

# PAIR DRIVING 102



Joan Fernandez driving her pair.

This issue's driving article is a reprint from *DrivingPairs.com* courtesy of Hardy Zentke. The website *DrivingPairs.com* is dedicated to, you guessed it, Driving Pairs. Hardy is also an ADS and USEF "R" Combined Driving Judge, FEI Combined Driving Judge and Para-Equestrian Judge. He has competed in pairs and 4-in-hands; served as Chef d' Equipe for many USA teams competing abroad. This is the second of a four part series on Pair Driving.

BY HARDY ZANTKE

I hope you enjoyed your first pair drive. Horses are herd animals, they like it much better in a pair, as I hope you will too. Now comes the next lesson and this will give you and your horses a distinct advantage over single driving. What follows now is something that a single driver can't do! But you need to stay with me through the end of the lesson to get full use of it.

Most of us know that one of our goals in proper driving - at least for those of us who drive carriage horses, but it doesn't hurt for draft horses either - is that the horses are going straight on a straight line and are bending properly in the turns. I will show you how the pair carriage helps us to teach our horses bending. And this lesson is VERY important for the beginning pair driver! Unfortunately most of them do not know this and the result of their lack of this knowledge is that their pairs are not going straight, are hanging off the pole and are going badly counter bent through the turns. Let's be honest, we all know that: Most lower-level pairs are going as I just described. Lengthening the coupling reins won't help. Switching the horses won't help. Nothing will, except proper pair driving! And the longer you wait to learn this lesson, the worse it will get! So do pay attention and do follow this advice!

First you must drive your horses STRAIGHT on a straight line down the road. You must be able to use your whip on the outside of your horses, if they do not go straight, in order to straighten them. You don't need to beat them, but they must tolerate the whip as an aid. You must have them calm enough to be able to do that at the walk.

If both heads are turned to the inside, as it is with many beginners' pairs, and your coupling reins are long enough, then you must use the whip on the outside of both horses to get them straight.

If both heads are turned to one side as you drive down the road, that means that the horse on the side, to which side both

heads are turned, is the more eager one, e.g. both heads turned to the left, means the left horse is doing more of the pulling, so you must get after the right horse to get them straight! Use the whip on his outside. That will bring him forward AND help him to go straight.

How do I know that the right horse in the example above is the lazy one? Stay with me now, this is important! Take a close look at the pair carriage and try it out yourself with a parked carriage on a flat surface. Stand in front of the carriage on the left side and pull it forward with your hand just on the left edge of the splinter bar. See what happens? The pole will go to the right, e.g. when you pull it forward just on the left edge of the splinter bar it will not travel straight, instead it will travel to the right. The same happens when the left horse is more eager, only most of us don't even notice it, but adjust automatically for it. How do we adjust? Well, if the pole gets pulled to the right and the carriage travels to the right, we don't want to go off the road to the right. Since we know how to steer, we automatically pull a little more on the left rein, and so the horses follow our





command, and take their heads to the left while pulling the pole head a little to the left to counter the tendency that it had to go to the right, where it was pulled by having the left horse more eager!

So to correct this crooked travel, you must go after the right horse. Of course all the same is true similarly if the right horse is the more eager one and both heads are turned to the right. When the right horse pulls more, then the pole wants to go to the left. Then you automatically take up more on the right rein in order not to go off the road to the left and then you have both heads pulled a little to the right. So then the cure is to go more after the left horse.

Once you fully understood the above and learned to drive the horses STRAIGHT, with their heads straight and calmly



at the walk, then comes the time to teach them bending using the same principle we just learned.

Now you go into a large arena, like a 40 x 80 meter dressage arena and you start

driving large figure 8's, calmly and at the walk. Drive the figure 8 with two 40-meter circles getting straight over X in the middle. If you do not have that much room, it is also ok to first drive one circle to one side, then change on the diagonal through the middle and then drive a circle to the other side. The important thing is that you alternate and drive one large circle to one side followed by another large circle to the other side. As you drive your large circle, **DRIVE ONLY THE INSIDE HORSE!** Make the inside horse pull the carriage! Let the outside horse rest and just go along. Concentrate all your efforts only on the inside horse! Make him go forward, use the whip on his side. That will make him go forward and it will assist him with the bending. But more importantly, driving the inside horse forward will make the pole wanting to go to the outside, just as explained above when driving down the straight road! Now we have the inside horse pulling the carriage, so the pole wants to go to the outside, the carriage wants to make the circle even larger, e.g. run out of the circle! That gives you the chance to take up a little on the inside rein (keep some contact on the outside rein as well, but take slightly more on the inside rein), and voila, with that you get the head of the inside horse pointing a little into the turn, and bingo, there is your bending! Never mind the outside horse. Leave him alone. His head will point by itself to the inside of the turn for him, that means toward the pole head. It is the inside horse that you need to get bent and prevent from going counter bent and over the shoulder! So **NEVER EVER** allow him to go counter bent, not in the circle, and not on the road **NEVER!** Use your whip on his side if he tries to counter bend. **YOU MUST** enforce that! But you get him best trained to that, by **LARGE** circles. Don't try to force him into smaller circles. Keep it large, and keep it calm. It will come!



Proper "Achenbach" style reins!

In the first article, Pair Driving 101, THE FRIESIAN January/February 2019, the pair reins photo shown on page 39 were not optimal for the article. A photo of "Achenbach" style reins should have been used. The reins pictured in that issue are too narrow and the holes are spaced too far apart. They are also buckled unevenly with the right rein in hole 3 and the left in hole 2 - which is counter to what is described in the article. They either should be both in the same hole, or, if the left is taken back one hole, then the right should have been let out one hole, otherwise the horses work crookedly.

Here, above, is a photo of proper Achenbach reins, which should be 1 inch-wide. That prevents the reins from slipping as well as the hands from getting tired. Driving Achenbach style one should hold the reins coming in over the top of the hand and down through the hand while pressing sideways with the lower parts of ring finger and pinky against the inside of the hand, rather than pressing down with the thumb onto the index finger. One cannot do that well with narrow reins. Further, as shown Achenbach reins have 11 holes, spaced 1.5 inches apart. A standard set of medium sized horses would be buckled in the 6th = middle hole. Further details can be found in the books The Art of Driving, by Max Pape or The Principles of Driving, by the German National Equestrian Federation. Proper Achenbach pair reins are available from good harness makers.

And you only do one circle with him, then you change directions, so now the poor guy, whom you have been after the entire circle, has time off and can relax and even hang back a little if he likes to. No problem, we can work on the hanging back later in a future lesson. For now the bending is **MUCH** more important. Now, turn all your attention to his partner, who now is the inside horse on your next circle. So each horse only has to give you one circle when he is on the inside, and then has time off for the next circle when he is on the outside, since you change directions after each circle.

This is perfect interval training. Usually one horse is better than the other. So this helps you too. You only have to get the more difficult horse through one circle and then you can all relax again, as you change directions and can enjoy the easier horse.





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## PAIR DRIVING 102, CONT.

Once all three of you mastered this lesson at the walk with large circles and the inside horse bending, then you can do the same at the trot, but keep it nice and easy and relaxed and LARGE circles! I think this is probably one of the most important lessons in pair driving! You can do large figure 8's for hours with your horses or ponies. So as explained above, this is something where the carriage with a pair helps you with the bending something that it does not do for a single, where the horse pulls from the center.

Not only does this teach your horses proper bending, it has many side benefits. Interval training is one which I mentioned already. It is much easier for each horse to have to work and concentrate on just one circle and then have the next circle time off, mentally and physically. That makes happier horses. The next benefit is that each horse has to lengthen stride a little when he is on the outside to come along and to shorten stride a bit when he is on the inside. You don't have to do anything to it. They learn that by themselves in the large figure 8. So they learn lengthening and shortening their strides by themselves, and then horses are like people: They like to be in stride. Just as you and I like to be in stride if we take a walk together at the beach or through the woods and carry on a conversation. It works much better if we are in stride - provided we are halfway similar in our strides to start out with - otherwise we won't make a good pair - at least not for walking in stride together :-). So then the horses learn by themselves how to adjust their strides to be in stride with each other, and all the spectators ooh and aaah when your pair goes across the diagonal and is in perfect stride with each other! They learned that by the figure

8s that you drove for many hours with them.

When you hitch them next time, switch them, so both are not getting one sided, and work the same program again!

Once it works well on large circles at the walk and at the trot, then, and only then, can you start working on making the circles smaller and the turns smaller. But again, never allow them to go counterbent. Proper training is love and consistency!

If you apply the above lesson, you will be way ahead of most beginners, as your pair will not go counterbent through each turn and each corner in the dressage ring, which is the most common fault of beginning pair drivers. And if that mistake is not corrected early on, it will get worse and worse and after a while will become almost uncorrectable with the pair, as by then they will have learned to go counterbent through each corner. Yours won't be one of those!

Once you are all good at this and always have your proper bend in the turns, then and only then can you start thinking of making the outside horse also go forward a bit to keep up with the inside horse and not hang back, and then one day, you can even get the outside horse to pull you through a sharp turn very quickly when you want to make a quick, tight turn in a hazard. But for a beginning pair that is not bending properly yet, trying to do that is the sure way to permanent counterbending. So don't do it! Resist the temptation. I know it's hard. Instead, drive your large figure 8s and teach them to bend. Your reward will be a well bending, good pair which with proper bending can do good dressage and cones, and hazard even faster one day.

Happy Driving,  
 Hardy