

A Lady To Drive

by Lynne Belluscio

Somehow it seems that summer is over once we finish the Walnut Hill Carriage Show in Pittsford. This year, summer started the week of the show and the heat was on, making it quite uncomfortable for the horses – much less the people. In our situation, we have a black horse, and standing in the sun, he just soaks up the heat. My daughter drives in two divisions – the two-wheeled road cart and the “other than” division, which includes any vehicle – two or four wheeled – that isn’t included in the other divisions.

John Skivington drives the Jell-O wagon in the trade division and although we won the championship for the trade division last year, the competition was pretty stiff this year and the championship went to a beer wagon pulled by two huge white Shire draft horses.

The “other than” carriage that my daughter drives is a restored

ladies phaeton that was made by the Flandrau Company in New York City. I bought it at an auction in Pennsylvania a couple of years ago and had it restored by an Amish carriage company. The reason why it is a ladies phaeton is because it has a huge curved patent leather dashboard, that prevents the lady riding in the carriage from viewing the rear end of the horse, which also means that when driving in obstacle classes, it’s difficult to see the cones. The Flandrau family, one of New York City’s most prestigious carriage makers, was manufacturing carriages before the Civil War. Eventually, the company manufactured chassis for automobiles.

Carriage driving competitions today frown on “costumes” and

none of the entries wear clothing that date to the period of the carriages – with the exception of liveried coaches and carriages, dressed in appropriate uniforms or liveries.

For women in competition, it is mandatory to wear leather driving gloves and an appropriate lap apron – with the monogram facing to the outside. For example, if two people are riding in a carriage, the monograms must be on opposite sides, facing outwards. All women must have long sleeves and hats. Hats must

are to be used in case of rain and are pulled over the leather driving gloves, to give more grip to the driver. Wet leather gloves and wet leather reins are very slippery and could cause problems.

Historically there is a lot of etiquette concerning riding in a carriage. In fact, one of the etiquette books told that the Empress of Austria asked the Princess of Hesse-Darmstadt to bring her three daughters to court, so the Empress could pick one of the daughters for a wife for one of her sons. When the



not “flop in the wind” and must be “appropriate to the vehicle.” When a woman driver salutes the judge, she nods her head, however, a man must remove his hat with his left hand and hold it down by his left side – but never – never with the inside of the hat facing the judge. The whip is held in the right hand at an 11 o’clock position and the lash must be long enough to reach the horse’s shoulder.

For turn-out classes, we bring out the English-made holly whip, made – naturally of holly. There are faux holly whips, but can be easily identified by the judges. One of the more curious accessories, is a pair of white cotton net gloves, that are usually tucked just under the seat cushion, by the driver’s right side. The gloves

girls arrived, the Empress immediately made her selection, much to the surprise of the Princess. “I watched the young ladies get out of their carriage,” said the Empress. “Your eldest daughter stepped on her dress and only saved herself from falling by an awkward scramble. The youngest jumped from the coach to the ground without touching the steps. The second, just lifting her dress in front as she descended, so as to show the point of her shoe, calmly stepped from the carriage to the ground, neither hurriedly nor stiffly, but with grace and dignity. She is fit to be an empress. The eldest sister is too awkward, the youngest too wild.”

The etiquette book also gives explicit instructions for carriage-

dress: “The dress for a drive through the streets of a city or along a fashionable drive or park can not be too rich in material. Silks, velvets and laces are all appropriate, with rich jewelry and costly furs. The carriage dress may be long enough to trail if fashion so indicates, though many prefer using the walking-dress length. For country driving a different style of dress is required as protection against the mud or dust . . .” In another chapter on traveling, it mentions that linen is best suited for travel,

because it can be easily shaken out to remove dust and dirt and that velvet should be avoided, because it attracts and shows the dust.

Sunday morning at the horse show is the “pleasure” drive to Mendon Pond Park. Most of the competitors laugh at the term “pleasure” because it is far from a pleasure to be in a parade of carriages, when most of the horses believe that it is a race.

This year, John Skivington drove Sunday morning and as my daughter says, it is hard just to sit there and not want to drive. The etiquette book is very specific about ladies accepting a ride from a gentleman driver: “If you are driving in company with another who holds the reins, you should most carefully abstain from even the slightest interference, by word or act, with the province of the driver. Any comment, advice, or gesture of control implies a reproof which is very offensive – you should resign yourself wholly to his control and be entirely passive.” Perhaps this is why so many women learned to drive horses!