

# Driving ambitions

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In the second part of this training series, Sue Mart from Bennington Carriage Driving Academy, a UKCC Level 3 coach, explains how to prepare for your first exercise class.

## About Bennington Carriage Driving Academy

The Bennington Carriage Driving Academy offers an extensive range of facilities and training for all levels of driver. A wide range of Try Carriage Driving experiences are available for those new to the sport or for those who would simply like to 'have a go' for the first time.

For more advanced drivers, there are a wide range of facilities to help improve performance and develop skills at our purpose built facility. The centre is set in 10 acres of picturesque countryside and is extensively equipped to help maximise your enjoyment of the sport. Ample parking, wash down facilities, toilets, tea, coffee and kitchen facilities are available, as well as expert advice from Bennington staff who are always on hand to help.

The Academy is also the home of our showroom, where an extensive range of carriages and accessories are always on display.



### TOP TIP

Think of the individual show, as being on stage, be proud of your turnout.

Gail Williams competing in an exercise class at BDS National

## Training Techniques

Sue explains what is covered during the training sessions in

preparation for a students' first exercise class. There is an emphasis on refining technique, driving specific exercises and

An entry level exercise class is aimed at grass roots, pleasure drivers and competitors need to ensure that they are a member of the British Driving Society and have proof of liability insurance.

An exercise class is judged on correctness of turnout; discipline and obedience of the horse at the two paces of walk and park pace trot with an emphasis and the correct way going.

Horses are also judged on suppleness and should move happily in harness. Drivers are judged on their skill to British Driving Society standards including the ability to drive coachman style.



Gail Williams competing in an exercise class at BDS National

pics supplied by Bennington Carriages





The driver shows good whip handling skill and coachman driving



Colour coordination is key

practising the individual show to help a student prepare and build confidence in advance of their first competitive class.

"It is beneficial for a student to have some specific training sessions prior to their first exercise class. It will ensure that the student has proficient skills in rein and whip handling, coachman style and will also help to refine their technique ready for the show ring.

## TOP TIP

Arrive in plenty of time for the show, and check out the access to the ring before you put to.

"It also helps to have training sessions that are dedicated to simulating their individual show as it really helps to build confidence as well as practising bending, straightness, balance and rhythm.

"I like the student to practice driving corners and circles as this really tests the student's ability to correctly balance the pony and carriage, particularly if they are driving a two wheeler.

"A dress rehearsal with the complete turnout helps to prepare for the show and it means that the student is fully aware of what is expected and I am able to give tips and advice during the session."

## Tack and Turnout

There are many things for a student to consider when preparing for their first exercise class. Of course, the most important element is to have a sound rein handling and whip technique whilst remaining safe and in control at all times. However, correct presentation of the driver, groom and pony is an important element too.

Sue explains the correct turnout for an exercise class: "You can use either a leather, or synthetic harness, both are acceptable. The judge is looking for a 'workman like' turnout, with correct fitting of the harness, which is also comfortable for the horse and with a two wheel carriage you require a sliding back band saddle.

"It is important to always carry a whip which is the correct length, where the lash can reach the shoulders of the horse or pony.

"Think about colour co-ordinating both the driver and groom, and spend some time looking at the detail. Jackets can be picked up in charity

shops and don't have to cost a fortune.

"The driver should wear brown leather gloves and an apron, mid-calf length, made in a Melton wool cloth type material. Sometimes a man wearing a plain dark bowler hat suits a very smart turnout.

"With regards to driver's headgear, I would suggest a felt type hat, nothing over the top. My current hat is an Ebay find, so again, you don't have to spend a fortune. As a backup plan, have your wet weather outfit packed in your lorry, i.e. wax hats and matching wax jackets.



Colour coordination is key

"If you are taking a young horse out, ensure that both you and the groom wear hard hats. Safety is key and any child under the age of 14 years has

## TOP TIP

Spectate at a few shows first and observe what they are wearing. Video the classes so you can watch at home.



Bennington Buccaneer





The line up, everyone await for instructions from the ring steward

to wear one on the carriage and if acting as a groom for any BDS class."

## Warming up at the show

It's a good idea to arrive at the show in plenty of time so that you can thoroughly prepare and not feel rushed or stressed.

Sue explains: "Once you have arrived at the show, find out where you can warm up and evaluate the space, then have a plan in mind for your warm up. Work out your timing as you don't want to arrive too early or too late for the class.

"Once you have put-to and walked for at least 10 minutes to the collecting ring, if space permits, it is beneficial to do lots of transitions to get the horse listening to you.

"Then progress to trot and ask for some collection; from working to medium trot as this will keep your horse listening to you at all times and will keep his mind on the job.

"Introduce some serpentines to encourage your horse to bend and become supple in his way of going. Also practice the halt and rein back when it is safe to do so.

"Have a damp cloth handy to wipe the horse and harness down, before you go into the show ring so everything is spotless and apply fly spray if needed. It is handy to have a third person to do this who can carry all the cleaning gear. We always carry a bottle of water too as it's amazing how dry your mouth can get before the class starts."

## In the Show Ring

If it's a drivers first time in the show ring then there are bound to be a few nerves. However, it is important to stay confident, remember what has been taught during the training sessions, put your skills into practice and have fun!

In an exercise class you may find yourself sharing the ring with a variety of horses and ponies of all shapes and sizes. Make sure you give yourself plenty of space and if you do find yourself behind a smaller pony then it is acceptable to overtake as long as it is done safely and with the correct whip signals so that those behind you are aware of your intentions.

Overtaking should not be done directly in front of the judge so alternatively, you could drive a small circle to create more

room between yourself and the other competitors.

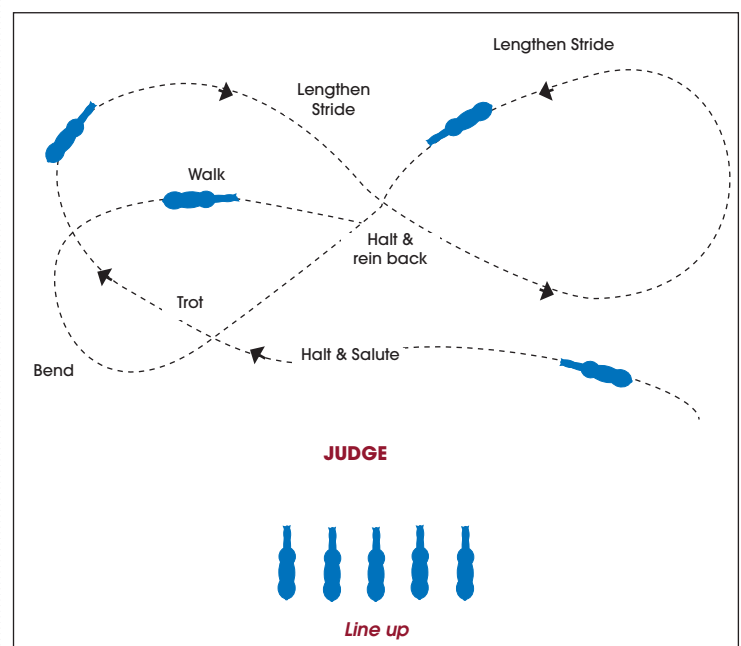
The Judge will ask everyone to make a change of rein; again it is important to give the correct whip signals so that the person behind is aware. Remember to drive the corners in a balanced and accurate manner and ensure the horse or pony is travelling in a consistent rhythm.

When driving across the diagonal, lengthen the stride whilst remaining straight and be aware that judges will be watching and are looking for



Remember to enjoy yourself and have fun

the correct way of going at all times.



What is commonly required during an individual show

## The Line-up

The judge will call all of the competitors into the line-up, usually in any order. It is important to understand correct show ring etiquette and ensure that both driver and groom have a good understanding of what is expected.

Sue explains: "The judge will inspect the cleanliness and tidiness of the turnout. This includes the horse, the driver, passenger and the carriage. Remember to greet the judge politely and say 'good morning/afternoon' as appropriate and gentlemen remove their hat until the end of the inspection.

"Your groom must be smartly turned out and sit unobtrusively with hands in their lap. When called to line-up, the groom should dismount and stand quietly at the head of the horse.

"The judge will also check your spares kit to see if everything

in it is clean and functional and this may be displayed in a basket or a spares roll. A number holder is also very useful and looks smart as it hangs under the carriage.

"Lamps are not necessary in exercise vehicle classes, but if you have lamp brackets fitted, lamps will be required. Do check when you clean your harness that you have taken it apart and really cleaned it thoroughly so there is no dirt, grease or hair under the buckles or in the recesses under straps.

## Individual Show

The diagram opposite illustrates what is commonly required during an individual show and this is something that can be practised during a training session or at home. You will usually be required to perform a figure eight at trot, followed by walk, halt, rein back, walk and then halt and salute the judge. When you leave your position from the line-up, proceed

away from the judge in walk and then after a few strides go forwards into trot. Drive a straight line and then begin the first loop in the figure eight, remembering to stay in a collected, consistent rhythm. Support your horse or pony with your outside rein as this will help you to achieve a good level of inside bend and ensure that you are balanced and in control.

## TOP TIP

Practice your individual show at home, use cones or markers as points.

As you come across the diagonal, ask for a little more extension and encourage your horse or pony to lengthen their stride. Remember to aim for

impulsion rather than speed; if you are travelling too quickly across the diagonal you will not be able to perform the next loop of the figure eight in a safe and balanced way.

Supporting with the outside rein, drive the second loop in the opposite direction and again aim for collection and consistent rhythm as you make the turn. Ask for extension as you ride across the diagonal and make a third shallow loop to bring you back in front of the judge and come back to walk as you straighten up.

Halt in front of the judge and ask for four steps of rein back, then halt and relax the contact ensuring that your horse stands quietly. Ask your horse to walk forwards again for a few steps then halt again and salute the judge. Ladies salute with their whip and gentlemen need to put their whip in their left hand and remove their hat. Return to the line-up from the back and ask your horse to stand quietly.

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