

What is a "Sporting Day of Traditional Driving"?

At the turn of the last century, during the heyday of carriages, most people were familiar with the style and skill of carriage driving. Horses and carriages were not only a means of transportation but a social institution. A Sunday drive to visit friends and relatives, a lady driving to tea, a picnic drive with the family to a park, a drive to visit a fair or the races or a polo match—all were part of the fabric of a quieter, gentler way of life. Care and maintenance of carriages and harness were important because of their utility but also because they indicated the owner's lifestyle. The horse's ability to move the carriage along at a suitable pace made proper training and rein handling important and made the drive enjoyable.

In today's world of instant gratification through high-speed technology and transportation, it is comforting to know that there are still proponents of traditional carriage driving. One event that showcases this old-fashioned style is the Sporting Day of Traditional Driving.

The purpose of a Sporting Day of Traditional Driving is to preserve and celebrate the carriage-driving style of bygone days, which encompasses horsemanship, driving acumen, care and preservation of carriage and harness, and the intangible qualities of good sportsmanship.

The perfect venue for the event is a scenic area with quiet roads or trails, wide enough for a car to drive on, where horses and carriages can trot along without interference from heavy traffic. The event begins with each turnout—the combination of carriage, horse(s), harness, driver and passengers or grooms—being inspected by one or more judges. Each turnout tries to come as close to perfection (a score of 50 points) as possible.

After the inspection, each turnout heads off for a trot through the town or the countryside along a prescribed route and at a pace that will allow the turnout to arrive at a precise time. Along the way, a few drivers' tests are set up and judged to determine whether the driver and horses are working skillfully. Perfection on the country drive is a score of 25 points.

After completing the country drive, the driver maneuvers his or her horse(s) and carriage through a prescribed pattern of road cones to demonstrate the training of the horses. This is not a test of speed but a test of accuracy, and a score of 25 points indicates a perfect test.

After completing all three phases, each turnout's score is totaled. Coming as close to 100 points as possible is each driver's objective. However, the goal of the event is to have a lovely, enjoyable drive in the "Sporting" tradition.

The Carriage Association of America initiated Sporting Days of Traditional Driving. Their website is www.caaonline.com