

Carriage Driving and Road Trials

I have always had a love for carriage driving. I have never been in a position to incorporate driving with the Road Trials. After attending the Road Trials in England, my interest was once again peaked.

While Emmy, my Road Dog Dalmatian, was in England competing in the British Road Trials, she was introduced to the carriage. She was a natural. Watching her move beneath the carriage only fueled my desire to one day compete in a Road Trial by carriage.

Several years ago I had another horse in the barn that I choose to be my driving horse. I was told by the seller that he would make a good driving horse. I spent several months trying to personally train him to harness. He was not progressing so I took him to a driving trainer to continue the training, only to be told the horse was not suitable for driving.

With this lesson in mind, I decided that one of the first steps that I would take was to find a reputable driving trainer in my area. I then took my horse to the trainer to have him evaluated first before any decisions were made. It is important that you take the time to have your horse evaluated.

Red was then placed on a waiting list for over 45 days to get into school. The next step was to deliver my horse to the driving trainer. What a thrill it was when I delivered him to the school. Two weeks went by before Red was placed into full harness. Then the day came when the trainer told us that Red would make a good driving horse. We could now invest in a harness that would fit him. Bruce and I were both excited.



Thanks to the book Make the Most of Carriage Driving, By Joy Claxton, Et al she provided an excellent picture of much needed measurements. This helped us to purchase the right harness. Our trainer went with us to a local Amish driving and harness sale. We bought a harness and a cart for Red. I could not believe it. Once the cart and harness was bought it all seemed possible.

We managed to trailer the carriage home and then it was the Dals turn. I introduced them to the stationary carriage and Emmy went right under it. Slick was a little intimidated to see such a large piece of equipment. Each day for only 5 minutes, two or three times a day, I worked on the command “get under”. Watching them just



approach the stationary carriage was almost all my heart could stand. I then began to work on “get out” and asked the Dals to leave the carriage by way of the rear. After several days both Slick and Emmy were comfortable to sit or lay under the carriage.

While Slick and Emmy were learning to “get under” and “get out”, Red was learning to ground drive with full harness. I took his new harness to make sure that it fit and I got my first driving lesson. What a thrill to just hold the reins. There was so much to learn. My excitement was so strong that this is one time that I was glad that my horse was not touching me. I am sure that he would have easily known that I was vibrating. I was able to ground drive Red in full harness for two hours. We went through an obstacles course that had a tunnel. Red spooked only once but I was able to bring him back under control very easily. I managed to impress the trainer and myself.

It was now time to introduce Slick and Emmy to a moving carriage. I took the carriage and pulled it around the yard. It sounded easy when I thought of the idea but it was a work out! I took a thin string and tied Slick and Emmy to the axel just to see if they would follow since I was alone. I used a thin string so that it would break easily. You would never tie your Dalmatian to the carriage.

It was a good thing that I was by myself because I am sure that anyone else would have surely thought that I had lost my mind. To my amazement Slick and Emmy followed under the carriage. Emmy was much more comfortable than Slick. I quit on a positive note and praised them with food and play. They were both excited. I returned to working with the command of “get under” and “get out” with the stationary carriage. This time I did not have them coupled together but just asked them in a playful way and they both went to the carriage. I still have to point to “get out” but I can always drop the pointing. I want them to always leave the carriage from the back. I am thrilled with how fast they are learning.

Red is now in full harness and hooked to a wagon with a very large draft horse. He did well the first day. All Red was asked to do was stand with the draft horse hooked to the wagon. His next lesson will be to pull the wagon with the draft horse. I am sure that it will make so much noise that the work horse will have to provide comfort to Red.

This process is done in small steps and each step is a building block for the next step.

Until the next time, happy driving.