARL:** As in training any horse, one has to adjust oneself sometimes to the horse you’re on. Teddy has his style and to adjust yourself to him, I could say makes you stay on your toes. It’s his way and may not be the same as others.

**JESSIE:** Many people have seemed to think over the years that Teddy is “automatic.” While he is a very safe horse and will take care of whoever is on his back, he is in no way truly automatic. You have to drive him the entire way and really be aggressive, but also know when and how to stay out of his way, because he does have a certain style and knows what he’s doing. He’s an “old pro” and a very smart horse, so he knows how to try to get away with things, and that’s why we’ve always been told to
ride him the entire way. The moment you let up, he can just as easily as well. So I will say that Teddy has taught me how to ride hard and be competitive, for the better. I do know though, that every horse is different and I cannot ride others the same way I do him.

**MARC:** He has made me a better rider because he has given me strength, taught me balance and how to really be aggressive.

*What do you think Teddy has done for the sport of pole bending?*

**CARL:** I believe he's been in a way an ambassador to pole bending. Several people who attend the Congress and other events that watch him enjoy his efforts. Anymore, his age plays a big part in them enjoying watching him run poles. I know personally it’s fun to see him still run poles his way, but to hear the people behind him when he performs in his event is even more enjoyable. There is still a team effort.

**BRYAN:** In probably the last 30 years of pole bending there have been a lot of good horses, and there have been a handful of great ones. During his time Teddy has put a name and a face to the sport.

**JESSIE:** I truly believe Teddy Terrific should be considered a legend in the sport of pole bending. I grew up watching some of the greatest pole horses who have ever lived, and I give credit to and admire all of the fabulous ones. They’re each very special and have won so much in their own rights. What is special and different about Teddy, however, is that he is STILL running and STILL winning. When others have been retired or slowed down, come and gone, it honestly seems like Teddy has only gotten better and faster. At 20, he won his 10th Congress title overall, (and his 4th
one) in Senior Pole Bending, having run a 19.4. I just don’t think you can find another horse at that age, who can pull out an accomplishment like that. Teddy is timeless. There is no horse left from his original campaign years that is still running (and most impressively winning) like him. I call him a “freak of nature” — he is just in a class by himself. He’s that horse that people love to cheer for because he’s an “old-timer” and so entertaining! For not only the sport of pole bending, but for the performance horse industry in general, he represents the speed, grace, heart and athletic ability of the Quarter Horse breed and demonstrates that the “old horses” can not only still show, but also win, at the highest level of competition.

**MARC:** He has made it a more exciting sport for people to watch, especially at the Congress. People love to watch him run and anticipate his runs. He puts on a show and knows how to draw in a crowd. I think he’s helped make the Pole Sweepstakes especially, one of the more exciting, premier events to watch at the Congress.

**Day 4 with Teddy Terrific and the Fords**

*When a horse has done as much in his career as Teddy Terrific, he doesn’t need to prove himself at every local barrel race. So, The Barrel Racing Blog asked the Fords how they choose where Teddy makes an appearance. And, keeping a horse running for this many years, we had to ask, what Teddy’s schedule is like that keeps him running at a world-class level every time he enters the ring. Tomorrow, The Barrel Racing Blog will talk to the Fords about Teddy Terrific’s future retirement, and their answers just might surprise you.*
What does it take to get Teddy Terrific to run somewhere – how much added money is necessary to get the old boy to run?

CARL: We will get Teddy out for some weekend events to keep him entertained, but shows like the Congress and World Shows are our main goals. Teddy likes the bright lights and the attention!

JESSIE: We pick and choose where we run him, and while we like to save him for the bigger shows such as the NBHA Ohio State Championships, the Youth World, possibly a Regional/Super Show, the Congress and AQHA World Show, we have to get him out throughout the year to run, so that he can get his wind and get back into shape. We also can’t just take him to a big show and run him “cold turkey,” so allowing him to make a few runs in between those big shows is necessary and what it takes to put him back in his “zone” after having a few months off. Besides the bigger shows we take him to, we’ll take him to some of the open barrel races/NBHA shows throughout the year that are at least a $1,000 or so added. As far as any other shows are concerned, we’ll haul to a few quarter horse shows when we need to, to get some qualifying points for the AQHA World Show.

MARC: When we’re not hitting a bigger show (like a World Show or Congress) on him, as far as regular season shows go, if it’s got good added money to it, we’ll take him to get him out. He needs occasional runs in between those bigger shows, to keep him fresh and in shape.

How has Teddy kept running at such a top level for so many years?
CARL: He’s got a big heart and enjoys what he does. Teddy feeds off of attention and enjoys playing either in the paddock or playing around in our indoor with people. The last few years, we select just a few shows a year to go to. We don’t run his legs off every weekend.

JESSIE: We have maintained Teddy’s physical health the best ways we know how over the years, and we’ve taken extremely good care of him at home and on the road. The chiropractor always tells us that he has the “body of a horse half his age” so his physical health is pretty top notch, for as old as he is. However, I think his mental health/happiness is more important than anything physical, and it’s the mentality and love for the game that he has that keeps him going the most. That horse truly loves to run, and if he didn’t have a job, he would get bored. He has to be on the trailer and enjoys going down the road. He feels left out otherwise. He also acts like a colt most of the time, when he’s being rode at home, or playing when he’s turned out. So we say as long as he thinks he’s young and acts young, that’s perfectly fine by us! He stays fresh, plays hard and still runs hard, so as long as he wants to keep doing his job, we let him.

MARC: He is always fit and we take very good care of him all year round. He also has a unique love for the sport and wants to keep running, himself. It’s not like we make him do something that he doesn’t want to do.

What is Teddy’s workout schedule like?
CARL: No pattern work is needed, so just turn outs and long jogging/galloping him, which seems pretty simple but we pay a lot of attention to how he feels or looks during his workouts, or even while he’s just turned out.

JESSIE: Throughout the summer and fall, when he gets ran the most, he gets exercised about four times a week. We have a dirt track in a back field behind our indoor arena that we long jog him around for several laps, as well as gallop him. He gets worked both ways, and occasionally we “blow him out” and let him run for a stretch, which he really enjoys. Otherwise, he gets turned out a lot because when he plays, he plays a little rough, but it shows us he’s feeling good. We read his body language a lot and just look at the importance of the little, physical things he does and the ways he acts. We spray his front legs with very cold water and wrap them up after he gets rode at home or runs at a show, to keep his joints cool and legs feeling fresh. We just take the time to do a lot of small, simple things, but they’re the kinds of “extra care” that really benefit him in the end.

How much time off does he get?

CARL: He usually gets the winter off for a couple months, but he still gets rode, just no hard workouts.

JESSIE: He usually gets most of the winter off. After Congress and the World Show, after he’s made several, hard runs, he will get the rest of November, December and most of January off. He’ll get ridden leisurely, but not worked a ton, and mostly gets turned out in our indoor to play during that time. We start legging him up closer to
February and might pull him out for his first couple runs back in March/April. He gets run once or twice a month from May-October, usually.

**Final Day with Teddy Terrific and the Fords**

At almost 21 years old, *Teddy Terrific* has brought the Ford Family years of success, and with that success has come recognition from across the Quarter Horse industry. The Fords have heard wonderful things said about their great animal, and below they’ll share some of the best compliments they’ve received.

More than the compliments, though, Teddy has brought to his family a degree of closeness that makes the Fords really something special. Working towards the common goal and with the same animal has kept them connected throughout the years. And, to finish off this series, Carl, Peggy, Jessie and Marc talk about if and when Teddy will retire, and what his life will be like afterwards.

**What’s the greatest compliment you’ve ever received about Teddy?**

**CARL:** I’ve had some people say that Teddy should be inducted into the AQHA Hall of Fame. (I know that that would not happen until he’s gone and I’m with that as long as it’s a long time from now). These comments are just real nice compliments. I know what he’s accomplished and just proud that I’ve been apart of that, and he has nothing to prove to me or anyone else.

**JESSIE:** That’s a tough one. There are so many people that love Teddy, and I think the highlight for most of those folks comes every October at the Congress. I’ve seen
no other horse have an electrifying impact on that Coliseum and make the crowd go as wild as they do when Teddy runs. People absolutely adore that horse, it’s unbelievable and hard to describe. Some of the greatest compliments would include him being called a “Congress legend”… and some have even said he’s been the greatest pole horse in the world. I think what’s most special, however, is when people say they wish they had a horse like him. We’re very honored and humbled by him.

MARc: I think the greatest compliment I’ve ever heard, was when a lady at the Congress told my dad and I that Teddy should be inducted into the AQHA Hall of Fame one day.

**How has Teddy affected your family’s connectivity?**

CARL: He’s affected everybody in our family, from feeding to bedding to turnouts and workouts. Everyday observation of his behavior is part of anybody’s routine that cares for him. He’s a family member like any of the rest of the Fords.

PEGGY: In the first few years of owning him, there was that possibility of selling him. After a while though, we couldn’t imagine not having him in the barn. Each of my three kids has won Congress titles on him. When Marc and Jessie graduated from their ponies, Teddy showed them what it was really like to barrel race, while keeping them safe.

BRYAN: Teddy is part of the family and he has allowed our family to share in all of the success together, and that is something that doesn’t happen for every family. He gave us a common goal to cheer for — him, the horse, Teddy Terrific.
**JESSIE:** Teddy is our family. We love him more than anything and in many ways, our lives and schedules revolve around his care and maintenance every single day. His health, soundness, comfort and happiness is of upmost importance to us and we would do absolutely anything for him. He’s been our life for so long because of everything he’s given us. He has never owed us anything, and we expect nothing of him. We truly feel so blessed to not only still be running him, but also just simply to still have him. Regarding our individual relationships with each other, he has definitely had a significant impact. He brings us together when we’re caring or cheering for him, and we’ve all shared wins on him. Therefore, he’s enabled us to be a close-knit unit. A lot of families don’t share such a strong, common love, like him. He’s really like the “rock” of the family. It’s hard to fathom how he’s “still going” but really, he’s the one keeping all of us going.

**MARC:** Teddy has affected this family’s connectivity because he is part of the family. We look at him like he’s another family member and we would/will do anything in the world for him.

How much longer do you think Teddy will run? Retirement plans?

**CARL:** Teddy’s not discussed that with me (haha). He’s looking good, acting great and enjoys doing his job. Teddy’s got nothing to prove to us or anybody when he does run. I do know that he likes the lights and the limelight. He will probably spend his retirement turned out and still playing as he always has.
PEGGY: Sometimes I think people who know Teddy wonder why we still show him (at his age). He loves to compete. We keep him in shape. He truly knows when he’s going to a show and he’s bright and happy when he’s loaded on the trailer.

JESSIE: As a family, we have always said that Teddy will have a way of telling us when his time is over and he’s ready to be done. We haven’t gotten any signs quite like that from him yet though, and for now, he still loves his job. We always say if we retired him now, we would affect him more negatively MENTALLY than benefit him PHYSICALLY. He is an athlete who knows he has a job, and enjoys it. If he didn’t get loaded on the trailer or still get taken down the road to do that job, he would feel useless and his mental health would most likely fail. We take VERY good care of him and keep him feeling as fresh and zoned-in as possible, and the vets and chiropractor have been impressed with his physicality, especially the last few years. He has never ran sore or hurt, so as long as he is healthy, sound, and WANTS to still run, we let him have his fun!

MARC: Teddy will keep running until he “tells us” he doesn’t want to anymore. We all know we’ll have a special sign from him.

Editorial: Teddy Terrific and Our Sport

Occasionally, there comes a horse that brings the crowd to their feet, not just because of its speed, or its turns, but because of its presence. When Teddy Terrific comes down an alleyway, people take pause, and some cheer, and when he crosses the timer line after a run, a collective gasp comes out of the crowd. It’s because of horses
like Teddy that we run – be it poles, barrels or anything else – just for the chance to maybe, someday, have a Teddy.

A lot of the feedback *The Barrel Racing Blog* received in the last week on Teddy’s story centered on that theme – the idea that readers were awed at Teddy’s excellence and would love to just once have a horse like that.

Jessie Ford, one of the Ford siblings that runs Teddy, called Teddy that once-in-a-lifetime horse, and that really captures it, I believe. For Jessie to have the foresight to say that Teddy is a once-in-a-lifetime horse says something for her family’s character, too. Teddy isn’t just a horse of theirs that’s been good to them, he wasn’t just a futurity prospect, or a good senior horse, he was their big one. While everyone would love to have a barn full of Teddys for years and years, it takes humility and respect for a horse to appreciate what that once-in-a-lifetime horse is.

For many of us, our big one might be the horse that we win a saddle with, a local series, a few rodeos or even the NFR. But it’s the constant search for our own Teddy that drives us.

I’m struck by the love the Fords have for Teddy, and for the care they’ve given him. With a horse that fast, that good, it would be tempting for some to stick a needle in his neck to see just how much more he could give with just a little dose of something. But, the Fords weren’t even tempted – they recognized what is best for Teddy, and they have taken impeccable care of him. His one injury in 2002 came at the Quarter Horse Congress when he fell during the Pole Sweepstakes and suffered a soft tissue tear to his bladder. Because of the Fords careful treatment of his injury, the
next year at the Congress Teddy came back with a vengeance to win the Senior Horse Poles, his first Congress title.

Again, The Barrel Racing Blog would like to thank the Fords for what they’ve done for barrel racing and pole bending alike by letting us all get to know Teddy and what an amazing animal he really is.
This product review of Oxy-Gen Xtreme GI Care began when I bought a new horse that had stomach ulcers – a problem common in barrel horses that can cause major problems for a competition horse. I began using the product immediately and informed my readers first of my horse’s problems and then with this update. I approached this review with the outlook that I would provide as much information as possible to my readers, since this is not a scientific study. Because of the lack to true science behind this review, I made sure that I told readers as many of the outside factors as possible so that they had a clear picture of the product.

**Update: Oxy-Gen Xtreme GI Care**

I’m on week three of my trial run with Oxy-Gen Xtreme GI Care, and I feel comfortable enough with the product to let you all know what I think of it so far.

**Some background:** A little over a month ago, I bought a 12-year-old appendix-bred Quarter Horse mare from a great friend of mine. The mare, with all of her thoroughbred background (Rocket Wrangler, Casady Casanova, and the list goes on…) and her history of getting a little hot at the gate, I had an idea that she might have ulcers. Not an original diagnosis, I’m sure. Her previous owner luckily was able to have her out on grass most of the time, which likely solved much of the problem. (She was super well taken care of, and because of the grass, my friend likely didn’t have many problems with her.) Being a poor college student, though, I can only take what I can get when it comes to board, and I only have a stall with little-to-no turn out.
The first week I worked her, she would work up instead of work down, and she would get a bit pushy and hot at strange times in our workout. After a tough ride, she would act a big ouchy and paw. She also is a picky eater, and she would barely touch her hay.

So, after a little over a week, I called my friend, Oxy-Rob, Robin Cummings, and told him a little about my horse and her history. He suggested Oxy-Gen’s Xtreme GI Care, so I’m giving it a try.

So far: Today, it really sunk in with me that this product is working. Originally, the mare threw some fits when I would ask her to do something as simple as cross a creek. She might have just been trying me, but I could tell afterwards that her stomach was really hurting her. But lately, she hasn’t been giving me trouble with things that she used to. Crossing a creek is business as usual, and so is waiting until I open and close a gate from her back. She works more consistently each day and throughout each workout, and she long-jogs now instead of pulling on the reins to break into a lope. This could be chalked up to her and I just getting used to each other, but the way she feels after a workout gives me a point of hope. She doesn’t seem to be in pain after a hard ride, and she cleans up her hay and grain.

Other adjustments: I’ve made some other adjustments to keep her healthy, too. I’m doing what I can to let her eat grass every day, even if it is just for 20 minutes on a lead rope in the hay field. I first switched her to Omolene 200, which is made with a soy-based molasses, which has less sugar than traditional sweet feed. I’m in the process of trying to get her to eat Safe Choice, which has gotten easier as she’s gotten less picky with the Oxy-Gen.
**Arena performance:** After a week on the product, I used the mare at a rodeo, and she went in the pen with no problem whatsoever. This was my first run on the horse, and I had heard mixed reports as to how she went in the pen. I can say, though, that I had no problems. A week later, I went to a barrel race in the same arena and took the mare into the pen twice, having no problems each time. She was anxious and nervous warming up, but again I did not have gate issues. She did get more nervous as the evening wore on, but again, she handled it and went in the pen when asked.

*I will continue to update this product review and will begin using the Oxy-Gen JailBreak product as well once I begin competing more heavily after the big move.*

*Check back for more information, and contact Oxy-Rob if you’d like to hear more about Oxy-Gen products.*
APPENDIX C

In an example of one of The Barrel Racing Blog’s Weekend Reviews, this story exemplifies the utility of such a service. It provides an overview of the arena itself as well as the way the show was organized. This story also gives readers an idea about the ground conditions, a key factor for barrel racers in deciding what arena, show or rodeo to enter.

Weekend Review: Henderson’s Arena, NBHA Show, Jackson, Ohio

The final weekend of summer drew in huge crowds and top horses at Henderson’s Arena in Jackson, Ohio. With exhibition only on Friday night, by 6 p.m. Friday the parking lots were full and electric hook-ups were scarce. When all was said and done, though, Ohioans Kelly Pitts and Brad Shirey took home the wins in the 1D on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

What: NBHA OH District 05 Money Maker.

Who: Hundreds and hundreds of barrel racers from Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky. The Open had over 350 horses on Saturday night.

Added Money: $2000 each night in the Open 3D.

The Ground: As usual, the ground at Henderson’s was soft and deep, generally in a good way. Some people came out of the pen complaining the ground was too deep, but most thought it was fine. The tractor drivers did a good, quick job working the arena, helping the huge show to move along. After every 100 horses they ran a big drag that
kept the ground holding. The ground was not particularly fast, though, as 15.5s and 15.6s have won at Henderson’s before, and usually a few more horses get into the 15s than just the three or four that did this weekend.

**Overall:** This was a top-of-the-line show. Many of the best horses in the area showed up to run here. The barns were packed, and the parking lots were crammed. With well over 100 in the Youth each day, too, the show was a huge success and really drew in the talent.

Although the committee only held exhibition Friday night, if you needed to do some tuning the barrels were set up in Henderson’s outdoor arena, where the ground was soft and the pattern isn’t much different from inside the arena.

Aside from just the ground, the competition and the added money, the hospitality at Henderson’s Arena could not be better. The food stand offers a wide array of delicious Southeast Ohio’s best home-cooked meals and desserts at reasonable prices. Even more, Henderson’s Western Wear and Tack Shop had some great sales and always has the latest in western fashion that’s hard to find anywhere else on the East Coast.

**Results:** Kelly Pitts on Tin Zan Man won Saturday night with a 15.964, and Brad Shirey took home all the money Sunday with a smoking 15.838.