



Combined Driving

Combined driving also known as **Horse Driving Trials** is an equestrian sport involving [carriage driving](#). The sport has three phases, and is most similar to the mounted equestrian sport of [eventing](#). It is one of the international equestrian [sport horse](#) disciplines.

Phase A1: Presentation

The judge grades on the cleanliness of the horses, tack, and vehicle, the matching of the horses or ponies, and the dress of the driver and groom(s).

- **Driver, Grooms and Passengers:** All persons should be clean and smartly dressed. The livery of the grooms should fit and match if there is more than one groom. The whip should be the correct length, based on the number of horses used. The driver should wear brown gloves, as well as a driving hat and apron.
- **Horse(s):** The horses should be clean and well-conditioned. If there are several horses, they should be of similar size and type (build), although the wheelers may be larger than the leaders. Matching color is secondary to matching type and size. Manes may or may not be braided, but should be level. Tails should not be braided.
- **Harness:** Should be “sound, clean, and fit correctly”. Harness, if more than one horse is used, should match, although different bits may be used. The overall harness should also match.
- **Vehicle:** carriage should be the correct size for the horse, as should the height and length of the poles for pairs and fours. Lamps are required at the advanced level, but only required at the training, preliminary, and intermediate levels if the carriage has lamp brackets.
- **General Impression:** judged on dress and position of driver and grooms, and suitability of horses and harness to the carriage.



Phase A2: Dressage

The dressage test is somewhat similar to [dressage](#) under saddle. The test is performed in a 40- by 80-meter arena with letter markers, where transitions in speed and gait are to take place. The judge scores each movement on a scale of 0-10, with a 10 being the highest mark possible. The difficulty of the test increases with each subsequent level of competition. At the lower levels, only one judge will normally be positioned at C (the centre of the short side of the arena) and the Test may have 16 movements. At higher levels in a 40 x 100 meter arena, 3 judges may be used and at International competitions and World Championships there may be up to 5 judges, with the Championship Test having 25 movements. The judges' marks are averaged (added together and divided by the number of judges).

Dressage movements may include walk, [working trot](#), [collected trot](#), [extended trot](#), [canter](#), a halt, and a [rein back](#). Multiple horses are judged on ability to move in harmony and ideally will have similar conformation, action, and movement. Horses are to remain on the bit throughout the test, maintaining

impulsion, elasticity, rhythm, and forward movement. The goal is to make the test look effortless, and an obedient and responsive horse is essential for a good dressage test.

Unlike a ridden dressage test, a driven test allows the use of the voice as an aid. At international level, dressage tests are prepared by the Fédération Equestre Internationale (F.E.I.) which is the governing body of competitive carriage driving.^[1]

Phase B: Marathon

The marathon is similar to the second phase of [eventing](#), the speed and endurance. It tests the fitness and stamina of the horses, as well as the driver's knowledge of pace, over a 10-22 km course, divided into 3 or 5 sections. The marathon is the most thrilling phase to watch, and often draws the largest crowds.

Section "E" of the marathon is similar to the cross-country phase of eventing. It has **obstacles** or "**hazards**" throughout the course to test the speed and agility of the horses, and the driving ability of the whip. Obstacles may include water, tight twists through trees or man-made obstacles, steep hills, or fences and pens. Drivers are scored on how quickly they can negotiate the obstacle, and must find the fastest route through each.



Phase C: Cones



The cones phase is a test of accuracy, similar to the show jumping phase of eventing. A driver negotiates a course of up to 20 sets of gates, denoted by pairs of cones with a ball balanced on top. The cones are a set number of centimetres in distance wider than the wheels of the carriage (from 50 cm at the lower levels, to only 20 cm at the advanced level). If a ball is knocked off, penalty points are awarded. There are also obstacles made of raised rails in a U or right angle, and a wooden bridge. The cones section is timed. Circling before an obstacle and refusals are also awarded penalty points.

The Levels and Divisions of Combined Driving

The levels of combined driving in the United States are similar to that of eventing: Training, Preliminary, Intermediate, and Advanced. Each level is further divided into divisions: Horse or pony and by number and arrangement of horses: singles, pairs, and multiples.

The People

- **The Driver or Whip:** The person who drives the horses and carriage

- **The Groom:** Grooms are used in the dressage and obstacle cone driving phases. They are not allowed to speak or signal to the competitor in any way. They are seated beside or behind the driver. One groom is used for singles and pairs and two grooms for four-in-hand.
- **The Navigator:** The navigator is often a groom, if one was used, from the earlier phases. He or she helps the competitor on the marathon phase to stabilize the carriage around fast and tight turns by leaning inward. He also helps the driver with timing and direction. A navigator is required on the marathon phase. He or she does not, however, have to be an active competitor. The navigator is sometimes referred to as the “gator” or “backstepper” because he stands on a specially designed platform on the back of the carriage.

The Carriages

For the presentation and dressage phase, [harness](#) is often leather, and [carriages](#) are built along traditional lines, and designed for attractive appearance. Competitors may use either 2-wheeled or 4-wheeled vehicles, but 4-wheelers are most often used in modern competition. Many competitors have a second carriage for the marathon phase. Most [marathon vehicles](#) are of a modern design, tailor made for competition. They are manufactured from steel, aluminum or other alloys and may have hydraulic disc brakes on front and rear wheels, low centre of gravity and very small turning circle. A tougher harness is also used in the marathon phase, often made from synthetic materials rather than the traditional leather.



The Horses

The horse or pony may be of any [breed](#), although [warmbloods](#) are often seen at the highest levels of competition. [Morgans](#) are also popular. The horse must be responsive, have a good mind, and be reliable. If multiple horses are used, they should be of similar height, build, and movement, and preferably similar color.



Volunteers

No driving event can take place without the help of people on the ground. Each individual has a specific job they need to perform to insure a safe and fair competition. The following list of jobs is in order of appearance throughout the day of a combined driving horse trial.

Road Crossers – the road is public, we have no right to stop traffic, so exercise caution when crossing the road on foot or when driving. Listen to the instructions of the volunteers assigned to the road crossing.

Dressage Gate Keeper manages entries and exits from the ring. When a competitor is due in the ring a bell will be rung by the judge and the horse and driver will enter the ring. The gatekeeper keeps track who is on deck and opens the ring gate to let a competitor in, and to let them leave after their test.

Cones pushers – the cones are set to be only slightly wider than the width of the vehicle wheels. Each vehicle is measured and the cones are adjusted for the appropriate width for each competitor.

Hazard judge – the length of time in a hazard is timed from the moment the competitor enters the hazard until they leave. It is necessary to ensure that all the gates in the hazard are completed in the correct order and direction. The judge sketches the route and order that the driver has taken and this is submitted with time information.

If there is any question of what happened in the hazard, or if a gate was missed – the information and sketch of the route is reviewed.

None of the people in the hazard are to assist the competitor in any way. No conversation, no advice, no picking up a dropped whip, or telling them anything that will help or hinder the competitor. If there is something unsafe, judgment should be used. Each hazard has a radio – call in questions to the judge.

Timers – throughout the competition there are phases that are timed. This is a very important job to ensure that everyone is treated fairly. Times are called in to the scorers throughout the competition.

If there is ever a time when there is a horse or equipment failure, and you are not knowledgeable about horses – step back and get out of the way. Safety is paramount for everyone, and volunteers are very important and special to us. There is no need to get closer to a horse than you feel comfortable. If you do want to approach a horse, be sure to talk to the driver or navigator first. Horses may be friendly, but drivers carry whips – so be careful when you approach.

Remember this is a beginning level competition and most competitors or their horses are starting out – so be sensible, cautious around the horses, and do not distract, frighten, endanger yourself, your fellow volunteers, or the competitors. Take as many photos as you like, ask all the questions you have, and thank you for coming.

