

Welcome to the Carriage Driving Community!

We are a tight-knit group of people who all share in the passion of carriage driving. We also have a culture somewhat uncommon within other horse-related disciplines. This may take some getting used to if you have experience in other disciplines. We are a warm and welcoming community, and safety always comes first. Here are some fairly tongue-in-cheek points to help you adjust to our little group:

- Carriage drivers look out for each other. If we see you doing something unsafe, we will tell you...and while it won't be mean, it may very well be straightforward. It's part of the culture.
- Once you are more experienced in carriage driving, we expect that you will do the same as above for the "next generation" of beginning drivers. If you are still fairly new to driving and see someone doing something that you question as being unsafe, it's probably a good idea to alert someone more experienced than you to handle the situation. They can have more influence by nature of their experience to convince someone that what they are doing could kill them.
- Never put a horse to a vehicle without a bridle on and the reins attached. Not even for a second. Period. No excuses ever.
- Never take the bridle off a hitched horse. Period. No excuses ever.
- Most experienced carriage drivers will never recommend starting with inferior equipment to save money. They are not judging your pocketbook. They know your life depends on good equipment. It's part of the culture.
- If you have "less than ideal" equipment, you may get some comments. This, again, is not about judging your pocketbook. It's about helping you make sure that your equipment suits your horse and goals. For example, if your breast collar is too narrow to be comfortable for the horse, it is less than ideal. That being said, "Use what you have until you get what you want," but recognize that it may not be the best for you or your horse in the meantime. Most carriage drivers just want to help you understand so that you can learn to make it better.
- Carriage driving is different than other forms of horse driving, and of course, we think it is the best. We have a lot of justification for why we do certain practices, some rooted in safety, some in comfort for the animal, and some rooted in history. Other forms of driving can seem foreign to a driver who has only ever been involved in carriage driving. Considering that strapping something to a flight animal seems very unnatural, carriage driving is one of the most natural disciplines you can do with a horse. We drive and develop the horse we have and don't try to make it into something it is not. It's part of the culture.
- Just because someone is "dressed to the nines" and their horse is turned out impeccably doesn't make them a "rich snob". Most are just putting in a lot of work to clean their harness and vehicle, and shopping smartly at resale stores to buy clothing in which to "roll around in the mud". They also put in a great effort to work their horse(s). Most are just regular people who have made carriage driving a priority. Take the time to talk to them. You will be pleasantly surprised. Again, it's part of the culture.

- Driving bitless is controversial. While you can do it at home, most competitions require a bit. Even bringing it up is controversial, so be ready for the comments if you do.
- If you wouldn't do [X practice] with a big horse, please don't do it with a little one.
- Help your fellow carriage driver...even if you are competing directly against that person in the show ring. If they need a header to put to, help them. If they broke or forgot something of which you have an extra, share it. It's part of the culture.
- If you borrow something from another carriage driver, return it in the same or better shape than you received it. If you break it, be ready to pay for it. Carriage drivers are gracious, but nobody likes to be taken advantage of.
- Be careful who you disparage in the community. Remember, we are a relatively small group of people who are fairly intertwined. It is also not uncommon for the average driver to be able to rub shoulders with people who are national or even world champions by nature of how the driving clubs, clinics, and competitions are set up. There are not too many sports where this is possible, but carriage driving is one of them.
- Don't complain about having to compete against those experienced drivers. Look at it as an opportunity to learn. Eventually, you may be the experienced driver who the beginners have to compete against.
- Most experienced carriage drivers are very approachable. Don't let their status intimidate you. That being said, don't approach someone at a show who is in the middle of trying to get ready for a class and expect them to take a bunch of time to chat with you. Wait until they are more free to talk.
- If you want to talk to a Judge, go through the Show Organizer or Technical Delegate, or wait until the show is over. It just looks bad for competitors to carry on a major conversation with a judge whom they will show under. There is a certain decorum that should be maintained.
- The carriage driving community is small. It doesn't take long for your reputation to proceed you, either good or bad. Do everything in your power to keep it good.

So again, Welcome to the Carriage Driving Community! Please take the time to get to know your fellow carriage drivers...from your local community, from all over the country and even the world! The more people you meet, the more you will learn. 😊

Written by Myrna Rhinehart, and adapted by the American Driving Society Education Committee, 2020.