Chapter Sixteen - Pair Driving

Driving a pair is a lot of fun and a great challenge. Before you attempt pair driving, however, you should be very confident about your ability to manage a single horse while anticipating and avoiding problems. These skills will stand you in good stead when you tackle pair driving. Although many of the same principles apply, there are some marked differences between single and pair driving, mostly due to the differences in equipment.

There are really two types of pair driving. The first consists simply of hitching together any two horses that you happen to own, and enjoying your drives on the trails. If the horses are somewhat matched in size and temperament, trained properly and hitched safely, you can have some wonderful drives. Your pair will be able to pull a larger carriage, so you can bring along friends for a picnic or a wonderful pleasure drive.

The second sort of pair driving, which is far more complex, involves the careful matching of two horses to make a "real pair:" horses that look alike, move alike, and work together in harmony as a unity. This is the pair you'll want to take to shows.

We will focus mainly on the second type, although many of the following considerations will apply to any two horses who are hitched to one vehicle.

MATCHING THE HORSES - WHAT TO CONSIDER

These are the factors that will influence your success (or lack of it) in choosing horses for a pair:
Size (height, weight, and length)
Movement (including length of stride)
Temperament
Conformation and natural carriage
Color
Age

Size

Ideally, the two animals would be of the same size, weight and body length. We can make allowances for some of these elements, however, if the horses are similar in other important aspects. Differences in height of up to three inches, differences in body length by several inches, and differences in weight of up to approximately 200 pounds can be almost unnoticeable if the horses carry themselves in the same fashion, have the same length of stride, and possess a similar way of moving.

Horses that are closely matched in size and build, but do not exhibit the same movement, may actually learn--after some time and lots of work together--to move more alike. Usually, the

shorter-strided horse will try to catch up with his partner.

Temperament

Temperament is one of the key factors. You may have two horses that look and move like twins when they are not in harness, but if one of them is lazy and the other very nervous when they are driving, chances are very slim that they will work together. One will always seem to be dragging a little behind, carrying his head lower in a relaxed stride, while the other one, always nervous, will seem just a little ahead all the time. The nervous horse will keep going against the bit, head high, with shorter and tenser steps.

Trying to correct this with the reins can make matters even worse. If you try to take the nervous horse back a little more in the reins, he will become even more tense because he feels held back. If you try to push the lazy horse constantly against the bit, the nervous horse will certainly notice--and become even more agitated.

The only way out of this problem is to school both horses in single harness, working to calm the nervous one and teach him to relax. The quiet horse you will have to encourage to work harder and with greater energy. This can be quite a long-term task, and very frustrating. It's far easier to begin with two horses of similar temperament.

Fig.16-1
This picture shows two horses of very different size. The off horse is

3″ shorter in height and quite a bit shorter in overall body length. He also weighs several hundred pounds less. However, he possesses the same type of build and body carriage and the same length of stride. Although this is certainly not ideal as a pair combination, it can be done for performance purposes. Note the blinders which give the horses plenty of space by their eyes; also note the breeching connected to the breast collar. The carriage is an all purpose vehicle, here equipped with the wider yoke and singletree arrangement and lamps.

Color and Markings

Color is another factor to consider. Identical color and markings can, at times, help to compensate for differences in size, conformation or movement--though we would choose similar movement and conformation over color. Especially if you are competing in performance sports like dressage or combined driving, the performance aspects are a lot more important than color and markings. If your interest lies with pleasure shows and turn out classes, then you may consider placing more emphasis on appearance.

Age

If both horses are experienced driving horses, the age factor isn't a crucial one. Putting two young, green horses together as a pair, however, can be quite dangerous. This can be done, but you will need to invest a great deal more time in groundwork and single driving. It's much better if you can start a green horse with an older, experienced, and quiet partner.

Remember also that even though your older horse can train and compete at a higher level on his own, you must adjust your pair driving demands to the abilities of the greener horse. This means that your pair will have to compete at a lower level for a while, until they are more equal in education and experience.

Fig. 16-2
The near horse is 16 years old, the off horse is 4. The off horse also is 2″ shorter in height, but they work together beautifully, and of course their color matches very well also.

SELECTING A VEHICLE

Many of the same considerations discussed in Chapter Six ("Choosing the Right Carriage") apply to a pair carriage as well. There is one vital difference between vehicles for pairs and singles, however, and this is the manner of hitching the horses to the carriage. With pair driving, you will be using a pole instead of shafts. There are three different pole arrangements, and three different ways of hitching the horse to the carriage.

1) <u>The drop pole</u>

The drop pole is found on carriages without a fifth wheel. In this arrangement, the pole structure is attached to the carriage through a clip-on mechanism on either side of the front axle. The pole is held up off the ground by the horses through a yoke arrangement.

The yoke is attached to the tip of the pole with a leather holder, and to the horses' collars with leather straps that run through a hardware loop on either end of the yoke and from there

to each collar. The tip of the pole protrudes about four to six inches from the leather holder that connects to pole with the yoke. This piece of leather comes off the pole very easily, and if the traces are too long or a trace breaks, it can come off the pole while you are driving and cause a disaster, as the carriage will hit the horses in the hind legs.

It is a very good idea to have a safety contraption of some sort attached to the end of the pole to prevent this. A small leather strap, securely fixed to the end of the pole, or a cotter pin in a hole drilled through the end of the pole, should work well.

Care must always be taken to ensure that the horses are properly hitched. When the horses are in pull (this means when the traces are tight and the collar pressed against the horse), the yoke has to be just snug on the pole. It should not be pushing forward on the pole at this moment, but it also should apply no excessive resistance.

If the collars are not firmly touching the horses when they are in pull, but are pulled somewhat off the chest, the traces are too short. The horse will then be pulling not with the collar, but with other parts of the harness. Needless to say, this has to be avoided under all circumstances--because the horse simply cannot pull properly. Also, the rest of the harness is not designed for pulling; incorrect hitching can result in having something break.

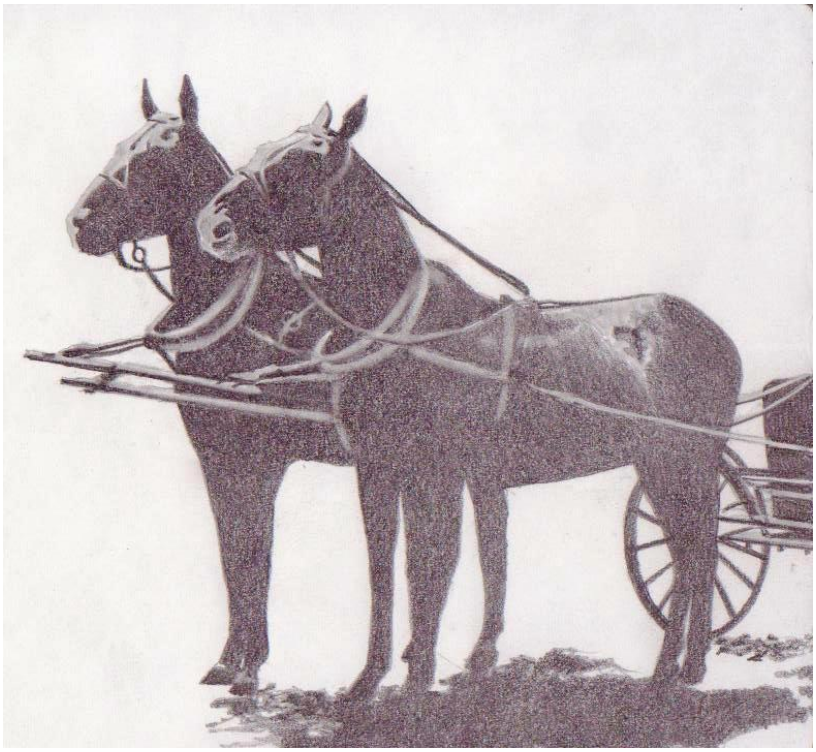

Fig. 16-3

This drawing is the copy of a 1918 photo with the following caption: ”M.H. borrowed his brother’s horses to take his girl friend on a date.” Note how high those poor animals are checked up, and the neck collars are not even close to touching the chests. Also note the tremendous pull exerted by the yoke on the horses’ necks; this is necessary in this hitching arrangement to hold up such a long pole. And they had to suffer through this for hours at a time! It’s hard to believe that there was so much ignorance at a time where the horse was a means of transportation and an everyday companion.

We once saw a pair at a show that clearly had no collar contact at their chests. After a few classes, the horses quit pulling--right in the middle of an obstacle course. They balked, and nothing could make them move. They had to be unhitched and walked off the course. The owner was deeply embarrassed, and said that the horses had never quit on him before. Unfortunately, none of the many judges who were present said anything to the owner; he may not yet have figured out that his horses quit because they could not pull properly.

The drop pole arrangement has one disadvantage: The reins can get caught easily around the tip of the pole and both ends of the yoke if the pole is close to the horses. And if the yoke is kept farther out front so that hanging up a rein is no longer a risk, the horses will find the pole very hard to hold up. Although the pole itself is not very heavy, and presents no problem as long as it is held up in a fairly vertical position, it will apply a constant, undue, forward and downward pressure onto the top of the horses' necks.

We do like to use the drop pole and yoke arrangement, and in order to avoid having the reins hang up, we keep the yoke and therefore the tip of the pole as close as possible to the horses, so their heads are always ahead of it. Hitched this way, it is easy for them to hold up the pole, and a rein gets caught only rarely--and usually only when you give them a very long rein. Often, the caught rein will undo itself easily, because of the placement of the pole and yoke.

The great advantage of this arrangement is that no jolts or movements of the carriage are transmitted directly to the horse, as happens with a stiff pole. The yoke attachment is a lot friendlier to the horse than the pole strap attachment. (See the discussion of these attachments, below.) The drop pole keeps the horses both connected and away from the pole much more efficiently than the other two types of hitching, and this is very helpful in dressage driving, where correct lateral bending is so important. (More about this later.)

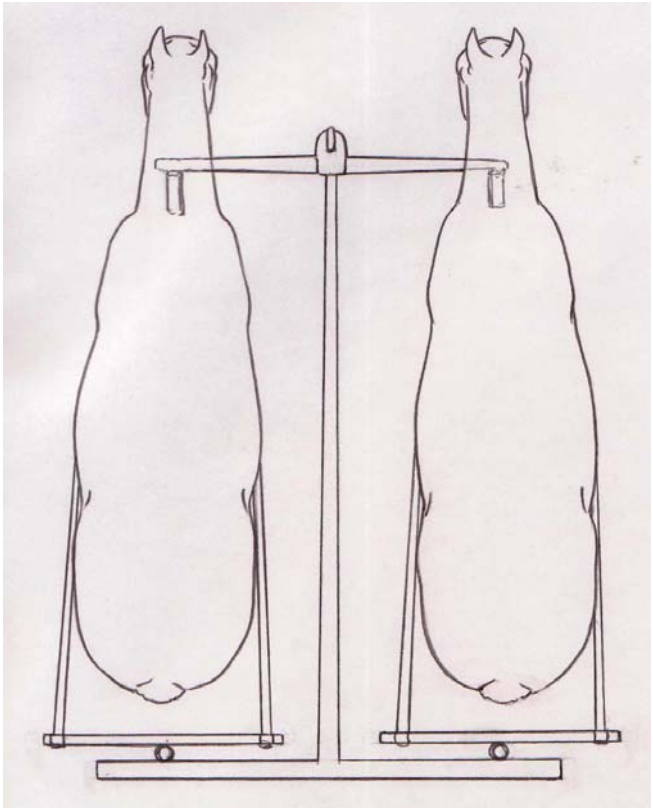

Fig. 16-4
A pair hooked to singletrees with a yoke arrangement. The length of the yoke determines how far away from the pole the horses are placed. The horses do not feel pulled toward the pole at all. The yoke is kept as close as possible to the horses' chests, thus keeping the downward pressure on their necks vertical, and as light as possible.

2) The Stiff Pole

This pole arrangement is always connected to a carriage with a fifth wheel. The pole is fixed to the carriage at a certain height, with the tip of the pole usually at about the height of the horses' shoulders. The tip of the pole is connected to the horses' collars, by either a leather strap or a chain, at an angle of about 45 degrees.

The pole must be at least long enough to be even with the horses' noses, so each horse can be correctly connected to it by the pole strap. If the pole is too short, the horses cannot be strapped in tight enough, and will be in danger of getting hit with the carriage. The same principles of correct hitching apply here as with the drop pole and yoke arrangement: When the traces are tight, the collars must fully rest on the horse and the pole connection must also be tight. If the pole strap is not tight--even if the pole is long enough and there is no danger of the

horses being hit by the carriage--the jolting of the carriage will cause the pole to swing around too much, bumping the horses on the shoulder or in the face, especially in turns.

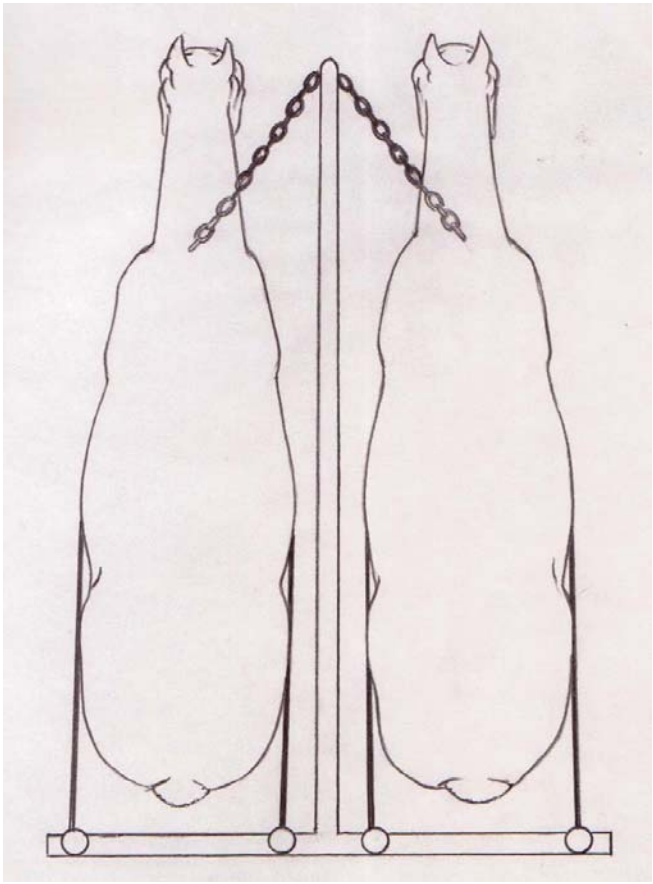

Fig. 16-5
A pair hitched to roller bolts with a pole-chain connection. Because of the angle of the chain, the horses will always be pulled toward the pole.

The advantage to this arrangement is that the horses don't have to hold up any weight. The disadvantage, however, is that the stiff pole transmits any up-and-down jolting and any sideways movement of the carriage directly to the horses. The pole will also move drastically up or down when you are driving up or down hill, when the pole and the carriage are at a different level.

Hitched snugly to a stiff pole, the horses also have a hard time remaining straight. Because of their 45-degree angle to the pole, this hitch gives horses the feel that they are being pulled toward the pole; their lateral freedom is greatly restricted.

By contrast, with the drop pole and yoke attachment (above), you can hitch the horses to keep them away from the pole at any desired distance (a longer yoke will place them farther apart, as

in Figure 16-4; a shorter yoke will bring them closer to each other and to the pole). The horses do not feel as if they are being pulled toward the pole, because they are hitched at a 90-degree angle to it. Also, the yoke can swivel back and forth in front of the horses (like an evener, but in front instead of behind them), and this helps to accommodate them in turns. (See below.)

You might wonder why a yoke cannot be used with a stiff pole. The stiff pole must move up or down with the carriage, which it can only do with the strap arrangement providing the connection between the two horses. The yoke, on the other hand, must be carried at the same height all the time. A yoke on a stiff pole would tug constantly and forcefully on the horses, moving up and down and--in a very short time--destroying the fifth wheel of the carriage.

3) The Spring-Loaded Pole

This wonderful arrangement--a very recent development--has been invented specifically for marathon carriages, and solves all the drawbacks of the drop pole and the stiff pole.

It is actually a stiff pole, but the pole is not connected to the fifth wheel. Instead, the pole rests on a powerful shock absorber that allows it to move easily up and down. When the carriage is traveling on level ground, the pole is kept at about the height of the horses' shoulders.

Because this pole has the advantages of both the drop pole and the stiff pole, it can be driven with either a pole strap or yoke attachment. (We prefer the yoke, for the reasons noted above.) Since these new poles can be made of aluminum, the yoke can be attached with a swivel bolt, which eliminates any protrusion at the tip of the pole. Reins do not catch on the tip, but the yoke has full horizontal and vertical freedom of movement (as with the old style of drop pole and yoke). See Figures 16-1 and 16-15.

Of course, these shock absorbers do not look very stylish and they certainly aren't traditional. If you want to use a carriage with this type of pole for dressage or pleasure competition, you may want to have a leather sleeve made to wrap around the shock absorber. Using a dark-colored sleeve, as shown in Figure 16-6, will make it almost unnoticeable.

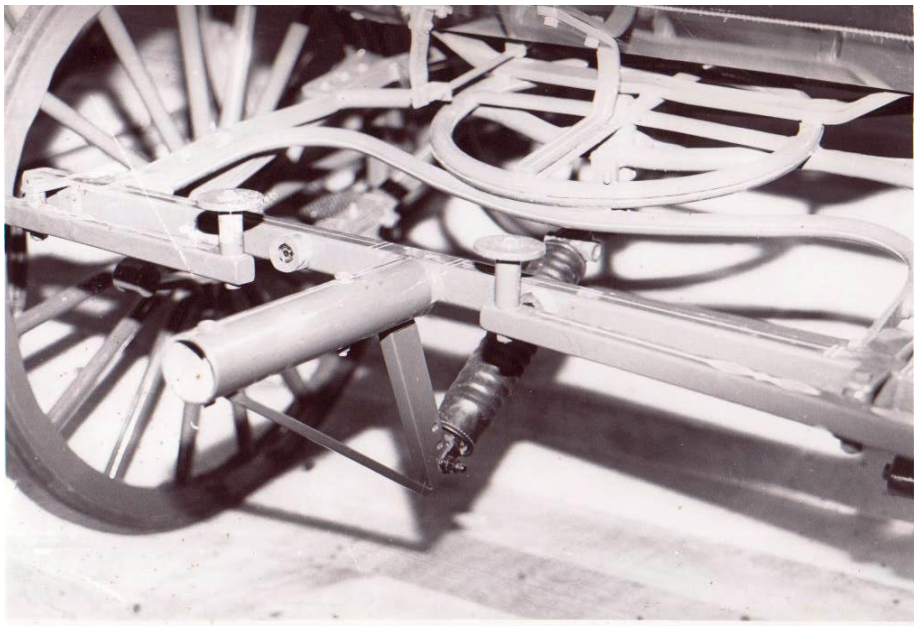

Fig. 16-6
This shows a spring-loaded, standing pole attachment connected to a shock absorber. A leather sleeve has been wrapped around it to make it less obvious. Note also the fifth wheel on this carriage.

Competing in dressage and the obstacles phase at the Advanced Level of a combined driving event requires a certain track width; using one of these new marathon vehicles is therefore not allowed because of their narrow track width.

You can, however, have this pole arrangement custom-built into some very stylish-looking carriages. We had a carriage built in Indiana to our specifications, and are very happy with it. The spring-loaded pole is of wood and looks like an old-fashioned stiff pole, but with a yoke attached--which makes it look like a drop pole in front. We chose a wooden pole for this vehicle, but an aluminum pole would also have been an option.

METHODS OF HITCHING

There are three arrangements for hitching the traces to a pairs vehicle.

The Evener

With an evener, the two singletrees are attached to one evener, and this evener is attached in the center of the carriage below the pole.

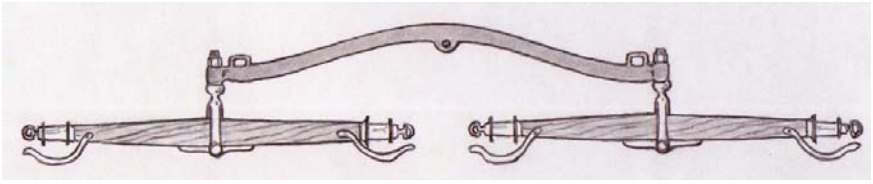

Fig. 16-7
An evener with full range of movement. Note the metal dees on the evener; they are used to fasten the evener to the axle of frame if a limited movement is desired.

This type of hitching is now rarely used in pleasure driving. It has its origin in work horse driving, and its purpose is to always keep both horses in the same degree of draft, even if one horse is lagging behind his partner.

The advantage of using an evener is that you don't have to be constantly checking to see if both horses are working equally. The disadvantage, however, is that there can be quite a lot of back and forth movement of the two horses, and one horse can manage to hang back off the bit without your being able to do much about it--except to constantly get after him with voice and whip.

Using an evener also gives the whole hookup a very "loose" feeling.

Most drop pole attachments have a limited evener movement. This means that the amount of the evener's movement is kept to a minimum by the construction of the evener and its hardware. This prevents excessive back and forth movement between the two horses, but it still ensures--at least to a degree--that both horses must pull the same weight. For long pleasure drives on the trails, this is a very useful arrangement.

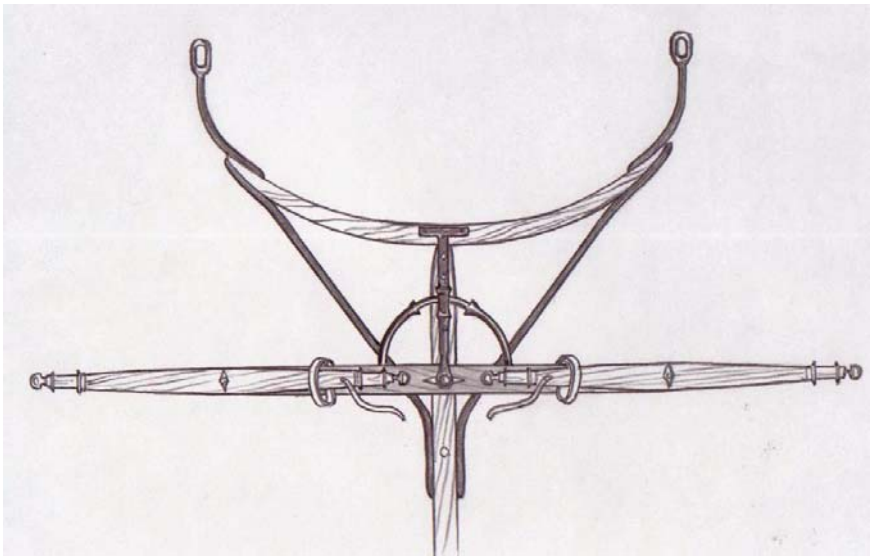

Fig. 16-8

This is a dropped pole with a limited-movement evener.

However, if the two horses do not work well together, the movement of the evener can cause problems. If your pair doesn't pull off simultaneously, the horse that does pull on will make the collar slap onto the chest of the horse that doesn't pull promptly forward. A young or inexperienced horse may find this upsetting enough to become completely discouraged from pulling at all.

One solution is to block the movement of the evener entirely. This can be done by connecting each end of the evener (with a strap or rope) to the axle or any other suitable part of the carriage. (See Figure 16-7.)

The Singletree Arrangement

With this hitch, the horses are connected to the carriage through singletrees, which are fixed to what is called the splinter bar. This is the most commonly used arrangement. Its advantage is that you do not need to worry whether both horses pull on at exactly the same time. Also, you will not get the "loose" feeling created by an evener.

The disadvantage is that you cannot always determine if both horses are working the same; even when you think they are, they can fool you. One horse in a pair of ours was always quite good at making us think he was working; he would keep his traces almost (but not quite!) as tight as those of his partner. When he was told by voice and whip that he must not cheat, he would become very upset and complain that he was working hard. He would leap forward for a step or two, and then settle back again into his sneaky way of pulling.

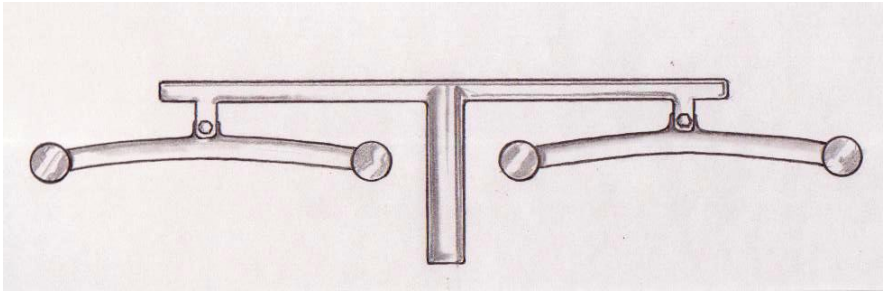

Fig. 16-9
A singletree attachment, with curved singletrees which allow for a greater range of movement. This is used on the vehicle shown in Ill. 16-1.

The Roller Bolt Attachment

With this hitch, the traces are connected directly to round, spool-like fixtures mounted on the splinter bar. No give-and-take at all is possible.

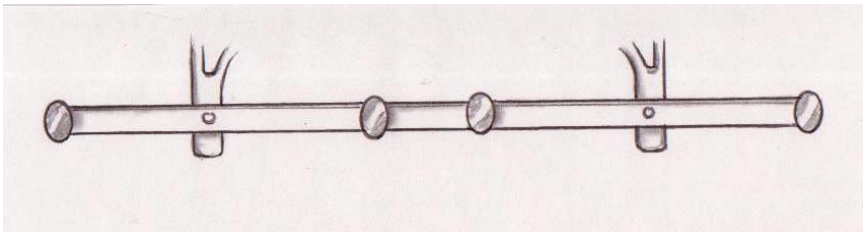

Fig. 16-10
A rigid roller-bolt arrangement.

This arrangement is seen very often on heavy coaches, and also on many stylish carriages used in competitions.

There is absolutely no reason for having this type of attachment, and no excuse at all for using it. It has no advantages whatsoever, and it makes the horses' job very hard.

During a few inches of each step, the horse must move the entire weight of the carriage by his shoulder muscles alone. (See Chapter Two and the discussion of shoulder movement.) This is particularly hard for him to do at the walk, because the load has no momentum to speak of.

A roller-bolt hitch prevents the horse from moving his shoulders freely, and it greatly increases the strain on his shoulder muscles. It is totally unnecessary. One can only admire and pity the horses who put up with this mistreatment.

Why on earth would anyone hitch heavy carriages onto their competition horses with unyielding roller bolts, when we know that draft horses can best pull their very difficult loads with an evener?

No one has ever been able to give a satisfactory reason for using roller bolts. Singletrees or eveners make far more sense from the horses' point of view.

THE IMPACT OF HITCHING ON THE LATERAL BEND

As we discussed in Chapter 9, bending a single horse in shafts can be an impossible task if the shafts are too narrow or the singletree has too little movement. Our equipment must be designed to prevent interference in lateral bending. In pair driving, we have a similar problem. Since the pole doesn't bend through turns, the horses must have the freedom to adjust their positions to it.

The less room the horses have next to the pole, and the less movement their singletrees have, the more difficult it will be for them to bend. This problem is especially apparent with the

inside horse on any turn, since he will have to move his front end away from the pole. The outside horse, on the other hand, can lean toward the pole in the turn.

The Worst Combination

Let's think of a situation in which we are driving a large pair of horses directly hooked to roller bolts. They are wearing neck collars and are connected to a stiff pole by a chain or pole strap connection in front. Remember that to be hitched properly there should be absolutely no slack in the traces when the pole strap is taut. (Please note: Breast collars must never be used with roller bolts. A breast collar requires a trace attachment that has some flexibility to it, because the breast collar sits lower on the horse's chest than a neck collar does. Using a breast collar with roller bolts will cause the collar to rub constantly across the horse's chest.)

Although the horses' use of their shoulder muscles is restricted at every step--because of the total lack of any "give" in the roller bolt attachment--they will still be able to move on a straight line. However, in the turns, the outside of each horse's body must become longer; and there is absolutely no way this can happen with this arrangement.

Here are the problems:

1) The fixed hookup to the roller bolts allows for absolutely no lengthening of the outside trace;

2) The neck collar can give an inch or two by twisting to the outside; however, this will now completely destroy the horses' shoulder movement. It may make them look (and be!) lame, and they may try to get out of this by breaking into a canter. Meanwhile,

3) The pole strap allows for absolutely no movement of either horse away from the pole in front.

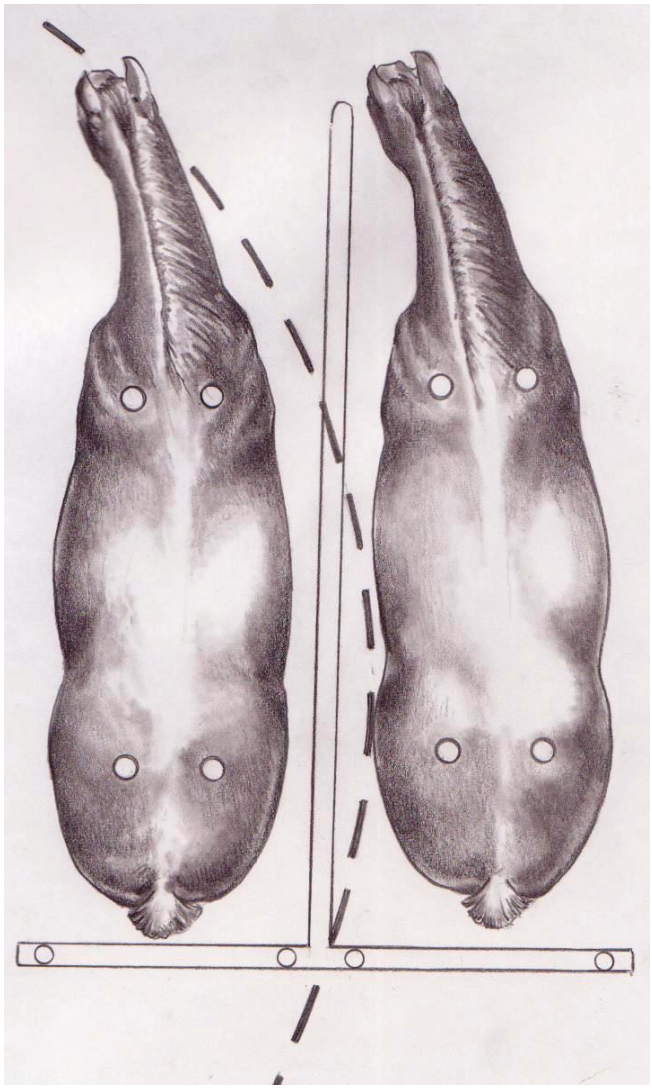

Fig. 16-11
This is the maximum “bend” horses can show on roller bolts and polestrap hookups. Only well trained and very willing horses will be able to do this at all.

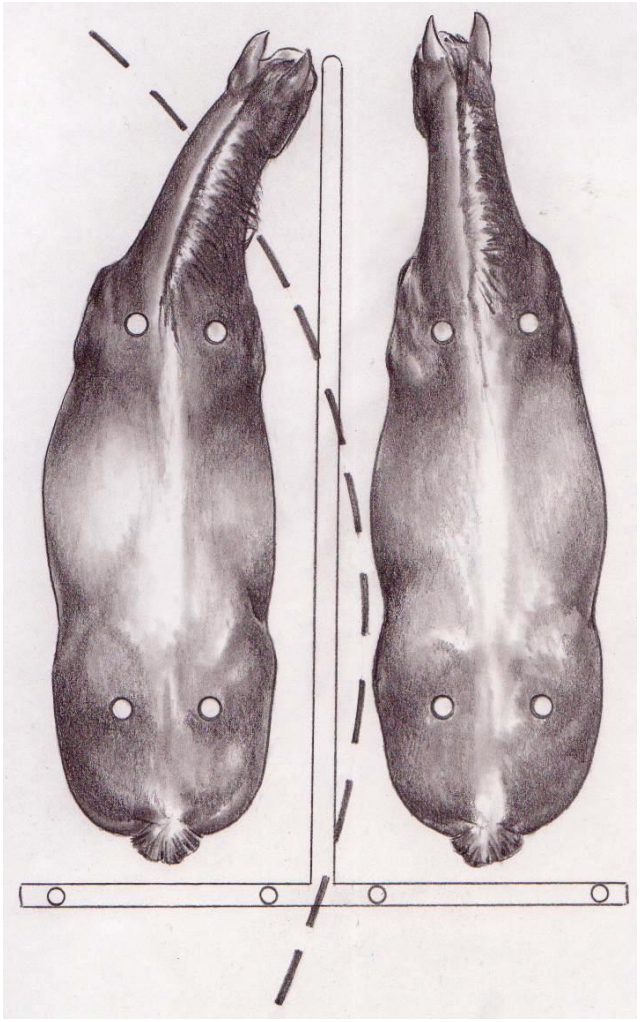

Fig. 16-12
This is what usually happens with roller bolts and a pole strap connection. Looking to the outside, the inside horse falls badly over his inside shoulder, while the outside horse stays more or less straight; however in order to negotiate the turn, the outside horse is also falling over his inside shoulder.

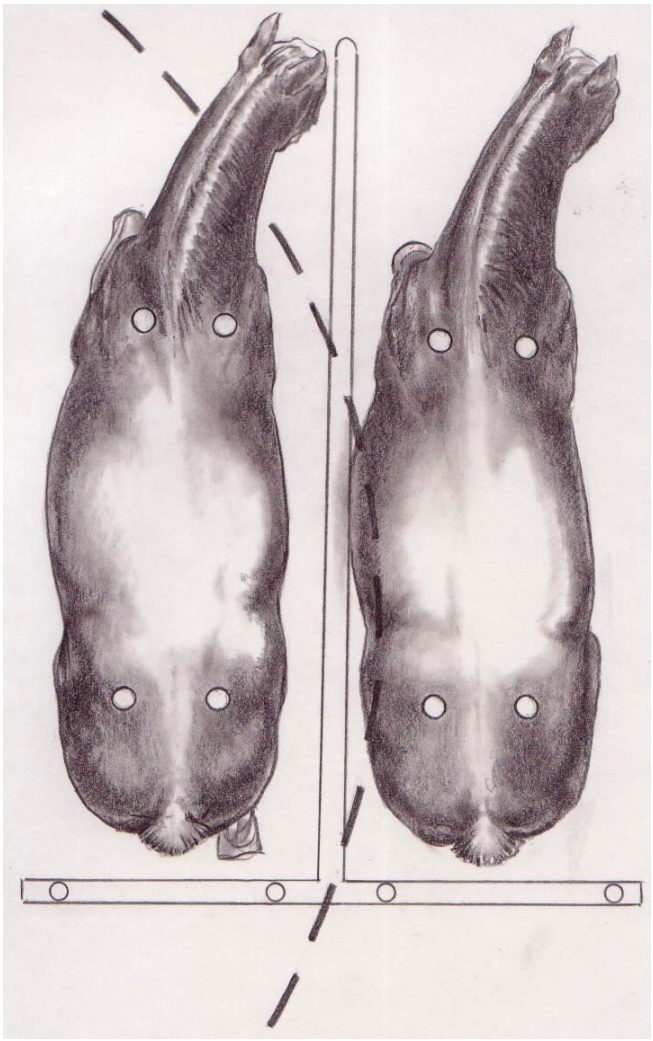

Fig. 16-13
This is what we usually see in the lower levels: both horses are looking to the outside and falling badly over the inside shoulder.

Even if the traces were kept a little loose in an attempt to allow for bending (and this can be dangerous, if it is a fairly short pole), it still won't work. Because of where they are usually fixed on the splinter bar, the roller bolts place a horse very close to the pole. Not enough room is allowed for the barrel and hind quarters to move as each horse tries to bend; the pole strap won't allow the front end to bend, anyway.

In their best efforts, a pair hitched by this arrangement can turn their heads slightly in the turn, or remain straight--but this requires very well trained, honest horses. (See Figure 16-11.) They will have to step sideways rather than forward; in severe cases, they may even have to cross their legs through the turns. Most horses, when confronted with this unreasonable

demand, will throw themselves over the inside shoulder and scramble around the turn, as shown in Figures 16-12 and 16-13. Again, this is most apparent with the inside horse, who should show a greater degree of bend, since he is traveling on the inside track and is describing a narrower turn or smaller circle.

A Better Combination

Now, let's say we drive the same pair of horses with breast collars (which allow for more slipping across the chest, and can thus help lengthen the outside trace without putting restrictive pressure on the shoulders), singletrees of a good width set a few inches away from the pole, and a pole strap attachment.

Our horses are now a lot better off. They can move their barrels and haunches as needed through the turn. But the pole strap is still a fixed restriction in front, especially for the inside horse, who must always travel somewhat in advance of the outside horse in a turn. The movement of the breast collar does help, but the inside horse still can't advance enough, and he can't move away from the pole in front--so he still must throw himself over his inside shoulder to negotiate the turn. The pole strap attachment, with its diagonal pull, always gives the inside horse the feeling that he is being pulled towards the pole and away from the direction of the turn.

The Solution

The solution to this last problem is found in a yoke attachment. The yoke can swivel on the pole, thus advancing with the inside horse. In addition, the yoke strap itself allows for quite a bit of sideways movement, which is very much needed especially in tighter turns. Also, with a yoke, the inside horse can be kept farther away from the pole, so he will be more comfortable with it.

To summarize, your worst combination of equipment for a pair of big horses would be:

- roller bolts set tight and close to the pole
- pole strap attachment
- neck collars

Small horses are better able to maneuver in any hitch, but for all horses, your best combination of equipment is:

- wide singletrees, moved sufficiently away from the pole (depending on the width of the horses themselves) and with sufficient swivel movement
- a wide yoke attachment ("wide" means the distance from the middle of one horse's chest to the middle of the other horse's chest)
- breast collar harnesses (although, if the singletrees and yoke attachment are correct, neck collars will work well also)

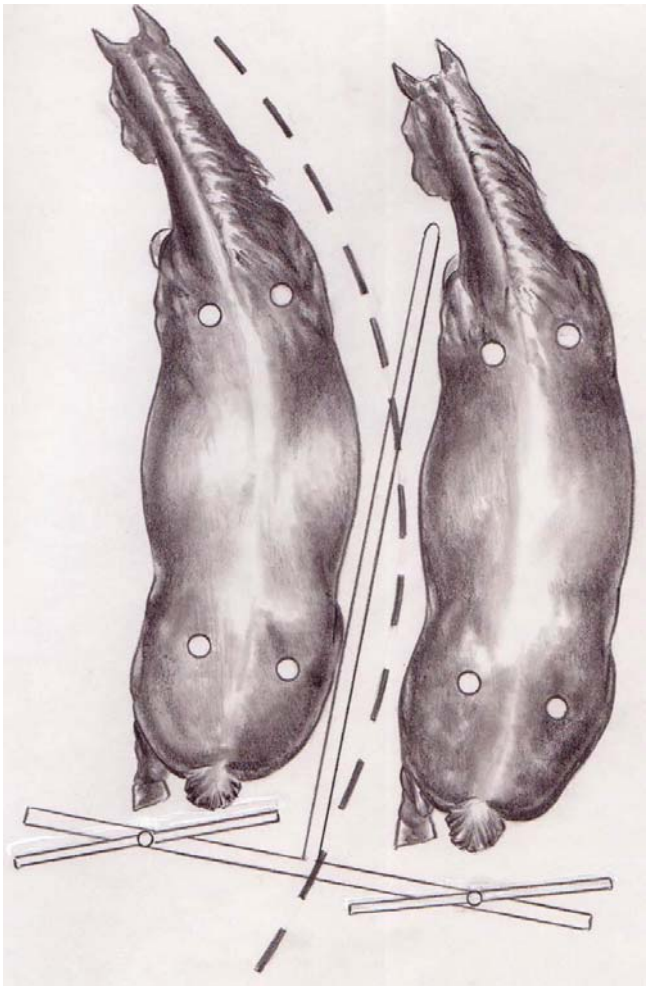

Fig. 16-14
True bending exhibited by both horses, made possible with a yoke arrangement and appropriate singletrees set far enough out from the pole.

Why Not Use an Evener?

You might think that a limited evener arrangement would work even better, from the horses' point of view, than the singletrees-and-yoke combination described above. This is true; however, it is far more difficult for the driver to keep a steady rein contact with both horses in an evener, simply because the arrangement is quite loose. Using an evener does give horses a chance to bend even better through their turns, but the looseness of the hitch will affect the harmony of the turnout too much. In dressage competition, especially, the frequent changes of direction and pace are difficult to execute smoothly with an

evener, since a constant bit connection with both horses is not guaranteed.

Pair Carriages for Combined Driving

Many people who compete in combined driving events at the lower levels use one carriage for all three phases. This is fine, but to be truly competitive in the marathon, you need your entire turnout to travel on a narrow track. Giving the horses some distance from each other with wide singletrees and a wide yoke works very nicely in dressage, but when you negotiate the very tight spaces of marathon hazards, you can't have wide singletrees sticking out to the side where they increase the overall width of your vehicle. And your pair needs to be able to tuck snugly together to bring you through clean.

You don't have to go buy a separate vehicle just for the marathon, at least not at the lower levels. But having a closer hitch will be to your advantage. Here's what we have done to solve this problem:

We had two sets of singletrees made, one wide and one fairly narrow. The narrow ones are short enough to be flush with the carriage for the marathon, and the wide ones are each four inches longer. We had the manufacturer attach another set of fixtures to the splinter bar five inches out from the fixtures for the shorter singletrees. We also had two yokes made, of different lengths, to correspond to the width of the singletrees. One carriage can easily be adapted this way--without great expense--to suit the demands of the different phases.

Fig. 16-15
Here we can clearly see how a neck collar, even in combination with a yoke and singletrees, prevented the horses from bending in a sharp turn. Both horses can only bend at the neck, and the off horse looks very disturbed. The difficulty in bending is, in this case, magnified

because the singletrees for marathon use are set as close to the pole as possible to make them flush with the other parts of the carriage. This allows the horse less distance to the pole. Note also the “work horse blinders”, and the breeching that connects to the false martingale.

Fig. 16-16
Here is another shot of the same pair. Note again how true bending is impossible. Note also the “work horse blinders”, and the breeching that connects to the false martingale.

Fig. 16-17
Altough the horses are hooked into the same arrangement here as in the above pictures, the breast collar does not seem to restrict the horse’s shoulder movement as does the neck collar.

HARNESSING THE PAIR

The same basic principles apply when you are hitching a pair as when you are hitching a single horse, with a few exceptions. In pair harnesses a short, adjustable cross rein connects the left side of the off-horse's bit to the left (full-length) rein of the near horse. And the near-horse's right rein is connected by a cross rein to the off horse's full-length right rein. The driver, therefore, holds only a single pair of reins to control both horses.

Also, because the carriage has a single pole instead of a pair of shafts, the breeching must be different.

Adjusting the Cross Reins

The left rein on the near horse and the right rein on the off-side horse are full-length reins, and the inside reins are the short "cross" reins that are attached and adjusted by buckle to the outside reins. The cross reins allow us to influence both

horses at the same time with only one rein. That's the advantage; the disadvantage is that the rein action will not be absolutely precise, especially on the crossing reins.

The action of this cross rein will feel quite different to the horse. It is no longer a straight backward pressure, but a sideways/backward pressure. The horses need to become used to this different feel; in the beginning, a green horse may put his head toward the pole to comply with this unusual sideways pressure.

Also, it is very easy for a horse to evade the pole-side rein by simply sucking back a little and turning his head towards the pole. Especially in turns, the outside horse will be looser on his inside rein because the inside horse is advancing more, thereby slackening the outside horse's inside rein.

One of our horses did this frequently, almost smiling back at us as if he were saying, "If I don't want to bend and put my head down where it belongs, there is nothing you can do about it at this moment, is there?" And he proved to be correct, more than once, by checking out his surroundings whenever he pleased during any turn where he was on the outside.

This must be why driving dressage with a roller bolt attachment is so popular. You can certainly keep both horses locked into the reins all the time; but the sacrifices aren't worth it, because the horses are physically incapable of bending with a roller bolt hitch.

Each inner rein (the cross reins) has a buckle attachment to connect it to the outer rein, and a number of holes that allow you to change the length of the inner reins. There are different styles of pair reins, but the best--in our opinion--are Achenbach reins. These offer 11 holes, spaced four centimeters apart. This allows you to make very fine adjustments in the rein lengths for many different horses. With the Achenbach reins, a good starting point is at hole number six for narrow horses, number seven for medium horses, and hole eight for larger horses.

The horses should be kept straight and parallel to the pole, with their heads showing a slight tendency towards the outside. If the horses then do not work equally into the reins when you are traveling straight, you can begin to adjust the reins to compensate for their differences. (For a full discussion of the ways you can fine-tune pairs using the Achenbach rein-handling method, read The Art of Driving by Max Pape.)

In general, you want to make adjustments in the rein lengths so that both horses give you as equal a feel as possible in the reins and remain straight in their bodies. If you have one rather energetic horse and one laggard, it will generally not work well to shorten the reins of the more energetic horse, even if you are using a very soft bit. Usually, the energetic horse is moving a little ahead of his lazier partner because he's shortening his neck and going more strongly against the bit already. If you try to take him back more with the reins, you may be able to keep him from pulling as hard, but he will

probably become more agitated and will shorten his neck even more, which will only lead to tenseness.

As mentioned earlier, this is a difficult problem to solve. The best thing is to train both horses singly, calming the nervous one and energizing the lazy one.

Also, be sure to teach each horse his name. As you drive them singly, use the name frequently so each horse learns it well. (Be sure the names do not sound alike!) When you drive them as a pair, you will then be able to speak to each horse individually.

The Breeching

A great deal of pair driving is done entirely without breeching, especially in Europe. Pair breeching is not really necessary, if you have a smoothly functioning brake and use it properly. However, breeching is strongly recommended for safety whenever you drive on the trails or in a marathon. It also makes a rein back much easier for the horses.

The reason most people don't use breeching in dressage or pleasure competition is simply because of the appearance. The less leather on a horse, the more elegant he looks. This is strictly a matter of preference. However, if you expect your horses to give you an engaged, straight and even rein back in a dressage test, your chances of success will be far greater if you use breeching. Pair carriages are difficult to move backward; if the horses have to do it with their necks alone while the false martingales are pulling the bellygirths toward their elbows, they won't be especially happy about it.

There are two types of pair breeching:

- The first type uses side straps on both sides that run from the breeching, under the horse's belly, to the false martingale. (See Figures 16-15, 16-16 and 16-17.) This type doesn't seem very comfortable for the horse. If it is short enough to function correctly, it seems to exert a constant and unpleasant pressure on the false martingale, causing it to cut into the horse's chest muscles. If it is kept longer, it will not come into play quickly enough to work effectively. Its one advantage is that it can be added to any kind of pair harness.
- The second type of breeching connects on either side to the trace buckle. This is a very nice arrangement that functions correctly and also looks quite neat. (See Figure 16-1 and 16-2) Its only drawback is that your harness must be designed specifically for this type of breeching. The trace buckle and keepers must be larger to accommodate two straps.

TRAINING THE PAIR

In years past, it was common practice to teach a young horse to drive by hitching him, right from the beginning, next to an experienced equine schoolmaster. Even if the green horse became very upset, the older horse would stay calm and help to hold back the panicky youngster.

Also, with so many horses used in harness, many foals learned first about carriages from running next to their working mothers.

That might have been an effective method of creating a driving horse in those times where there was hardly any motorized traffic and very few frightening things to negotiate on the roads. If the pair bolted, it wasn't as life-threatening as this can be now: there were long stretches of clear country road ahead for you to bring them back under control without the danger of colliding with anyone.

We've never felt comfortable with this method of training a pair; besides, how many people have that rare and wonderful schoolmaster at hand?

Pair driving is the art of driving in harmony two horses who already know how to drive well as singles.

We did train our very first pair together when they were both green. Since we had no fields or large arena available, we had to do all the training on the roads. After weeks of ground driving we hitched them to the front of an old Army jeep, and we walked beside the jeep while a friend drove. Later we sat on the hood.

If this sounds bizarre, think about it: The horses certainly couldn't run off with the jeep, because of its weight and its excellent brake. Because it was motorized, we were able to put it in gear to carefully regulate the amount of weight they had to pull. And because it constantly made noise of some sort, the horses were very quickly accustomed to traffic behind them. If they felt like kicking, they weren't going to hurt a person or a fragile cart.

These horses drove as a pair before they began driving singly. However, once we began to drive them singly, we realized how much easier and safer it would have been to start them this way. And not everyone has a jeep or a knowledgeable friend handy.

Many people say that pair driving is not as difficult as driving a single horse, because it is easier to keep the horses straight and they can reassure each other. This is true, to some extent, but if both horses become upset, you have to hold two horses. And holding two horses who want to bolt is a LOT harder than holding one!

Confirm the Single Skills First

We make a point of training every horse thoroughly in single driving before we introduce him to pair driving. He must know

all his rein and voice commands and must be very safe and reliable as a single driving horse. Then, we ground drive the two horses together by connecting their collars in front.

With some horses, you may have to do this only once. With others, it may take several sessions for them to become accustomed to bumping against each other and to the feeling of the cross reins.

Then you can hitch them to the pair carriage in an arena with two helpers at hand in case something goes wrong. Usually, there is no problem at all. Some horses may be a little nervous at first about the pole, and there may be a few misunderstandings about having to pull on together, but since they trust you and know all their commands things should quickly begin to go smoothly.

Once we feel the horses are comfortable together, we go right out onto the familiar trails to give them long stretches of straight pulling. If we think they're not quite confident in this new role, we'll stay in the ring for a few times. Working in the ring is more demanding for them, but better for everyone from a safety standpoint.

When you do have both horses driving as a pair, you may realize that their single training was not quite as confirmed as you thought it was. As a matter of fact, they may have forgotten everything you taught them about putting their heads down and bending. This is a common response.

Don't insist immediately on the same level of obedience and suppleness that you had developed when you were driving them as singles. Continue their single driving sessions, concentrating especially on work in the ring to better establish the right muscles and reinforce all the goals of good training.

Work them as a pair no more than twice a week, and if the ring work is still atrocious don't insist on it; all you will do is teach them bad habits. Take them on the trails and let them become thoroughly used to the different tugging on their bodies, and let them find their rhythm together. Don't try to work on their frames yet; they won't be able to handle it.

Remember also that the cross rein gives both horses a chance to escape your precise rein actions; don't let them know about this if you can avoid it! And don't go to a more severe bit unless you must for control.

If after several weeks or months (depending on how much time you can invest in their training, and how regular your schedule is) the pair's acceptance of the bit hasn't improved at all and their heads are still way up in the air, you can put your sliding sidereins on for a few ring sessions. They are a little tricky to attach because of the yoke arrangement, and you must figure out a way to avoid interference with the yoke, but it can be done. Usually you won't need the sliding sidereins more than once or twice; once the horses figure out what you're asking them to do, they will remember how to work better.

If only one of the horses gives you trouble and you feel it

may be because of the cross rein's different pressure, you might want to try running another single rein directly to this horse's inner side to help correct him. This requires some practice and some skillful rein handling, but it can really help a horse who seems confused by the cross reins.

You may also want to try switching sides with your pair. Some horses just work better on one side than the other.

If you feel that one of your horses has a general disrespect for his bit, you can try a slightly more severe one. But make sure it is a broken-mouth bit (preferably double-jointed). Straight bar bits can make attempts at bending far more difficult. (See Chapter Three, "Bits.")

Common Problems in Pair Driving

1) Horses "pole off," with both looking to the inside with their bodies moving away from the pole as much as the traces allow.

A. Horses often do this because their inside reins are too short, or--if they are being driven with a pole strap arrangement--they are being pulled too close to the pole in front. This makes them hit the pole a lot, and they "pole off" to try to escape it.

B. They may also have sore shoulders, or just try to go crooked because it is easier for them to throw one shoulder against the weight than to pull it straight with both shoulders.

To solve this problem, you need to figure out the cause. If lengthening the inside reins and applying the whip on the outside shoulders does not help, you may try switching the horses. If they exhibit the same crookedness after you've switched them, it's probably some part of the equipment that is bothering them. Check the harness for possible pressure points, see if the traces are different lengths, and look to see if the belly girth is rubbing at the elbows. They may also be hooked up too close to the pole, and are just feeling too restricted.

C. If you can't find the cause of the problem by correcting the equipment, your training might be at fault. Try them singly again and sort out any basic problems with straightness.

2) Horses crowd towards the pole.

A. They may do this if their inside reins are too long. Also, the footing may be at fault. If you are traveling on trails that have deep ruts, the horses may try to stay out of those ruts by crowding the pole.

B. An insecure horse may also look for the support of his partner, and try to lean closer to him for security. If this is the case, more time and a general increase in confidence will solve the problem.

3) One horse won't bend, but throws himself over the inside shoulder.

A. First review your equipment and hitching (see the sections on equipment earlier in this chapter) to be sure you are making it possible for them to bend. If your horses both know how to bend well when they are driven singly, and if they seem reasonably relaxed and working towards the bit as a pair, you may try shortening the direct rein (the right rein on the right horse or the left rein on the left horse). Do this by making an additional hole at the bit for the rein buckle.

If, for instance, your right horse is giving trouble in right turns, shorten the right rein and then drive a 30-meter circle to the right. Take both reins into your left hand and try to keep both horses out on the line of the circle. Then use your whip behind the girth--quite firmly, if necessary--until the right horse reacts by moving away from it. (You may have to support your left hand at times with your right hand to keep the horses under control.)

As soon as the horse yields in his ribs, take the right rein back into your right hand and try to increase and secure the bend. Take and give on the right rein until his head moves to the inside as much as possible.

Stay on this circle for two or three minutes, then move onto a straight track, and then try it again on another 30-meter circle to the right. Make sure you praise the horse lavishly when he does respond well.

If you don't get any correct response, and all you seem to be doing is upsetting the horses, stop, put the sliding sidereins on (one or both horses, as necessary) and try it again. Remember that once the longitudinal bend is established, the lateral bend should come easily--and if there are problems with the lateral bend, you should look first to the longitudinal bend for correction.

Once your horse has learned to respond, adjust the rein again at the bit buckle to its former length. If you don't do this, you might keep pulling his head too much to the outside when you are going straight, or you might even overbend him in turns.

If you have problems with the left horse on a left turn, the same principles and method should apply; simply shorten the left rein and drive your 30-meter circles to the left.

If it is your outside horse that does not want to bend in a turn, you have more serious problems because your cross rein does not offer you much help. Often, a horse will settle down with experience and begin to follow his partner through a turn without much in the way of correction from the driver; if this doesn't happen, however, and the outside horse is still looking to the outside of the turn to explore his surroundings, you may have to work him with the additional single rein as explained above.

IN CONCLUSION

Pair driving--especially in the ring--is a far greater challenge for the driver than handling a single horse.

It is also a far more difficult task for the horses. Pair driving demands great patience, willingness, and submission from them. A horse can never be as comfortable in a pair as he is in a single carriage, simply because of the restrictions of the equipment and the need to accommodate a partner. Since the rein aids can never be as precise or as subtle as with a single hitch, the horses must be able to forgive more and to work with somewhat less direction from the driver.

On the plus side, however, driving a pair can be a tremendously satisfying experience. Finding two horses who work well together and will do their best for you is exciting, because you have harnessed twice the power of a single turnout.

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