

## *Refining Your Turnout*

There comes a time in every carriage driver's career when they realize that perhaps they need to refine their turnout. It might come after a judge's comment or a consistent low score in presentation or simply not being able to win despite a nice horse.

If a judge makes a comment about something in your turnout, consider yourself lucky. The judge is giving you a huge hint about how to improve yourself. But before leaping into any changes, do some research first. Some judges, well meaning as they might be, can make generalized statements. For example, stating that a collar upgrades a harness. But not if you are driving a road cart. More is not always better.

A well-turned out road cart can outshine a formal carriage if the road cart gets it right, and the formal carriage does not. The following are tips on some of the details that make the difference between an acceptable turnout and one that turns heads.

### Condition of the carriage and harness

Keeping your carriage and harness in good condition is paramount in the sport of carriage driving. Continuous use and age show unless the equipment is maintained.

Natural wood vehicles are much easier to keep in show shape than painted ones. An annual light sanding and recoating can do wonders for the appearance of a carriage. Included should be touch up of the painted iron and a thorough cleaning of the brass or metal parts.

Painted carriages touchups are a bit trickier. Care should be taken to be sure that the paint matches. Taking a chip to a good hardware store and having them mix up the paint can do this. Be sure to test the paint first on an area that will not show.

Mats and rugs in the carriage should be replaced if cracked around the edges where they are attached to the floor. Rubber mats can be brought back to life with a coating of Armor All.

Areas of wear, such as the black channel iron on the wheels and between spring leaves, may need regular touch up during the show season. Not all black paint is the same, take the time to find a black that matches yours and keep the can handy.

Loading and shipping the vehicle can cause as much wear as driving it and one should be prepared for touch ups at competitions. Before doing any touch up, be sure that the vehicle is clean. Washing with a mild soap, such as Orvus, is suggested. After any touch ups, wiping the vehicle with Pledge or a similar product can brighten the overall shine.

The "patent leather" on the shafts can suffer damage and should be replaced if that should happen. The "leather" is really plastic and replacement kits can be obtained from any good carriage shop. Wiping the "patent leather" with Pledge will also improve it's appearance.

Even an inexpensive, well-used leather harness can look good if properly conditioned. However, this takes some time and effort, which is a good argument for synthetic harness! Once the harness is clean, it should be taken apart piece by piece and blackened with either leather dye or black shoe polish and then allowed to dry. If the fittings are brass, this is a good time to use a good metal polish on both the front and backs of the buckles. If there are some stubborn green or black spots, use a scrubby or fine steel wool to remove them.

A well-maintained carriage and a clean harness will never fail to make an impression on a judge.

### Does everything match?

It's simple, brass with brass, chrome with chrome. But what to do if you have a brass harness and the cart you just bought has chrome? It's a lot easier, and less expensive, to change the fittings on the cart then buy a new harness. Most carriage hardware, such as rein rails, whip

sockets and shaft hardware, can be removed and replaced with the metal of your choice. If you cannot replace a piece, such as hubcaps, simply paint them black. This is very acceptable and better than not matching.

Be careful in adding brass or chrome pieces such as rein rails. Be sure that the rein rail does not overpower the dash. Try to remember that it is an accent piece, not the centerpiece.

Upholstery of color often fades over the years and short of replacing it, not much can be done. However, you can downplay worn upholstery with carefully selected clothing. Do not try to match the color, for example faded dark blue upholstery will look even more faded with a dark blue apron or a dark blue jacket. Use complimentary colors to downplay the upholstery.

Another way to hide it is to carry a groom or passenger or dog, again taking care of what they wear.

Adding color to a turnout is a good idea, unless the colors clash. An outfit can look great, until it gets into a carriage and clashes with the paint. Lay out your outfit on the carriage, step back and be critical. Is it too bright, too dark, too busy, too dull?

While the rule of thumb is to have the apron match your upholstery, one can have some fun with country turnouts by wearing a patterned apron and then complimenting it with a solid blouse or jacket. Another fun idea is to add ribbons or flowers to a hat which accent your carriage or apron.

If you aren't good at such things, get a friend to give you an honest opinion. Then buy them lunch.

Some simple tips from judges about what they often see incorrect in the ring. Drivers should wear dark brown gloves. The driver's hands are very visible to the judge and light toned leather catches their eye before everything else. One thing never to wear are sunglasses. One thing to always pay attention to are your shoes, they should be as clean and polished as the rest of the turnout.

### Lamps and accessories

Adding lamps can truly accent a vehicle, much like jewelry does a dress. However, before purchasing lamps, consult a knowledgeable carriage person, as lamps are as individualized as jewelry. Be sure to keep the metal matching with your harness, brass with brass.

Should you add a collar? Maybe. Unless you are driving a formal carriage, such as a Stanhope gig or phaeton, you can be correct in a breastplate. Adding a collar when driving a road cart is overkill. Collars must fit and not all horses look good in a collar so try to borrow one before buying.

Baskets can add a great deal to a turnout, providing there is a place for them. Stuffing a basket in just for the sake of having one never works. Be sure the basket is secured with leather straps (with the buckles matching your harness) so it does not become a liability while driving. Accenting the basket with flowers is a nice touch, but keep it simple. Further coordinating the flowers with those in your hat or lapel can offer a lot to a turnout.

On some carriages, a cane basket hung on the side of the carriage looks great. Finding interesting canes and umbrellas to fill the basket can be great fun. Antique shops are great places to find such things.

Upgrading to a holly whip definitely adds to a turnout. There are antique holly whips and new holly whips available. Take care to find one that balances nicely in your hand for driving.

### Braiding

Braiding can make a huge difference in the appearance of your horse. It accents the arch of the neck and presents a very well groomed appearance. But only if it is done well. You will be happy to learn that the tail is never braided in driving horses. In order to do button hunt braids,

the mane needs to be pulled rather short so that the braids are small. Often there is not enough time to hunt braid, but there are some alternatives. If the mane is long, a French braid is quick and easy. Take care to not let the horse reach his neck to the ground once braided as it can pull out the braid. Looped braids work nicely on medium to long manes. Using colored yarn in the braids is a nice accent. Braiding takes time and practice but once you become proficient, will add only a few more minutes of your time in preparing for a show.

#### Groom or passenger

Carrying a groom or passenger can add to a turnout. First, be sure there is enough room in the carriage so that you can drive the horse comfortably. Some road carts just don't suit for two people. Pick your groom or passenger carefully, even if they are relatives or friends. You do not want to be overpowered with a person larger or taller sitting next to you. A passenger's attire should compliment but not outshine yours. The only thing that should match is the aprons, hats and clothing should be different but in the same color theme.

A groom's attire should reflect your turnout, whether it be formal or country. A groom should be prepared to get out of the carriage and head the horse when lined up in the ring. The groom is there to assist you at your direction and should be aware of what you might want to have done beforehand.

A child as a passenger can be very charming. Place safety first and be sure that the child's feet touch the floor. If they do not, a wooden box can be secured on the floor for that purpose. Man's best friend, the dog, can also be a welcome addition to a turnout and can sometimes be more fun than a passenger or child. Dogs may not be tied to the carriage so practice with the pooch at home first.

#### Don't forget sleighs

The most fun thing about going to a sleigh rally is the options for turning out a sleigh are almost endless. Bells, furs and foot warmers can make a plain sleigh come to life. Taking an antique sleigh in original condition and clear coating it will bring out the paint color and the detail often found in the trim. Polish up the bells, whether they be on the shafts, strap bells or harness chimes. The horse can be driven with a quarter sheet that accents the sleigh.

A sheep skin "rug" on the floor of the sleigh is correct for keeping feet warm. Furs or sleigh robes thrown over the upholstery can hide any wear that would otherwise show. If you have a particularly attractive fur or robe, toss a corner over the back of the sleigh for all to see. Then have some fun with furs for yourself.

Refining your turnout does not need to be expensive, but it does require time and effort in bringing out the best in what you have. That effort will not go unnoticed in the show ring and should reward you with that blue ribbon.

#### Photos



A good example of a tuned up turnout. Addition of a collar, lamps, wicker cane basket and carrying a groom.

**Figure 1**



Lamps can add a nice touch to a carriage.

**Figure 2**



Passengers should compliment the driver. The holly whip is another nice addition to a turnout

**Figure 3**



The addition of a rein rail to the dash is a nice touch and it should match the metal on the harness.

**Figure 4**