

Western and Horse Photography: Event vs. Fine Art

Morgan Allbert, president

Plan

Phase 1: Snapshotting the world

Phase 2: Learning how to photograph

Phase 3: Event photography

Phase 4: Fine art photography

Bonus: Sneak peak of field trip

Phase 1: Snapshotting the world

- Whatever camera was on hand
  - My mothers canon 20D
  - Fujifilm Finepix XP50
- Most photos were never looked at twice
- No knowledge of photograph rules
- Automatic settings
- Point and shoot and move on
- Disposable film cameras
- Mostly for the memories



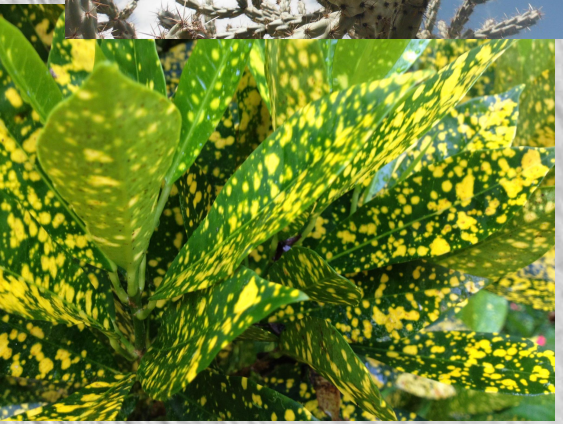
I just played, photographed, and explored













… 2012?





Phase 2: Learning how to photograph

At some point I started actually learning about photography

- Class in high school
- 4-H workbook
- Worked with a semi-professional event photographer
  - I had someone to ask questions when I didn’t understand what aperture was
- Classes in college
- **Still learning with the club speakers today

The classic: Rule of Thirds

How to crop every photo, obviously







Shutter Speed

“Smoother” long shutter

“Sharper” quick shutter

Freezing action



4 second
(Night mode)

1/10



Fun fact: It’s hard to hold a camera steady for a 4 second shutter, even with a tripod!

Aperture (F-stop)

“What is the f thing?” Depth of field and focus, bokeh effect

F 1/5.6 (portrait mode)



F 1/22 (“normal” mode)



Birds eye of view

Don’t just take photos from eye level







And then I knew everything I needed!

…. Just kidding

Part of this learning process was sharing and getting feedback

- Class grades
- Local county fair open class
- Working directly with my instructor
- Sharing with my family
- Posting to social media

It still continues today



Phase 3: Event Photography

I started uploading lower res photos to my adobe portfolio website

- rmkmedias.myportfolio.com

I told people about the website, and added the webpage as a watermark

I handed out 4x6 prints to the competitors each week as a business card and personal keepsakes

I took over 30,000 Rodeo and 4-H photos between 2019 and 2023

“Event photography is the professional art of snapping high-quality images during a wide variety of important occasions… the goal for any event shoot is to compile a variety of posed and candid photographs of both people and scenery.”

Beaver Creek Rodeo Series 2019



Someone let me borrow their 70-200 f2.8mm lens occasionally

I had plenty of light

I returned each week having reviewed my own work, ready to try something new

I asked competitors what they wanted

I was there because my sister was the Rodeo Queen that year













Eagle County 4-H



A quieter pet project

I knew the stories, I had been in these kids places

All participants under 18

Much stricter “rules”

Longer, quieter moments

More posed

Couldn’t try again “next week”

Rules





Stay in one place for all competitors within a class so there is an even playing field for every rider and horse involved



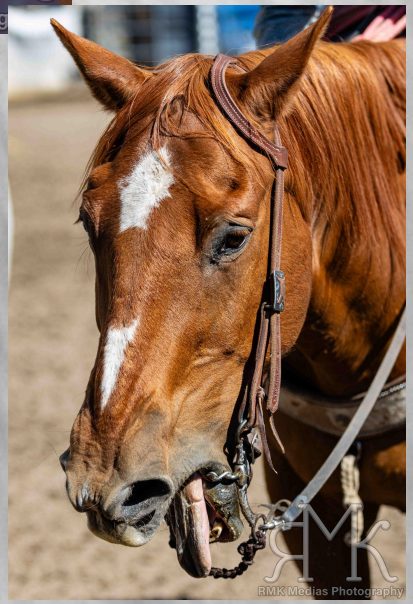


Don’t be a distraction









Other event photography rules and tips

- Don’t forget the behind the scenes
- Be impartial and fair in your edits
- Be conscious of your audience
- Bring extra batteries
- Be respectful
- Grain is better than a too slow shutter
- Know the spoken and unspoken rules
- Be daring





Cowboy Forever Foundation 2022 and 2023



Less than ideal lighting

All my own equipment

I tag-teamed with my brother

- Photographing
- Editing
- Planning

I chose to be there every time I went

2021

I was an audience member

My photos felt disconnected from the action









2022

I got in on the action,
sponsoring the rodeo in kind







My current equipment: Canon 60D

Flaws:

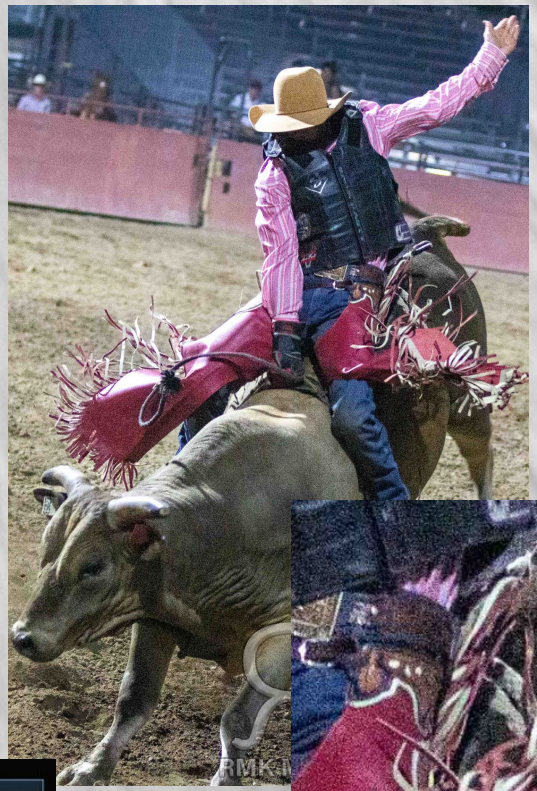
- 5.3FPS maximum, and 16 RAW files
- I could maybe get 1 or 2 shots of novice bull riders/bronc riders
- I could max out my frame buffer on a single barrel in a race
- Poor low light performance
- High ISO noise starting at 1600
- 9 autofocus points

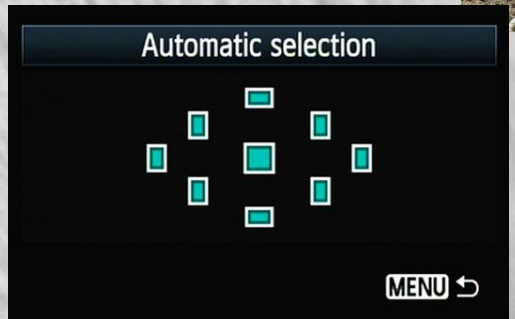
Things I liked:

- ASP-C crop gave me a magnification boost
- Body wasn't incredibly heavy
- I had good lenses for it
- Batteries lasted a while (and I had spares)
- Adjustable review screen
- I already had it
- I already knew how to use it, technically and aesthetically
    - I knew what my 70 - 200mm *felt* like

There were nights I had to just accept I could not “event photograph” it









My upgrade: Canon R7

- Same APS-C crop sensor
- I could get a converter to use all the lenses I already had
- Same batteries
- 15fps mechanical, 30fps electronic shutter
- 5,915 individual focus points across 651 zones
  - Also featured subject tracking capabilities
- Correct price point

2023





Shots I probably would have missed with the 60D







Tips for Photographing Cowboys and Rodeos

- Get under the brim of the hat
- Be in the either
  - horses eyesight or ear sight
  - riders eyesight
- Do not unintentionally cut off ears, hooves, ends of tails, leather straps
- Do not unintentionally cut off part of the hat or chaps



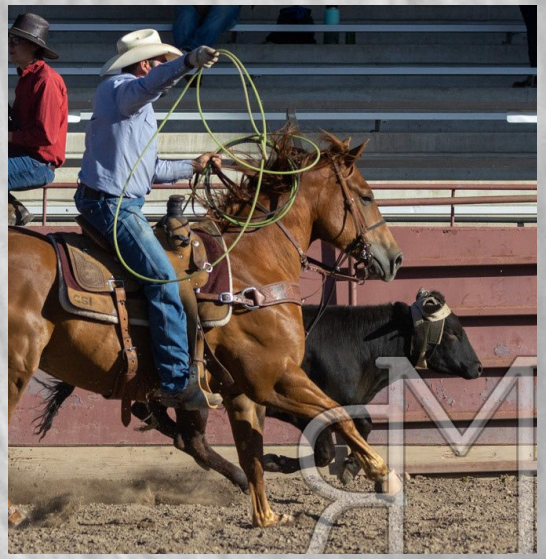




Getting under

the hat brim

Having the horses eye line





Phase 4: Fine Art Photography

When I moved to Maryland, I wanted to order prints for my house of my photography work. I also discovered I really wanted to have one of my prints for sale in a Fine Art Gallery. This desire led me to have two realizations:

- There’s almost nothing here I could print to hang in my living room
- There’s almost nothing here I could submit to a Fine Art Gallery

I had lots images that I could print, lots of moments and memories and emotions captured through my lens, but none that met my “Fine Art” definition

“Fine art photography is the intentional use of photography as your artistic medium of choice, used to further your conceptual idea” - Ariel Wilson

Paradigm shift

I wasn’t taking photos for someone else anymore

I did not need to be truthful to the moment, just truthful to myself







Leaving The West in Colorado

I argued in college that I was about more than just the horse. It felt shallow and juvenile. It felt like I was letting down those that woke as sunrise to work all day.

I realized that doesn’t mean I have to be about more. While cowboys and The West might not have been just about the horse, I was.



I was about horses and their beauty

The connection I have with them

Their massive strength

Their wildness and prey instinct

My absolute adoration of them









Upcoming Field Trip Photography Advice

- Get to a different angel
  - Higher angel looking down at things
  - Lower angel looking up at things
- Craft the shot
  - This is not an event, not a passing moment
  - Move your feet
  - Watch your background
- Get close
  - Lots of textures across the property

