



American Driving Society, Inc.

Turnout Troubleshooting for Beginners

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“Can I show with black gloves?”

“My reins are brown--is that okay with a black harness?”

“I have a great top hat that I want to wear while driving my natural wood road cart--is this appropriate?”

These and many more questions are often posed to the American Driving Society, Inc (ADS) by first-time carriage driving competitors. Let's face it--we all want to put our best foot and hoof forward to impress the judges and hear those oos and ahhs from the spectators. But for some first time competitors trying to put together the perfect outfit that compliments the driver, the horse and the carriage, all at once, can be quite intimidating. So let's begin at the beginning and consult the ADS Rulebook!

ARTICLE 11 DRESS OF DRIVER AND PASSENGERS (taken from the General Regulations)

- 1. Drivers and passengers should be dressed conservatively according to the style of the present day. Any attempt to introduce period costumes or gaudy trappings is discouraged.*
- 2. Dress for the driver should conform to the type of turnout (i.e. Formal, Park, Country, Sporting).*
- 3. Gentlemen must wear a coat or jacket while appearing in any class unless excused from doing so by the judge and/or show management. When accepting awards, gentlemen are requested to remove their hats.*
- 4. Ladies must wear a conservative dress, tailored suit, or slacks. Floppy hats are discouraged.*
- 5. Unless otherwise specified, the driver shall wear a hat, an apron or knee rug and gloves.*

Traditionally carriage driving attire is described as classy conservative; the objective is to create a harmonious picture and put the emphasis on the horse. It is always a good idea to start with the vehicle: a painted gig or a four-wheel wicker phaeton, are more formal than a stained road cart or a Meadowbrook-type vehicle, and the driver should dress accordingly.

The Hat – Bigger is not Always Better!

Drivers, both men and women, have been known to agonize over their hats. Here are a few tips to help you choose the appropriate topper for your turnout.

- Wear a hat that is comfortable for your climate. If you live in the south straw is always in season, and if you live in the north felt can work for you long after Memorial Day.
- If you are driving a natural road cart, that awesome Kentucky Derby hat you have in the back of your closet probably isn't going to work well, but it might just be the ticket if you have a more formal carriage—just make sure it is in proportion with you and your vehicle.
- Helmets are always in style! If you want to wear a helmet instead of a hat it is definitely appropriate and will not count against you. Children under the age of 18 must always wear a helmet during all ADS competitions.

Lap Robes – Steeped in Tradition

This essential part of your turnout originates from the days when driving a horse was a means of getting around. The purpose of the lap robe was to keep your clothes neat and clean during your commute from point A to point B down a muddy or dusty road. Today, lap robes can be made from any fabric but most often they are some form of wool. Typically your lap robe should coordinate with the color of your carriage's upholstery but it doesn't always have to. Wrap the lap robe around your body above your natural waist over your coat or blouse. Some styles are long enough to reach the top of your shoe, while others only fall to mid-calf. Both are appropriate, but if your socks are visible, please make sure they are not white! Wear colored hose or socks that blend in and do not attract attention to your feet. Often you will see lap robes with coordinating trim and a monogram--these add a nice touch and help tie in the colors of your ensemble, giving it a finished look. If you are not a seamstress, there are plenty of businesses that can make you a custom lap robe. Contact the ADS for a list of names.

Gloves and Accessories

Your gloves should always be brown leather to match your reins (more on this later). Use your gloves frequently before you show in them, so they are broken in and comfortable for you. If your gloves are too light in color rub them all over your horse's sweaty body to help darken them. Besides, your horse will probably appreciate the good scratching. The gloves are really the one part of the turnout where you cannot be creative: brown is your only option. But do not despair! You can accent your turnout with a colorful scarf, a different hat band and accessories like pocket silks and jewelry. Of course, when overdone, these can become a distraction, so exercise your best judgment. Remember to keep things conservative and appropriate for your vehicle and the type of equine you are driving.

The Mane Attraction – Your Horse!

Carriage driving provides the spectators with a wonderful look at many different types and breeds of equines. Appropriately, the ADS encourages drivers to show their horses turned-out as close to their breed standard as they choose. However, the use of artificial hair in the mane or tail is strictly prohibited. It is also not appropriate to braid your horse's tail except for draft horses shown in a draft horse division. A rule of thumb for braiding manes: if your horse has a great neck show it off by braiding, and if not, consider keeping the mane natural, but under control, so it doesn't detract from your overall picture. There are many different styles of braiding that are appropriate for carriage driving and if you don't know how to braid, try searching YouTube™ for "how-to" videos. Remember, practice makes perfect.

Harness – Leather vs Synthetic

According to ADS rules, both synthetic and leather harnesses are completely acceptable in the show ring. It is important, however, that you match metals: if your carriage has brass fittings then your harness should have the same or vice versa. Let's face it, black goes with everything, but if you have a natural wood vehicle with either brown or black-painted metal a russet-colored harness would also be appropriate. Traditionally, a painted vehicle without natural wood panels requires a black harness. Your reins, however, regardless of whether they are synthetic or leather, should be brown. Back in the day, dyed black reins would leave stains on horses and clothes so harness makers always left the reins un-dyed to prevent this from happening. This is also the reason why your gloves are brown to match your reins.

Final Words of Wisdom

1. "Drive what you have until you can get what you want." It's more important to get out there and gain more experience driving than it is to have the fanciest carriage. Winning a Turnout class is great but it is only one class in a division, so it is more important to concentrate on your skill and your horse's training.
2. Shop at Thrift stores! There are some incredible finds to be had for very little money. You can buy several outfits to go with your favorite hat.
3. Lay your outfit on your carriage in bright sunlight and have your horse standing in the background or better yet, have a friend take a picture from all sides of your complete turnout so you can really evaluate your look BEFORE going into the show ring. Pay attention to how you look coming AND going. Something that looks good from the front may be a rumpled mess from behind.
4. Polish, Polish, Polish! Make sure that your harness, horse and carriage are as clean as possible. If your harness has extra length in the hip straps or other places, fold them in half and tape them up with electrical tape so they are neat and tidy.
5. Use the Internet. Go to Google image search engine and type in "carriage driving"--you'll get around 656,000 images to look at. Better yet, go to an ADS show and take pictures of turnouts that interest you, not just the winners. Remember, what one judge likes today another judge may not like tomorrow.
6. Don't give away a ribbon because you did not do your homework. Read the ADS Rulebook--it is a FREE download on the ADS web site, www.americandrivingsociety.org It contains many more answers to questions that we were not able to cover in this article.
7. Smile when you drive: if you look like you are having fun you probably are!