



## Driving Activities & Events Explained

Carriage Driving, much like horse riding, offers participants a wide range of activities. Those new to the sport are often surprised at how much variety there is, and just how technical some events can be. It is not unusual to meet someone who started out “wanting to plod around the lanes” now taking part in a local event... driving gets quite addictive! Driving is a very social pastime; it is always advisable for safety reasons to drive with a groom (or backstepper) which also means there is always someone to chat to.

### Driving out (hacking)

We are fortunate to have some of the most wonderful scenery in Hampshire & West Sussex, from the rolling South Downs to the New Forest and everything in between. Carriages can legally use “restricted by-ways” which are for non-mechanically propelled vehicles (not “bridleways”) allowing us to get off the road. The Forestry Commission has a permit scheme to drive in the enclosures of the New Forest and have similar schemes at some of their other properties nationwide. We always recommend taking a groom, both wearing hard hats but also hi-viz even going off-road as it helps other to spot you, including the Air Ambulance and low flying aircraft!

### Training events

Clubs will put on training events for their members and occasionally non-members; this could be an introduction to showing day or driving trials or basic schooling & dressage. They might also hold lecture/demos by leading trainers and competitors. Young driver and Introductions to Driving days are also a good way to bring new people into the sport.

### Social Drives inc sponsored drives

Meeting up with others, driving over country which sometimes is not normally open to the public is a great day out for all. There are several types of social drive:

- Group Drive – Everyone meets up at the same place and follows the same route in one large group or several smaller groups
- Interval Drive - Everyone meets up at the same place and follows the same route. Drivers set off at intervals of a few minutes
- Spider Drive - The meeting place and time for meeting up is agreed. Drivers may start from any place and find their own route to the meeting point

## National (international) Competitions

These events have national (international) rules / guidelines and are managed and judged accordingly. However Clubs will organise introductory (grassroots) level classes to encourage both the new and less competitive drivers to have fun.

### Showing

It is wonderful to see vintage vehicles, polished ponies, smartly dressed ladies and gentleman in the show ring. Coaching has to be one of the most spectacular classes. It takes time and investment in the right equipment, animals and training to achieve the highest levels.

However many shows have classes for non-traditional vehicles such as the modern pleasure or exercise vehicles, which can be used with synthetic or leather harness. These classes provide lots of positive feedback and encouragement so are ideal for dipping your toe in to see if showing is for you.

The British Driving Society holds a National Championship in September. The BDS is a good resource for showing information - [www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk](http://www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk)

## Horse Driving Trials (HDT)

This is the equivalent of Eventing, requiring a fit and well school horse or pony. The competition is in 3 phases – Dressage, Cones & Marathon which involves obstacles to negotiate as well as a cross country distance drive. Competitions run from April through the summer culminating in the National Finals at the end of September.



Full details and the rulebook are available on the British Carriage Driving website - [www.britishcarriagedriving.co.uk](http://www.britishcarriagedriving.co.uk)

There are several levels of competition from Grassroots and Club to Regional, National and International. The duration of the competition varies, grassroots /club events are one-day; club/regional are two-day and nationals/internationals are three-day.

**Dressage:** The horse and driver must show all the good things a ridden partnership should – collection, good paces and harmony. Drivers are allowed to speak to their horse which riders find quite odd the first time they watch driven dressage. Backsteppers (grooms) are not allowed to assist the driver with the test, it is all from memory! Arena sizes are 80m x 40m or 100m x 40m – which feels massive when you are doing your test.

**Cones:** The cones are also a test of memory but also of accuracy at speed, like show jumping. The cones are a set width apart, so having the right axel width on your vehicle is important. As with the dressage test, your backstepper cannot offer any assistance navigating the course, they have to hang on, helping to balance the vehicle. There is a set time for the course; to avoid penalties you need to be quicker than this time. A ball down is 3 penalties. If you do not knock off any balls and are under the time is it a “double clear” – which can annoy some course designers!! Cones are not as straightforward as it may appear at first glance...

**Marathon:** The marathon is by far the most exhilarating element, going over all types of terrain, sometimes water obstacles too. The full competition route is typically timed; however the grassroots level competitions will only time the obstacles, not the whole route. A marathon distance is measured in kilometres and depending on the level of the competition ranges from 4km with up to 5 obstacles, all the way up to 17km+ with 8 obstacles. Obstacles require a cool head as there are up to 6 “gates” to negotiate from memory at each one. Backsteppers are able to fully assist with timings, remembering the route and getting the horse(s) out of a jam. Be warned, there are penalties of your backstepper gets off the vehicle – voluntarily or not!

The lowest number of penalties from all 3 phases wins. Some competitions will also give awards for the best dressage, cones or marathon in each class.

To see competitors in action, YouTube has lots of clips to watch. Search for names like Boyd Excell, Koos De Ronde & IJsbrand Chardon to see the best in the world driving teams but also UK competitors like Angela Flannegan (horse pairs), David Matthews (horse pairs), Jeff Bannister (single horse), Sonny Hillier (single horse), Anna Grayston (pony pair, Gold Medal winner at Pony World Championships 2015)

### **Indoor driving trials**

Based on the Horse Driving Trials, this shortened format has been designed for the winter season using an indoor school. It is a national competition running from October to April with the National finals. Containing all three elements there are some subtle changes. The lowest number of penalties for all 3 phases wins.

Full details and rulebook are on the Indoor Driving Trials website - [www.indoordriving.co.uk](http://www.indoordriving.co.uk)

The shortened dressage test is renamed “precision & paces” with 2 judges giving a “score” but no comments for your precision (accuracy of the test) and paces (collection, bend etc.) The arena is 50m x 20m so quite tight for the long legged horses, but ideal for the ponies

The indoor cones are timed differently. The course time is set and you need to meet that time, slower or faster earns penalties. A ball down is 5 penalties

The Obstacles replaces the marathon. Two Obstacles erected are in the arena, but are driven separately going through the start and finish (timers) for each. Once everyone in the class has done Obstacles 1 & 2, then you get a second chance but they are now called Obstacle 3 & 4. The obstacles typically have balls balancing on them, so not only are you timed but you cannot dislodge a ball either.

### **Other Competitions (the fun stuff!)**

These competitions are not part of any formal national competition but organisers will use the rulebooks from the most similar events to ensure fair play.



### Inside Out

This is the Indoor competition, run during the summer months at an outdoor venue – hence “Inside Out”! This format is popular with grassroots club events and perfect for those starting out in driving trials or those simply wanting to have fun

### Dressage & Cones

Organised and judged the same as the two phases of a HDT

### Dressage to Music

This is a freestyle test which you create to include the chosen mandatory movements. These will be described in the schedule. The aim is simply to have fun!

### Cones Accumulator

Each pair of cones is given a points value (e.g. 100, 75, 50, 10, 5). Drivers, with the help of their backstepper have a fixed time (e.g. 2mins) to accumulate as many points as they can by driving clear through any cones they choose in any order. A knock down makes the cone 0 points. Highest score wins.

### World Cup

One of the most exciting events on the circuit! This is what you see at Olympia with the 4-horse teams. The course is a mix of cones and obstacles, fastest time, with least penalties (balls down) wins. Competitors get to drive the course twice and the scores are added together. Despite its fast and furious reputation, this is actually a great competition for new drivers and horses. The cones are set slightly wider apart and there is lots of room for wide turns.

### World Cup Relay

In pairs, typically a novice and an open driver, the first driver collects a flag (baton) from a cone then drive the World Cup course. After returning the flag to the cone, the second driver starts, collects their flag and drives the course to replace the flag before finishing. The course has an “optimum time” so the closest to this time gets least penalties.

### Trec

A fun competition that tests the skills of the driver, the sportsmanship of the groom and the training of the horse. The competition typically involves a timed driven route followed by a number of “challenges”. These challenges could range from apple bobbing grooms, reverse parking, posting letters and working out anagrams! A good explanation is available on the British Driving Society website - [www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk](http://www.britishdrivingsociety.co.uk).

### Treasure hunts

A driven treasure hunt, collecting items and answering clues along a route can be lots of fun as well as frustrating!

## **And for the even more adventurous...**

### Scurry Driving

“Double Harness Scurry Driving” is the full title and they promote themselves as the “Formula One of Equine Events”. It is certainly very fast and furious, similar to pony club games for adults – and this isn’t a young person’s sport by any means! There are some very fast mature drivers on the scurry circuit. The ponies are typically small natives and feisty with it. Full details can be found on the website for the Scurry Driving Association

### Harness Racing

The British Harness Racing Club officiates over the formal races in the UK. The horse needs to be a registered Standardbred to be able to race; they look similar to a thoroughbred in type. There are horses called Pacers that have an extra gait. Instead of diagonal pairs of legs moving in the trot, the legs on the same side move at the same time, it is smooth pace compared to a trot. A pacer can travel 3s/mile faster than a trotter. When racing, horses can travel about 25mph, the UK record for 2 miles is 1m 53.7s by a horse called Doonbeg. Not a sport for the faint hearted!

## **INSURANCE**

Insurance is an important consideration for everyone, third party liability is always advisable even for those who drive out and do not compete. South Downs Harness Club covers its members with insurance from British Carriagedriving (BC) for all of our events. Due to our insurance requirements, non-members are not always able to enter some of our events. The entry forms will clearly state whether an event is a members only or is open to those with suitable insurance, e.g. Personal Insurance which includes competitions or British Carriagedriving membership. We will need to have copies of membership cards or insurance policies to confirm this when you make your entry. Unfortunately British Driving Society (BDS) membership does not give sufficient insurance cover to take part in SDHC events.