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NEWS RELEASE

Motormouth from Armstrong, B.C., captures livestock auctioneer title

CALGARY – You could say Rod Burnett really knows how to throw it into high gear.

Burnett, of Armstrong, B.C., delivered true motormouth mastery on Saturday morning, winning the Calgary Stampede's 23rd annual International Livestock Auctioneer Championship from a field of 10 finalists. Victory was sweet affirmation for Burnett, who sold cars and heavy equipment for 15 years before being convinced in 2008 by his current employers at Valley Auction Ltd. – brothers Peter and Don Raffan, both former Stampede champs themselves – that he should turn his attention to bovines.

"They moved me over and gave me a shot. They don't give many people a shot, and I do appreciate it," said Burnett, who'd also advanced to the Stampede final last year.

"You're 15 years selling equipment, and then you're selling something with horns. We all think we can do it, but you've got to prove it to yourself. Within six months, I picked it up and started rolling with it . . . and here we are!"

Burnett collects \$5,500 in cash, prizes, a handtooled Stampede championship buckle, and an automatic berth into the 2012 World Livestock Auctioneer Championship at Hilmar, Calif. Reserve champion Mike Nuss of Minatare, Neb., takes home \$1,000 and a buckle. Brennin Jack of Regina, the reigning Canadian champion and the 2009 Stampede rookie-of-the-year, placed third, good for \$600, while Jay Romine of Mt. Washington, Ky., was fourth for a \$400 pay day. Brandon Frey of Creston, Iowa, the son of 2010 Stampede champ Tom Frey, took top rookie honours, winning another of those Stampede buckles.

Burnett won Saturday's competition – widely acknowledged to be the second-most prestigious auctioneers' showdown in the world – from the coveted 10th and final position in the sale order, after a random draw. "That's the position you want," he said. "You can monitor what everybody else has done, then pick up the torch and see what you can do to close it out."

The 10 finalists were put through their paces Saturday, selling four drafts of cattle as part of the Stampede's annual Brand Consignment Sale, plus one Black Box item, which included automotive tools, golf packages, and cuts of meat. Friday afternoon at Strathmore's Calgary Stockyards, the original field of 21 was whittled down to 10 during the preliminary round; Burnett held the lead after the first day, with points carried over into Saturday's final.

Nuss, this year's runner-up, needs no introduction in the livestock auctioneering game. A veteran of the business since 1980, he's been an eight-time finalist at the World Livestock Auctioneer Championship, and was reserve champion at that event in 1984.

"This competition is quite a bit different than a lot of the other contests out there," said Nuss. "It's so open and relaxed, not so stressful. The people here do such an outstanding job of taking care of us, and they make it fun to attend."

Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Limited

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"In some of the other contests, you're sequestered. You don't get to hear or see any of the other contestants until after you've sold. You sit there and stew, basically, until it's your turn to go," added Nuss. "I also like the two-day format of this competition. You can have two almost completely different crowds to sell to, two different venues . . . it gives you a chance to showcase what you can do."

International Livestock Auctioneer Championship contestants were judged on rhythm, clarity, voice control and intonation, appearance, mannerisms, deportment, repartee and timing, deportment, and livestock knowledge, as well as their ability to spot bids and conduct a sale. The 2011 judging panel included Brad Martin of Elkhorn, Man., Rod MacLean of Brooks, Alta., Stan Skeels of Rimbey, Alta., David Macedo of Tulare, Calif., and Walt Glynn of Creston, Iowa.

The Stampede competition is a one-and-done affair, with no repeat winners allowed – and this year's edition attracted seven rookies, the most in recent memory. "These contests further your education," noted Dan Skeels, the 1999 event champion and a member of the Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneers committee. "I give all these young guys full points, because they know they're going up against the top dogs of the industry. It gives these guys a really good opportunity for more exposure and experience . . . and they'll learn from it."

Also competing in Saturday's final were Rob Bergevin of Stavely, Alta., Jake Bettencourt of Hilmar, Calif., Justin Gattey of Ponoka, Alta., Shawn Gist of Westeros, Alta., Cliff Pahl of Hanna, Alta., and Travis Rogers of Westlock, Alta.

The International Livestock Auctioneer Championship also carried on its Down Under component this year, as it has for the past decade. The Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association sends over its national under-25 auctioneering champion to participate in the Stampede showdown on an exhibition basis. Andrew Warder, 25, of Tamworth, sold seven drafts of cattle during Friday's preliminaries, auctioned off some strip loins Saturday after the 10 finalists had said their piece – and cracked wise with virtually everyone he met.

"I killed 'em. It was a lot of fun. I was trying to get them to take me seriously, but they kept on laughing at me," joked Warder, who sells cattle and sheep in Australia. "It was very different from what we do over in Australia . . . we only call the bid we've got, where they sort of call the bid out front here. Plus, we sound a heap better. You guys are just terrible."

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The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.

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