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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

This is part of an occasional series by the Sanpete County Travel and Utah Heritage Highway 89 Alliance on the people and places along U.S. Highway 89.

## **Horse Racing Is In Young Champion's Blood**

*By Christian Probasco*

*For the National Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area*

FAIRVIEW, UTAH—Those who know the Kellers of Fairview would say it would be inevitable for family members to eventually step on each other's horse-racing records. And that's what happened last July when high school student Kelsie Keller made local history breaking the record her grandmother set two years earlier for fastest barrel race at Panguitch Rodeo Arena, riding the same horse as her grandmother, Jackie Keller, did setting it.

Kelsie's mother, Autumn, who trains barrel horses, also competes at rodeos. Her father Bill and her grandfather on her father's side compete in calf roping. Her 13-year-old brother Kash ropes (and rides steers). Many of her aunts and uncles run the rodeo circuit. Her 81-year-old great-grandmother, Beth Wilson, of Gunnison, still rides competitively.

"We race against each other all the time," says the 16-year-old Kelsie.

That leaves the question of who gets to race Bender, the 17-year-old quarter horse which earned the Keller's both records at Panguitch and won Jackie the Senior Pro Rodeo World Barrel Racing Championship a few years back. The horse belongs to Jackie but she lets Kelsie ride him when the arena conditions are right.

"I'll use one of my other (two) horses if the ground is too hard or too deep," Kelsie explains. "Bender is getting old."

Kelsie found herself competing almost every weekend last year. She won all the Rocky Mountain Professional Rodeo Association breakaway roping events she entered ("seven or eight," she says), against an average of 30-40 other competitors each time. That's just the sort of behavior you might expect from someone who says she "ran barrels before I could walk."

But her rodeo victories don't come at the expense of her grades. "My parent's say I have to keep a 3.5 GPA," she says, "I have to get my homework done before I leave for the weekend."

Kelsie scored another sort of achievement when her "Tribute to the Cowboy," won first place in the essay competition of the first Cowboy Expo held in Mt. Pleasant earlier this year.

"I have been riding horses since I was two years old..." Keller wrote in her essay, "On both sides of my family, riding goes (back) several generations. It is in my blood to ride and train horses. It means much to who I am."

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Kelsie Keller beats her grandmother's barrel racing record at the Panguitch Rodeo Arena on the same quarter horse her grandmother rode to set it. Kelsie's time of 15.990 seconds was .009 second faster than her grandmother's.



Kelsie Keller with 17-year-old 'Bender'. Keller says Bender is "getting old" but the horse broke a record Keller's grandmother set years earlier.

*Photographs courtesy Autumn Keller/Sanpete Messenger*