

# FROM BEHIND THE LINES

By BRIAN JENSEN



I started my driving of Fjords in 1983 working with draft harness and taking what information I could find on driving draft. We had an active draft horse community in Western Canada but very few clinicians or material available for training a beginner. Our local draft community was not accepting of Fjords so I moved to C.D.E.'s (Combined Driving Events) and carriage driving as a way to grow in my chosen discipline, improving my skills and those of my horses.

There are many observations one can make in the two very different styles of driving and my aim is to point out a few in hopes that drivers who are just starting their driving career can differentiate the two.

The carriage community has a firmly-rooted history in Europe with many traditional rules and specific guidelines that leave little room for deviation. At the time of my arrival on the driving scene carriage driving in the form of CDE was just starting in North America.

The first thing I learned about carriage driving was the difference in line handling and contact with the horse's mouth. Over the years many draft teamsters have approached me with a quiet smile, pointing out that my lines appear too tight and suggest that I should maybe let the lines out and allow the horses go on loose or longer lines.

In carriage driving the norm is to always have contact through the lines with the horse. Actually, a good driving horse seeks that contact to feel assured and engaged with the whip (driver).

In contrast, if I were working a field in a draft style, I would want a more relaxed contact for a day's work and equally so would the horses. Most Fjord shows today have both draft and carriage hitches driving in the same classes. A good judge would see both styles and judge them according to their respective standards.

Stringing of lines in draft and carriage style is entirely different. In draft, the lines are strung down the center between the pairs to the teamster. This was a practical idea especially back in Wells-Fargo stagecoach days when the lines were safer from trees and branches strung on the inside of the multiples. As well in farming, the lines were easier to see by a farmer when strung down the middle between the pairs. In carriage driving of multiples the lines are traditionally strung on the outside of the

pairs. Again, I periodically get draft people walking over to tell me my four-in-hand lines are strung wrong and I need to run them down the inside.

Another most commented aspect regarding my carriage driving is the traces or tugs and tension or lack thereof. In draft work, driving traces need to be in draft (engaged) and showing that the horse or multiples are working or engaged in pulling the load equally. Carriage driving, especially the multiples, have totally different standards for the horses working. If I am driving a four-in-hand carriage style, the leaders are out of draft just looking pretty and the wheelers are doing the work pulling the carriage. In Pleasure shows or CDE's I have the front pair out of draft with the wheelers---rear pair pulling the load. When I get into the marathon of a CDE the rules change a bit. I then rotate my wheelers and leaders through draft allowing a pair to pull while the other pair can rest somewhat. In heavy uphill pulling I engage both pairs so all four are pulling together. If I am in a hazard of a CDE I pull in my leaders so they can turn quickly in a tight turn, again out of draft; while the wheelers pull the carriage making the turns as needed.

Tandems, Randoms and Quadroms in Carriage driving, have different standards as well. The original tandem evolved in England back in the days of going to the fox hunt and a day of socializing and visiting. The lead horse of the tandem wore a hunter/jumper saddle with the lines strung through the raised stirrups and back through the headstall of the wheeler to the driver. The front 'riding' horse was to arrive at the hunt relaxed---warmed up and ready for the hunt. This was achieved by having the wheeler do all the pulling of the cart and the leader traveling with slack traces. I think there was a bit of showmanship involved here as well; as it is harder to drive a horse out of draft than in draft over a distance. The other implication here is that the lead horse cannot pull on the traces or attachments of the wheel horse. If this happened the wheel horse would feel the pulling on its breeching and immediately hold back as it has been trained to do.

All Tandem, Randoms and Quadroms in Carriage are driven with only the wheeler in draft and the rest driving out of draft but in driving line contact with the mouths of each horse. Again this is a challenge to drive all the horses other than the wheeler out of draft in the hitch. The Tandem hitch from England was simulated here in America with some of the early pioneer stud carts. The stallion was put out front looking showy and driving out of draft to various farms. A gelding was most likely used to do the work of pulling the cart and the stallion owner. The stallion was the traveling advertisement for his abilities and he got to arrive rested and ready for his job. I must say from personal experience it is harder to drive a horse out of draft than in draft. The weight of the draft has a steadying influence and balancing of the horses working in the hitch. Putting all multiples into draft and letting them go is easier on the teamster and of course balances the work for all the horses.

The first time I was seen driving with a whip in hand I was given a severe dressing down by a Fjord draft teamster. He admonished me for even carrying such a thing as it might give the wrong impression to the membership or the general public. In Carriage Driving the whip is considered an aid which acts as the absentee rider's leg. The thong of a whip must touch the shoulder of the farthest hitched horse. Most drivers today, whips or teamsters are carrying a whip of appropriate length. I chuckle to see in the beginning years a teamster carrying a riding crop as a whip in hand. I just returned from watching the

driving classes at our BC Interior Provincial Exhibition and the Sandpoint ID Draft Show and am glad to see the length of whips getting longer.

Clothing and turnout between the two styles are different as well. At draft shows, in the earlier days, a clean shirt and pants were considered adequate. Today I see teamsters wearing hats and jackets, using gloves, and carrying a whip portraying a pride in their hitch and turnout. One Rule of thumb in shows is to dress appropriately to the type of carriage being driven and to show respect for the judge. On very hot days if the judge removes his jacket only then, permission is given for the entrants to follow suit. Carriage customs from Europe dictate clothing and apparel, appropriate to vehicle and style. It is considered that there are only 5 acceptable coaching colors: black green, gray, brown and red.

The much discussed apron is apparel dictated by necessity on how to arrive at the destination clean for tea. If one dressed up at home and left in the rain and a muddy road it made sense to wear a cover on your good clothing. This common sense idea became a driving tradition over the years

Carriage passengers on larger hitches were usually dressed to the nines which complimented the coaches driven and the overall turnout. Female riders could wear large hats as were the mode at the turn of the century. Today, one class in large Pleasure shows is called the Country Drive. Hitches entered, allow for clothing and hats replicating turn of the century turnout. The awards picture from Spruce Meadows 2005 shows Ursula in a modern version of the large brim fancy hats. Normally hats in carriage driving classes are to be small brimmed suitable for windy days and to not allow for too much flopping which is distracting.

Another mandatory rule in Carriage driving which differs from Draft driving is the color of the lines. Carriage lines are to be brown or unstained in the hands of the whip. Any black staining of leather could leach off into the gloves of the whip on a rainy day. Of course a lady driving with white gloves would not want to show up for tea with smudged or stained gloves. Today, Carriage lines are natural brown full length or on the back half going to the whips hands. Hence, whips drive with compulsory brown gloves only.

Draft harness is quite different from Carriage harness. Typically carriage harness utilizes a lighter breastplate style while Draft harness uses collars and heavier harness suited for draft work. In carriage driving there is a lighter style collared harness which has been around for a few hundred years. The collars are quite small and light with thin decorative hames. Due to the diversity of the Fjords you will find in the same driving class, hitches driven in draft style competing against Fjords driven in carriage harness style. It would be a challenge for a Judge to call a class when you have four-ups of Carriage and Draft competing against each other. The Draft entry would be driving with all traces in draft, and the Carriage entry would be driving with the leaders out of draft. It gets really confusing when you see a four-up of Fjords using light collared Carriage harness but stringing the lines down the center as Draft entries do. Is the hitch Carriage or Draft?

There are probably many items of comparison between Draft and Carriage driving which I have missed. For me a good teamster in draft or a good whip in carriage is always a pleasure to watch and learn from.

I ask all fjord drivers to keep their learning minds and abilities open to progression and growth. Sometimes I have learned the most from the least expected direction or person.

And remember this Tjeerd Velstra quote “without a horse there is no life!”