

The 'Friese Sjees' - Friesian Chaise

There is one type of carriage that is specifically Friesian: The Friesian 'sjees'.

The word 'sjees' probably comes from the French word chaise, which means chair. The sjees was like 'a chair on wheels'. The Friesian sjees was originally used in Friesland, a province (and homeland of the Friesian horse) in the northern part of The Netherlands. It came into use in the eighteenth century. It bears the characteristics of the Rococostyle (Louis XV): artfully bent curves and abundant decoration with woodcarvings and paintwork. There are no two antique sjeeses alike. The sjees was hung on leather braces between two high wheels, which were fitted onto a wooden axle. The sjees only seats two people.

The color can be dark or white. Usually the sjees used in the country was dark; the one used more in town was white. When the roads improved, the white sjees came more into use. The height of the wheels is not always the same, but mostly around 1.50 m. (59 inches). The sjees does not carry lamps. The sjees can be driven either with a pair of Friesian horses on either side of the pole or with a single between shafts. On some Friesian sjeeses the shafts were offset to the offside of the sjees. In this way, if the horse would trot in the farmer's horse path, the sjees would not get dirty. This carriage was driven from the left side and is one of the few kinds of carriages where the lady sits on the right side, the place of honor.

The antique sjeeses are all registered in a book. Twenty-six measurements are taken and recorded before a sjees can be admitted into this book. Every registered sjees gets its own registration number, which will be carved, into a copper plate that will be attached to the sjees. There are some people in The Netherlands that have specialized in building new sjeeses, with the old characteristics.

A book has been written about the Friese sjees. In it you'll find pictures and descriptions of about every antique sjees in The Netherlands and abroad. ('De Friese sjees' obtainable from the FPS).

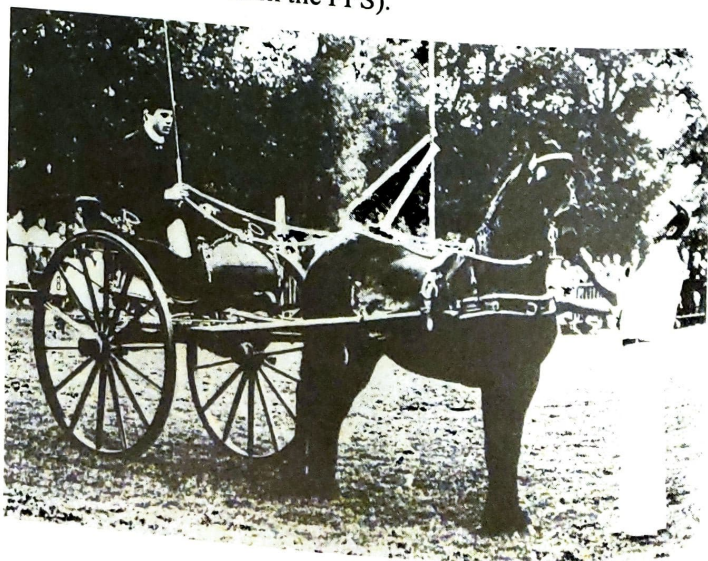


Photo By: Leeuwarder Courant

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The Friesian Costume

Riding in a sjees in jeans would of course be an insult to this beautiful carriage. In the sjees, the man and his lady wear a Friesian costume. For the lady this means wearing a gold casque that covers all but the back of her head. Over it she wears a lace bonnet. Also an apron and the shoulder piece are made of lace. The dress goes down to the ankles and has long sleeves. There are no specific rules for the color of the dress, ladies even coordinate the color of the dress with the color of the inside of the sjees. The stockings are white and the shoes black with a silver clasp.

Usually part of the costume is a necklace and sometimes also a bracelet with at least three rows of red coral with a gold lock. On one side the lady has a small purse with a silver clasp, on the other side three silver pieces: a pair of silver scissors, a silver pincushion and silver needle case. These silver pieces hang down on silver chains of about 60 cm (almost two feet).

The man wears 'black tails' with a colored vest under it, black knickerbockers and a white shirt and white scarf. The knitted socks are blue; the shoes are black and closed with a silver clasp. (There is an unofficial story that the blue socks are for married men only, bachelors should be wearing white socks!) The man also wears a black top hat. In the sjees one does NOT wear gloves.

The sjees is still in use in the show driving competitions in The Netherlands where the Friesians compete in separate classes for single, pairs, tandems and sometimes four-in-hands.



*The Friesian Costume
Photo By: Bert Renken*



Photo By: Hermien Wierdsma Renken