

# The Friesian Horse & COMBINED DRIVING EVENTS

By Ann Davis

As a Friesian owner and active participant with the American Driving Society, I sometimes get this question:

**Friesians make beautiful driving horses but I have heard that they lack the endurance needed to excel in Combined Driving Events. What's the real story?**

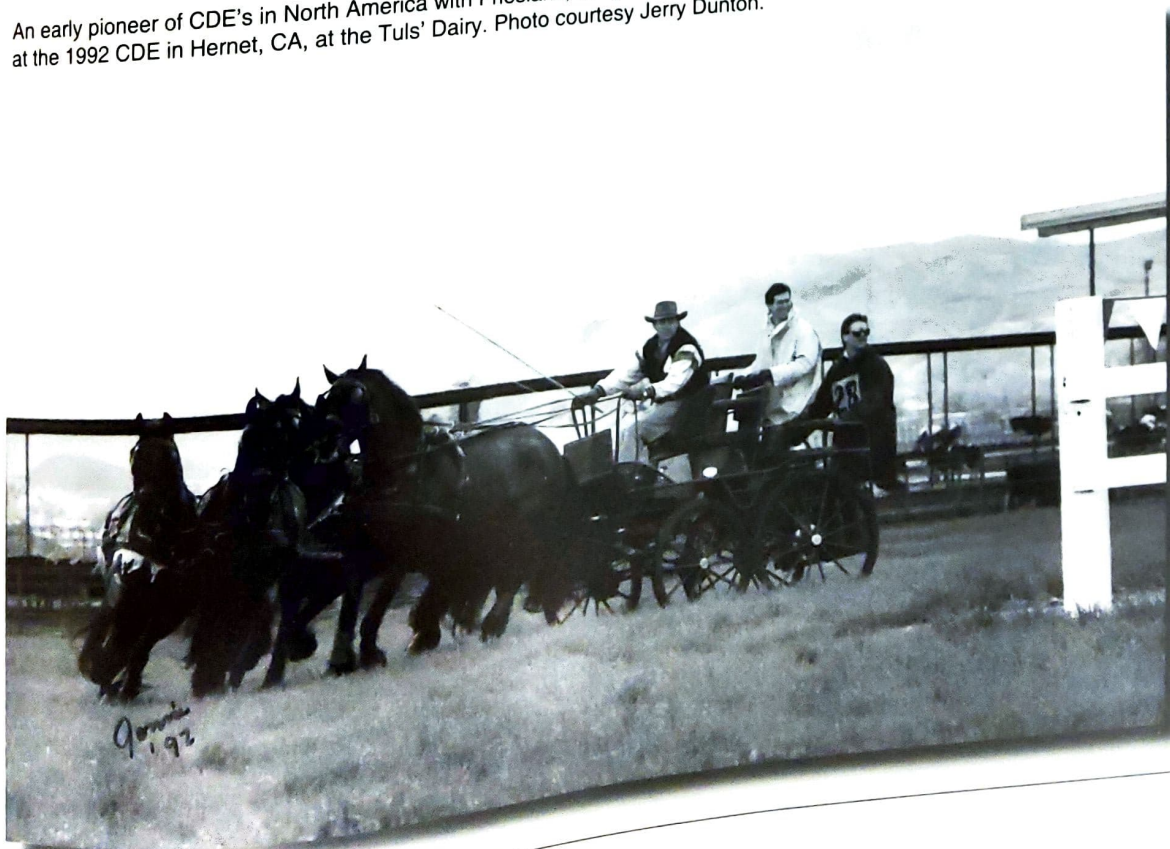
To answer this question, it's helpful to take the historical perspective of how Friesians came to have this reputation, and how they actually stack up against the competition in present-day CDEs.

## What is a Combined Driving Event?

The Combined Driving Event (CDE) is a driving competition which tests the overall condition and versatility of the horse in sport. Prince Philip of Great Britain was a major force in the design of the rules of the CDE in the late 1960s. As the story goes, his daughter Princess Anne was involved in the equestrian sport of Three Day Eventing, and so it was natural that the Prince, a carriage driver, would think about developing a driving event modeled after the riding event. Based upon his suggestion and that of other prominent European drivers, the Federation Equestre Internationale (FEI) drafted a set

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An early pioneer of CDE's in North America with Friesians, Jerry Dunton navigates the hazards at the 1992 CDE in Hernet, CA, at the Tuls' Dairy. Photo courtesy Jerry Dunton.







## Combined Driving, cont.

of international rules which standardized Combined Driving Competitions. The rules were approved by the FEI early in 1970 for four in-hand driving. The first recognized international competition was held in Lucerne, Switzerland of that year. A World Pairs championship was added to the roster of events in 1985 and Singles in the late 90's.

Major competitions are usually held over three days. Day one is Driven Dressage, day two is a Cross Country Marathon, and day three is Cones Driving. The Dressage phase is the performance of a dressage test, similar to a ridden dressage test, consisting of a prescribed sequence of movements that are judged against a standard of absolute perfection.

The second phase is the cross country Marathon. This is the phase that tests the fitness and stamina of the horse as well as the judgment and capability of the driver. Up until 1998, there were five sections to this phase, including a fast trot section. In 1998, around the time of the first Singles International Competition in Ebbs, Austria, most countries went to a 3 section (A, B, E) competition for this phase with maximum and minimum time allowances. Section A is any pace, section B is a walk, and section E is the last phase and one requiring the navigation of hazards placed at distances throughout the E course. The change from 5 sections to 3 sections is important, and I will come back to it later.

The Cones phase is likened to the stadium jumping of Eventing. The object is to drive through narrowly spaced pairs of cones, usually sets of twenty (although sometimes multiples) within the time allowed. Each cone has a ball placed on top, easy to dislodge with driving miscalculations. The point is to drive "double clear" within the time maximum and with no balls down. This phase tests the fitness, agility and obedience of the horse and the accuracy and skill of the driver.

### Early CDE Competition

It was only natural that drivers from Friesland would put together teams of Friesians to compete in this new sport. Carriage driving in The Netherlands had been a



Above: Past FHANA Board member, Leo Zylstra, competing in the dressage phase of Happs CDE, Western WA, June 2009. His son, John, is the groom. Photo: Wendi Ross©

Right: Lora Martin driving the Marathon phase at Joshua Tree, Sweetheart ADT in Hesperia, CA, February 2009. Sonia Zinke is the navigator. The Friesian is Ozebella. Photo: Marc DiLeo©







Sarah Johnson at Happs CDE, June 2008, doing the third phase of the CDE - Cones.  
Photo: Wendi Ross©

way of life and a popular sport for many centuries. There were probably a number of drivers who were attempting to do this. However, in answering the question of whether Friesians can do Combined Driving, I will mention only two of the most well known, Leo Kraayenbrink and Tjeerd Velstra.

The first time that Leo Kraayenbrink saw Friesians in the early 1970s, it was a love affair for life. He eventually became the driver for Elizabeth Korthagen Van-Til of Brueklen, known as 'Tante Bets.' Through this partnership, Leo drove one of the first teams of Friesians to compete in international Combined Driving competition. He reports that he ended up somewhere in the middle. The next year, 1973, he competed again in International Competition at the Windsor Horse Show. As reported by Leo, he ended again in the middle of the field. Although the results were not overly impressive, it was impressive enough to catch the eyes of Tom and Theresa Hannon. FHANA members know what happened next. The Hannons bought the team and other of Tante Bets' horses, and they became the first Friesians imported into North America. However, I have digressed, as that is a different story best described in the April/May 2009 issue and continued in this issue of *The Friesian*. It is an outstanding article written by Laurie Menzel Kasperek on "The Early Years of Friesians in North America."

Back to the question of Friesians and Combined Driving. Leo acquired other Friesians and was able to continue competing for the next 30 years. Although he never placed, he stuck with the Friesians even though he came to understand some of the challenges of driving this breed in competition against the Warmbloods who were more naturally built for this type of event.

Tjeerd Velstra, current National Coach for all Driving Teams from The Netherlands, also started driving Friesians in the early

70's. At that time, he was Director of the National Equestrian Center in Deurne, a school for trainer certification. In order to add driving to the curriculum, he purchased Friesians for his students to drive. With this experience, in 1975 he put together a team of Friesians to compete at the World Championship in Aachen, Germany. Over the next three years he competed at Aachen, Windsor, and Hamburg and placed first in two of these competitions. This early success was not to continue. In 1979 he competed poorly in a hot and hilly international competition in France against Warmblood teams. That was his last competition using Friesians. The next year he switched to driving Warmbloods. However, it is important to keep in mind that Tjeerd had his successes, as well as his experience in France, under the 5 sections rules. These required a length of 28 kilometers or 17 miles, including a fast trot section of 19 kph or 12 mph. Again, I will return to this information.

Although Leo continued to drive Friesians and Tjeerd switched to Warmbloods, both men came to appreciate the challenges of driving Friesians in the marathon phase of combined driving. Friesians are black and muscled, get too hot over the long distances and have problems cooling off. Both these drivers also stated that their heart rates tend to be higher, and they are not as quick as other breeds in the hazards of the marathon.

At this point, some readers of this article may be saying that the experience of these two drivers does support the argument that Friesians cannot compete successfully and consistently in Combined Driving. However, we still need to put the question in perspective by looking at a short history of the Friesian horse in North American and some of the changes that were to be made in combined driving competitions.

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## Combined Driving, cont.

### The Friesian horse and Combined Driving Events come to North America

The Friesians breed and Combined Driving came to North America about the same time. Outlined well in Laurie Kasperek's article, the first Friesians came to the Midwest in 1974 with the purchase of "Tante Bets" horses by the Hannons. Friesians arrived in California in 1975 when Frank and Adrianna Leyendekker imported horses from his native country. By the early 80's, Friesians had spread up the west coast, Michigan, and other North American locations.

### Friesians in California

During the late 1970's and 80's, a number of Friesian owners put together teams of four-in-hands and pairs, and drove these horses in Pleasure Driving Competitions all over North America. Although not as well known, many of these Friesian owners and drivers also came to compete in Combined Driving Events. In the investigation of whether Friesians can successfully compete in Combined Driving Events, I will focus on California. This is not to imply that the state was the only location where Friesians competed.

The first American Driving Society Combined Driving Event in California was held in 1980 in the city of Orange and the



Left: Antonio Aldana and the mare, Inga, compete in the Pleasure Days Show, Tejon Ranch, CA, May 2008. Photo: Marc DiLeo©

Below: Will Bron, FHANA Board member, with navigator, Teresa Bron at the Happs Driving Trial, September 2008. Photo: Anne Buckler©

Combined Driving Events came to the North America in the early 1970's. This was with the organization of three events, two in New York and the Myopia Combined Driving Event in Wenham, Massachusetts. The American Driving Society was incorporated in 1975, initially to create rules for pleasure driving competitions but soon also to regulate Combined Driving Competitions. By the early 80's combined driving rules, as regulated by the FEI, were printed in the American Driving Society handbook. The sport of combined driving, under the rules and regulations of the ADS, soon attracted an enthusiastic group of devotees, and it continued to grow. Again, it was natural that some in the growing population of Friesian horse owners would be attracted to this new type of driving sport.





Author: Ann Davis, in  
the Marathon phase  
of Happs Driving Trial,  
September 2008 in  
Western WA.  
Photo: Wendi Ross©



sport developed over the next decade with the addition of other events. Friesian owners and drivers whose names are recognizable to the FHANA community, people such as Frank and Adrianna Leyendekker, Jerry and Joy Dunton, Fred and Jennie De Boer, John and Anita Mellott, Jack and Tillie Tuls, Clay Maier, Roel Hofstee, and Tony Aldana, came to compete in some of these Combined Driving Events. The results were mixed.

In the Dressage phase of the competitions, the Friesians always made a bold statement and did very well. The Friesians also were very competitive in the cones phase of the competition. Similar to the early international competitions, the marathon phase of the events with challenging driving distances and hazards that require quickness sometimes were a problem. This was particularly an issue when the temperatures were high as was often the case in California. A number of Friesian competitors continued over the next decades to compete and others went on to other uses for the Friesians. The late Anita Mellott told me that it was just too difficult and consumed too much time to get their Friesians fit enough to be competitive in the marathon phase of the Combined Driving Events. Jerry Dunton felt that the challenge he experienced in this phase was a problem of dedicating enough time to properly condition his Friesians. In 1990, Clay Maier left California and began working for Judi Knapp in Sisters, Oregon. He and Judi competed where they could find events. Similar to some of the other Friesian competitors, Clay experienced frustration in not being able to condition the geldings to the level required for serious Combined Driving Competition. Keep in mind that during the 80's and the first part of the 90's, the competitions were done under the rules of 5 sections to the marathon.

Let me return briefly to our drivers from the Netherlands, Leo Kraayenbrink and Tjeerd Velstra. Their experience, along with

those of many Friesian competitors in California and the West Coast, appears to add weight to the argument that Friesians have difficulty placing in Combined Driving Events because of the rigors of the marathon phase. However, there is a larger perspective. Despite everything that has been said so far about the problems that drivers have had with their Friesian horses in the marathon, today Friesians are competing successfully all over North America in recognized American Driving Society events. How?

### Changes in Combined Driving Rules and Regulations

The answer lies in the changes that have occurred in the rules and regulations of the sport over the last twenty years that provide opportunities for the Friesian, or other breeds, that are not naturally built for endurance over many miles. There were three major changes that have helped Friesians be more competitive. First, when Leo Kraayenbrink and Tjeerd Velstra began to compete in Combined Driving, and later the early competitions of the California owners and drivers, there were five sections to the marathon phase. In the late 90's, most countries, including the United States and Canada, went to a 3 section marathon with distances no more than 18 Kilometers. Further the fast trot section (12 mph) was eliminated and the speeds were dropped down to 14-15 kph (8-9 mph).

Second, when the first competitions began in North America and up through most of the 80's, all competitors competed at the same level. Today, there are four levels of competition: Training, Preliminary, Intermediate, and Advanced. The time and distance requirements for the lower level are less than

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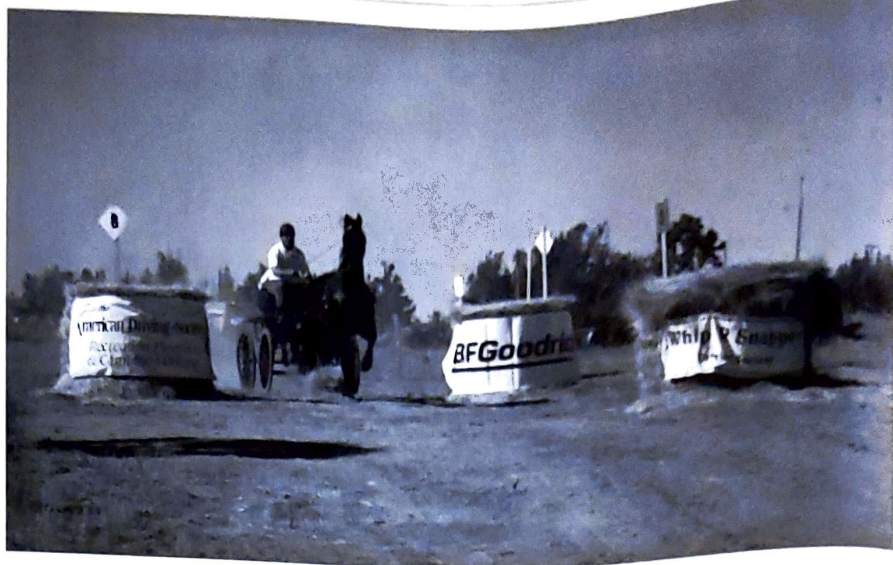


## Combined Driving, cont.

the higher levels, again a definite advantage for the Friesians who sometimes struggled with the distance and speed requirements. Thirdly, new types of Combined Driving Events such as Driving Trials and Arena Driving Trials have been introduced in the last fifteen years which further cut the distance requirements.

### Friesians can Compete in Combined Driving

The introduction of a 3 section marathon, different levels, and new competitions that have reduced cross country distance requirements have created a different environment for horses that are not built for endurance. This includes other breeds as well as Friesians. Looking at Combined Driving and the Friesian horse with these new possibilities gives us a totally different outcome to the question whether Friesians can



Above: Marc DiLeo, FHANA Board member, during the Marathon phase of a CDE.  
Photo: David Christinan©

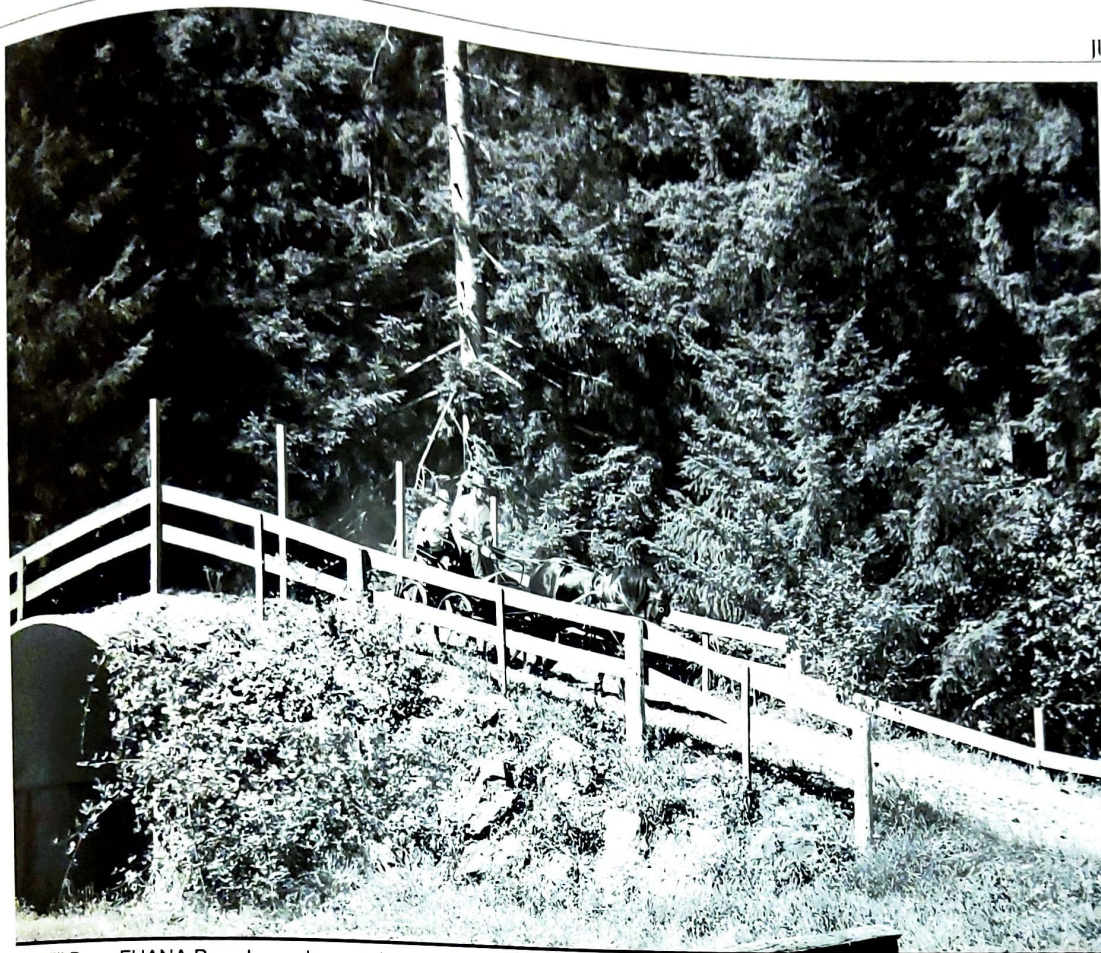
Below: Roel Hofstee in the Cones phase of the Ram Tap ADT, November 2008 in CA.  
Photo: Ted Campbell©



compete successfully in Combined Driving. Friesians can and do! Under the new rules, Friesians are competitive in full Combined Driving Events. In the new events, Arena Driving Trials with only 2 hazards and no marathon and Driving Trials with a short E section, Friesians can win.

There may still be people who discredit Friesians because they do not do well consistently in international and advanced levels of the competitions. This may possibly be true, although the right horse(s) in the right hands can be exceptional. Also, keep in mind that up until a few years ago there were nay-sayers who said that Friesians could not perform well in the upper levels





Will Bron, FHANA Board member, at the Happs Driving Trial, September 2008. His navigator is Teresa, Will's wife.  
Photo: Anne Buckler©

of ridden dressage, a field also dominated by Warmbloods. Yet today, Friesians are doing just that. This development does bring up the possibility of selectively breeding Friesians for more stamina. However, I digress from the focus of this article on Friesians and Combined Driving today and will leave the question of selective breeding to genetic experts.

If driving in advanced and/or international competition is your primary goal, Friesians may not be your best choice. Tjeerd Velstra made that choice and changed to Warmbloods. Leo Kraayenbrink did not and stayed with the Friesians. However, exceptional skills, time, and finances are required for international and advanced competitions. The reality is that most carriage drivers, no matter what the breed, are going to compete at the lower levels of preliminary and training, or in the shorter less stamina types of combined driving. This includes American Driving Society Driving Trials and Arena Driving Trials.

The surprise is not that Leo and Tjeerd had problems competing successfully with their Friesians in Combined Driving International Events. The surprise is that they, in fact, did so well. All acknowledge that Friesians, unlike say Arabs, are not naturally built for the long distances. Both Leo and Tjeerd competed when the distances were even longer than they are today, and with Friesian horses that were of the more baroque types, not the more "modern" lighter Friesians available today.

This is certainly a credit to the outstanding skills of both these drivers, but also to the versatility and character of the Friesian. If you are in a situation to purchase your Friesian driving horse, the more "modern" type would be a good choice, best not taller than 16 hands. Most of us do not have that luxury, however, and want to use the horse we presently own. With the willingness to spend time conditioning our Friesian to improve the respiratory and cardiovascular systems and the muscular performance, all Friesians can compete successfully in American Driving Society Combined Driving Events.

### Getting Started

Getting started is easy. Just visit the American Driving Society web site: [www.americandrivingsociety.com](http://www.americandrivingsociety.com). Get the name and contact data for the ADS Regional Director and the driving schedule in your area. Or, visit the American Driving Society booth at the FHANA 25th Anniversary Convention, October 8-10, 2009, in Reno, Nevada. Either way, driving your Friesian successfully in Combined Driving Events can be a reality...a challenge that will be lots of fun!

*Ann Davis has been a member of FHANA since 1998. She is the past President of the Northwest Friesian Horse Club and the present Secretary of the American Driving Society.*

