



DRIVING NEWS

Spokes & Spurs Inc Newsletter

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President's Message

The summer has just flown by! After a wet spring the dry weather meant concern for hay but certainly allows for plenty of driving days! I hope that you all are able to enjoy the cool weather with your horses. We are so fortunate to have such an active driving community and I wish to thank those who help to promote driving activities.

Recently, several of our members along with Charlotte's Creek were promoting driving at Spy Coast Farm's EquiConnect. I was off to the National Drive where one of our long time members, Lenny & Kathy Courtemanche are instrumental in setting everything up for a wonderful week of driving and clinics. Coming up next is, "Halloween at the Haven" which has a very full entry! I hope to see our members competing and/or volunteering. Another new obstacle has been added and this event has both ADS and USEF competitions over three days!

As always, we welcome your input and we will soon be putting the schedule together for 2026. Our year end meeting and luncheon will be held at Valkyrie's Haven on Dec. 7, 2025 sat 1:00 pm.

Thank you to all who help to promote driving!!

You're Invited!

SPOKES AND SPURS

YEAR-END BANQUET

Sun. Dec 7 at 1:00 PM

Valkyries Haven Farm

Please RSVP to Ann at katdopony@gmail.com

Thank You to Sterling Graburn, Sammie Jo Allen, and Snip for spreading the word about the wonderful world of Combined Driving! They participated in a driving demo at EquiConnect, held at Spy Coast Farm on Oct. 11. There were over 400 attendees at the one day equestrian community outreach event! Charlotte's Creek Farm also sponsored a booth for the American Driving Society. There were giveaways and coloring pages, as well as handouts on driving safety and selecting a driving horse.



Article Courtesy of the American Driving Society

MAPLE LEAF MUSINGS

Make Safety a Habit

BY ELISA MAROCCHI

If you drive horses long enough, chances are it will happen. One day, you will find yourself distracted with a conversation you're having with a friend while harnessing or putting to. Or perhaps the week has been a tough one, full of many tasks and pressing issues. Or maybe you are just trying to fit a drive in at the end of a long day and you are tired. Whatever the reason is, during these times, it is easy to miss something while preparing for your drive. If it is the wrong thing, it can be disastrous.

My students learn a simple but effective way to help prevent these omissions from happening by learning a safety checklist they run through each and every drive. Initially, I ask them to verbalize this checklist so I can be sure they haven't missed any steps but as they become more comfortable, they can do the checklist "in their head". To this day, every time I harness my horse and put him to a cart or carriage, I mentally run through this safety process. It takes only a moment and can go a long way to preventing an accident.

Some situations I have personally witnessed that could have been prevented through the use of this checklist include seeing a horse harnessed and hitched with only one ear through the crownpiece, another horse being driven around an event site, prior to the start of the marathon, with the bit UNDER the bottom jaw, not in the mouth, and a horse arriving at the arena for a lesson with only one rein attached to the bit!

To make the checklist easy to remember, simply work from the front of the horse to the back when checking harness, and from the front of the vehicle to the back once you have put the horse to the vehicle.



Noseband, throatlatch and curb chain all in place? Rein attached on each side of the bit? Ready to go!

Here's how it works when checking your harness:

- Bridle in place with ears between the crownpiece and the browband
- Throatlatch and noseband secured
- Bit in place correctly with a rein attached to each side
- Curb chain or strap, if used, correctly attached
- Blinkers at the correct height, and not pressing into the eyes

- Lines through the collar and backsaddle terrets – both sides
- Traces attached and tips tucked in
- Girth secured and tips tucked in
- Crupper fitted and buckled correctly.

Once you've actually hitched your horse to the vehicle, it is time for the second safety check:

- Shafts correctly placed through the tug loops
- Overgirth secured on both sides
- Hold backs correctly wrapped, buckled and through the footman's loops
- Traces attached to the singletree
- Kicking/bucking strap buckled and adjusted correctly (if used)

These checks take but a moment and are easy to commit to memory. Even if you are an experienced driver, it is a good idea to ensure you are "present in the moment" and concentrating on the task of harnessing and putting to. Using a mental checklist will help with this.

Next month, I will be describing a variety of more specific safety practices to keep you, your passengers and your horse safe and will also be offering up a few simple ways to make harnessing more comfortable for you horse. ↘



Elisa Marocchi is an Equestrian Canada licensed driving coach and a member of the EC Driving Committee. She owns and operates Wildwood Farm, a full service driving facility near 100 Mile House, BC. An active driving coach since 2000, Elisa offers clinics and lessons in a safe, supportive and fun manner both on and off the farm. As a combined driving competitor, Elisa has successfully competed throughout North America with both her own homebred horses and those of clients.

Make Safety A Habit, Part 2

BY ELISA MAROCCHI

If a way of doing something doesn't cost you anything, takes no more time than any other method, is safe and keeps your horse more comfortable during harnessing, you'd want to do it that way, right?

In last month's article, I shared a few safety tips you can incorporate into your driving routine. In this article, I'll describe a few ways you can make harnessing more comfortable for your horse, and will also provide a couple of additional safe practices to adopt.

We know that when putting on a full collar that is not equipped with a buckle at the top, we need to first put our knee into the collar to stretch it out a bit, then turn it upside down when putting it on, so the widest part of the collar clears the horse's eyes. By turning a breast collar upside down so the front of the collar passes over the ears, you will also avoid rubbing the eyes. Hold the collar by the trace buckles, and guide it over the head, avoiding the ears and eyes. Once over the ears, turn the collar in the direction the mane lies. Doing so will avoid the mane hairs being pulled. When you take the harness off, follow the same procedure in reverse - turn the collar over behind the ears, in the direction of the mane, hold the collar by the buckle attachment points, and lift it over the ears.



The breastcollar is placed over the head.

When placing the backsaddle on, I hold it and the breeching assembly over my right arm and use my left hand to lift the girth over the back and place the saddle on.



The author standing upright by the horse, with the backsaddle being placed.

There's no need to throw the backsaddle on or drop it heavily into place. I realize that draft harness may be heavy enough to make this process impractical, but for regular harness, doing it this way is a just a bit more comfortable for your horse.

Once the backsaddle is over the back, place the breeching on top of the croup. Before dropping the breeching into place, buckle the girth just tightly enough to hold the backsaddle in place. At that point, you can then take the



The author stooping over slightly to reach for the girth, with the breeching sitting on the croup.

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breeching from the croup and settle it in place around the butt. This way, if something were to spook your horse prior to the girth being buckled, the harness will fall freely away from the horse and not be entangled in the hindquarters. At the end of the drive, unbuckle the crupper, then place the breeching on top of the croup before unbuckling the girth.

Fitting a buckle-in crupper is another place we can make the process more comfortable for our driving partners. To avoid the possibility of the buckle scraping against the underside of the tail, I grasp and lift the tail with my left hand, and with the buckle enclosed in my right hand, I pass the crupper under the tail.



Putting the crupper on.

I then keep my right forearm under the tail to keep it lifted while I buckle the crupper to the backstrap. When removing the crupper at the end of my drive, I make sure to cover the buckle with my hand to again ensure it doesn't rub the tail.

If anyone reading this article has ever tied their hair back with an elastic band, they'll recognize the discomfort they feel from a single hair being caught in that band. To avoid this experience for your horse, take a moment to really check the crupper carefully once it is buckled in place and remove any hairs that are caught up or being pulled by this piece of equipment.

The last two harness fitting tips are safety related, but like the other tips, are easy to incorporate into your routines.

Putting to and unhitching are two of the riskier moments in driving because the horse is partially attached

to the vehicle. Strive to complete these tasks as quickly and smoothly as possible, while avoiding rushing. If I'm using quick-release tugs, before hitching I make sure they're open and ready to receive the shafts. Breeching straps and kicking straps are unbuckled with the tips tucked into the keepers so they're easy to reach for and attach through the footman's loops; the trace shackles on the singletree are open. My whip is in the holder, I've got my gloves either on, or on my seat waiting for me and the cart is lined up, ready to pull forward. Taking the time to properly prepare for the actual hitching process will make the job quicker and safer and is worth the few moments it takes to do so.

Safe driving! ↙



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Spokes and Spurs Library

Spokes and Spurs has a nice little library available to our members. Let Ann Katona know if you would like to check-out anything.

*American Carriages, Sleighs, Sulkeys and Carts 168 Illustrations from Victorian Sources! Edited by Don H. Berkebile

*American Horse-Drawn Vehicles - Being a collection of 218 pictures... Jack D. Rittenhouse

*Bending the Driving Horse Muffy Seaton

*Breaking a Horse to Harness - A Step by Step Guide Sallie Walrond

*Bristol Wagon & Carriage Illustrated Catalog, 1900 Bristol Wagon & Carriage Works Co. Ltd.

*Carriage Driving - A Logical Approach Through Dressage Training Heike Bean and Sarah Blanchard

*Discovering Horse Drawn Carriages D. J. Smith

*Driven Dressage with the Single Horse Sandy Rabinowitz

*Driver Proficiency Program - Level I and Road Driving Syllabus The Carriage Association of America

*Driving a Harness Horse - A Step by Step Guide (A sequel to Breaking a Horse to Harness) Sallie Walrond

*Driving for Pleasure or The Harness Stable and its Appointments Francis T. Underhill

*The Encyclopedia of Driving Sallie Walrond

*The Essential Guide to Carriage Driving Robyn Cuffey and Jaye-Allison Winkel

*Fundamentals of Private Driving Sallie Walrond

*Horse-Drawn Vehicles at the Shelburne Museum Kenneth Edward Wheeling

*Illustrated Catalogue of Carriages and Special Business Advertiser / G. & D. Cook & Co.'s Forward by Paul H. Downing

*Walnut Hill: A Grand Celebration of the Horse & Carriage Robert Lannazzi; Photographer. Bill Remley; Commentator

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Send ads to dunhorse1220@gmail.com.