

# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Carriage Driving and Turnouts

**Q. *Why does the driver sit on the right side of the seat?***

- A. Since the Victorian age of carriage driving originated in England, where drivers still sit on the right, this tradition has been carried on to the US. Antique vehicles will typically have both the brake and the whip holder on the right to aid the driver.

**Q. *Why do I need a whip? Why do I have to hold it?***

- A. The whip “replaces” your legs as if you were riding. To use the reins as a “go forward” cue bumps the horse in the mouth, so as to tell the horse to “stop” whilst the slap of the reins tells the horse to “go”. This type of cue is considered bad reinsmanship. The whip can also be used like a riding leg to get the horse to bend properly so as to create better balance for the horse. Anytime you are in the vehicle, the whip should be in your hand (traditionally, the right hand). Holding the whip is proper so that you are ready for anything. If you need to move your horse quickly, you may not have enough time to pick the whip out of the holder in order to use it.



**Q. *Why do carriage drivers use a whip with a “long” lash?***

- A. The lash is used to more effectively cue the horse in a specific location, such as the belly or shoulder. A whip without a lash will first of all cause you to have to reach considerably more to cue the horse, but also be a lot less subtle in its cue. Some drivers prefer a shorter lash as they feel it is less to handle. Other drivers like to use a longer lash more precisely. The typical length of lash is 8”-24”.

**Q. *How big should my hat be?***

- A. In this day and age, we don’t tend to wear “dress up” hats on a normal basis. So when new drivers see carriage drivers in their hats, the hats tend to seem bigger than they are. While hat selection can be an article of its own, the rule of thumb is that a lady’s hat brim should not be outside her shoulders. The smaller the lady, the smaller her hat. Guys have it much easier. A straw Fedora is perfectly acceptable for most informal turnouts, while a top hat is reserved for only formal carriages.

**Q. *Can I wear a safety helmet?***

- A. Yes! However, make sure that it is still tasteful with your turnout. If your carriage and attire are fairly dark, don’t ruin the look with a big white helmet. Get a black cover if nothing else. Some people are handy to “dress up” helmets with ribbons or feathers to make it seem less like a “brain bucket”. Juniors (children under 18) are required to wear a helmet.



*Q. What is an apron (lap robe) and why do I need it?*

- A. The driving apron is a traditional article of clothing meant to keep your clothes clean while traveling on dusty, dirty roads. It is considered an accoutrement of the vehicle, like a seat belt, and therefore should coordinate with the vehicle more so than your clothes. The driving apron is worn over your clothes. The length is a preference, but should be past your knees to your ankles at a seated position. (See our article “**Driving Aprons**”.)

*Q. Why do I need brown leather gloves?*

- A. Brown gloves were traditionally oiled and not dyed. Therefore, when you reached your destination and pulled off your gloves, your hands would not be stained with dye from either sweat or wet weather. (See the photo at right of my mom’s dyed foot from wet leather shoes!) Leather provides a good grip on leather reins more so than typical fabrics. Recently, glove companies have designed and manufactured synthetic gloves with excellent grip. Our family uses synthetic gloves for obstacle course classes, but still wears the traditional leather gloves for judged arena classes.



*Q. What are string gloves?*

- A. String gloves are meant to be worn while it is raining, as they have better grip on the leather reins than wet leather gloves. A pair is typically tucked under the seat on the driver’s (right) side, so that the driver is prepared in case of inclement weather. Since string gloves are basically “destroyed” once used in the rain, our family has pretty, higher quality string gloves that we use for show on nice days, and cheaper ones we actually use when it is raining.

*Q. Why are brown reins considered correct?*

- A. Brown leather reins are oiled, just like brown leather gloves, and drivers did not wish to have the dye from the reins transfer to their hands or clothes while driving.

*Q. Why do carriage drivers use breeching?*

- A. Breeching is considered the most effective and comfortable way for the horse to slow and stop a vehicle. Most other non-mechanical methods of braking without breeching use the horse’s withers and girth to slow and stop the vehicle, while breeching uses the horse’s meaty haunches. This is considerably more comfortable, especially with the heavier vehicles used in carriage driving. If breeching is not used in carriage driving, the vehicle should have mechanical brakes.



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**Q. *Can I use a check rein at a carriage show?***

- A. Check reins are generally not used for carriage driving because they limit the ability of the horse to use his head and neck to balance and bend properly. That being said, side checks are allowed in lower level competition. Overchecks are only allowed with certain antique vehicles as a proper piece of equipment for that vehicle.

People who use side checks are generally concerned about keeping the horse's head up so that he doesn't eat grass while put to the vehicle. Unfortunately, I have seen horses push through the check to throw their head down anyway, only to come up with the check under the shaft. This makes the check even tighter, encouraging the horse to flip over backwards. The best way to keep the horse's head up is to start the training for this in hand. The horse should not be allowed to eat while his "work clothes" are on. This training will transfer to the vehicle if done properly. Also, not driving with "slack" reins will help as well.

**Q. *What is meant by the term "middle hole" for harness?***

- A. Quality harnesses should have enough adjustment so that the buckle is not at one end of the adjustment holes or the other. This is so in case the harness breaks, there is a point of adjustment available so that the horse, vehicle, and people can safely return home. By having the adjustment on the "last hole" on either end, any adjustments can't be made if necessary. Judges look for the middle hole adjustments to see that the harness fits the horse properly.

**Q. *What is a Spares Kit and do I need one?***

- A. A spares kit is usually a pouch or case in which extra harness pieces and tools are placed in case you have a breakage out on the road. A fancy turnout spares kit includes items such as rein and trace splices, a knife, leather punch, wrench, hammer, etc. It is usually in a custom leather case. However, an everyday, practical spares kit might include zip ties, electrical tape, duct tape, knife, wrench, etc. as anyone who has had breakage away from home knows that zip ties and duct tape fix about anything!

Recently, the American Driving Society has included that "Spares will be judged" in their Rulebook for Turnout classes. Unfortunately, at this time, I have seen that taken quite literally or not at all. Some judges want to see the spares kit presented, some just ask if you have it with you on the carriage, and some don't ask at all. That being said, my suggestion is to have at least a small pouch with basic necessities on the vehicle for the Turnout class.

That way, at least you have a spares kit with you. If you can afford a fancy leather kit, great, but don't let not having one stop you from competing.

