

What Style Harness Do I Need?

For the prospective or beginner driver, the words “horse harness” mean one thing: the parts that attach the horse to a vehicle. However, there are many different styles of horse harness that are appropriate for different styles of vehicles and styles of driving. We will touch on some various styles here.

Carriage Harness

We specialize in *carriage* harness. Carriage harness has its basis in 1800s Europe, and was designed to pair with vehicles of various types, from two-wheeled carts such as a Meadowbrook, to heavier vehicles, such as a Phaeton. Of course, within this style of *carriage* harness, there are variations as well for certain vehicles, such as a two-wheeled cart



Smucker Super Deluxe carriage-style harness with a two-wheeled Road Cart.

generally requires a wider harness saddle for supporting the weight of the cart, and some heavier four-wheeled carriages should be used with a full (neck) collar instead of a breast collar because of the weight of the vehicle. Carriage harness comes in all sizes, and good harness is custom made to the horse. In order for the horse to perform at its best, it is paramount that a



IVC Enhanced Leather carriage-style miniature horse harness.

carriage harness fit the horse well, and that the vehicle also be appropriate to the horse in terms of size, weight, and style. The bearing surfaces of the harness should be of adequate width for the comfort of the horse, and the material should be of quality.

Historically, harness was made of leather, but good modern synthetics do well to mimic the visual qualities of both dull and patent leather. While carriage harness can have some decorative features, it is generally very conservative in taste. My rule of thumb is if the Queen of England is not going to be seen with it, neither should a carriage driver. This means carriage harness is never embellished with “spots”, however, monograms and family crests are often seen in certain locations on higher end harnesses. This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of variations within the term *carriage* harness. We can help you determine the style of harness and the features you need for your chosen vehicle and horse, as well as the type of driving you wish to do, be it high-end competition or recreational driving.



IVC Enhanced Synthetic carriage-style harness with a Marathon vehicle.

IVC Carriage

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Draft Harness

Next, we have what the driving community calls *draft harness*. The American draft horse industry tends to use a little more “bling” in their show competition harnesses to draw the judge’s attention. This can be in the form of square, round, or diamond-shaped “spots” that decorate the harness. They are usually stainless, although brass may also be used. Some show harnesses are also made of shiny synthetic material to add to the showiness. There is also draft harness that is known more as “field” harness. This harness is designed for heavy duty field work, where decoration is completely unnecessary. Draft harness can come with the tall Scotch housing over the collar or regular collar and hames with balls. The breeching



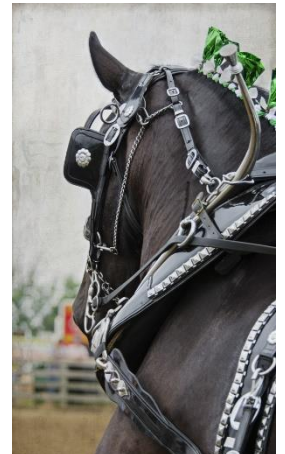
Draft show harness with a Scotch collar put to a two-wheeled Show Cart.



Draft harness with round spots.

can have various configurations such as two or three-strap, and the saddle may be different depending on if the horse is driven as a single or a multiple. Draft harness also comes in sizes for standard-sized horses, ponies, and miniatures. Again, depending on the vehicle and the venue to be driven, draft harness can be appropriate. If you are putting your

horse(s) to a hitch wagon or a draft-style show cart at a draft show or in draft-style classes with either of the above style vehicles, draft harness is appropriate. It is too heavily-styled for a typical Victorian carriage or Early American-style buggy. However, draft horses competitors can have carriage-style harness made to be used at carriage competitions.



Draft show harness embellished with square spots.

Fine Harness



Fine harness with a Viceroy buggy.

Fine harness had its start in the American show ring with high-stepping Saddlebred (and the like) horses, although now you will see stock-type horses using this style of harness in their driving classes. It is also seen in the pony and miniature horse show rings, again, put to very lightweight vehicles. *Fine harness* is designed to leave the majority of the horse free of material so that the horse can be seen more by the judge. The strapping tends to be very fine and dainty, hence the term *fine harness*.

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Modern fine harness can have colored piping sewn into the bridle and saddle that coordinates with the color of the cart/buggy. *Fine harness* is only appropriate for a flat competition show ring put to a super light two-wheeled cart (commonly known as a “Jerald” cart, although Jerald is



Miniature Horse Fine harness put to a “Jerald”-style two-wheeled cart.

technically a company name), or a Viceroy four-wheeled buggy. There is not much bearing surface for the horse to

support or pull, therefore fine harness is completely inappropriate for heavier vehicles. In the worst case, it can break under the strain of pulling a heavier load than for which it was designed. Fine harness is also not made for any recreational work outside of the flat ring, as it usually is not used with any breeching on the horse’s rump to slow and stop

the vehicle. Tight wrap straps on the fine harness girth/saddle are used to slow the lightweight vehicles on a flat surface. With a heavier load or a downhill surface, this puts great strain on the horse’s withers. Breeching should always be used with a single horse when driven on hills.



Fine harness in an AQHA Pleasure Driving Class.

Race Harness

Lastly, there is race harness which is, of course, designed for harness racing. It is lightweight and designed to pull a lightweight vehicle quickly on a flat surface. Race horse enthusiasts do not want extra, unnecessary weight on the horse to slow it down. It is built most similarly to fine harness, but



Race harness put to a bike.

can add certain features for quick changing of harness and vehicle. Race harness is again entirely inappropriate for any vehicle other than the race bike or jog cart for which it was designed, and definitely should not be used with a heavier vehicle.



Race harness is very light.

While some features of harnesses are purely decorative, most have specific functions that are intended to correspond with the style of horse, style of vehicle, and the style of driving for which they were designed. Let us help you make sure your harness is *appropriate* and *safe* for your driving style and comfort of the horse!

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