



ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE D'ATTELAGE DE TRADITION

Fondée en 2008

Comments on AIAT judging

Concours de Tradition is the logical culmination of dressage and the training of the harness horse. Thanks to these events drivers, whether they are novice or experience whips, have made great progress in presentation and the traditional production of turnouts attaining standards they did not think possible.

Presentation

The advancement in this phase of the event has been remarkable.

Overall impression.

Although sometimes style is lacking, 95% of equipages are in good order and standards are consistently high.

The remaining 5%'s horses can be unsteady, with turnouts inadequately or poorly prepared and sometimes even unsafe.

Horses

95% are in good condition with proud owners with the remaining 5% in inferior condition, poorly presented with dull dispositions. Their overall cleanliness also leaves something to be desired.

Harness

95% have well fitted harness but a few have ill-fitting collars, but not everyone can have specific collars for each horse. 50% of harness inevitably could be cleaner, but is usually safe.

95% of horses are badly bitted, with bits incorrectly set up, positioned badly in the mouth with reins set without consideration to the tightness of the curb chain, resulting in discomfort to the horse. Drivers respect their horses as I have said before however the inappropriate balance between the setting of the height of the rein on the bit and the tightness of the curb chain causing discomfort to the horse is the worst of mistakes.

In the nineteenth century, the famous coachman Howlett advocated a strong bit with a lighter curb chain with soft hands. When bits are fitted correctly the horse can support and balance on its jaw. If bits are too high any action by the hand tends to cause resistance and raise the head.

Howlett's words summed up the result good biting when he said, "I like to *taste* with my hand what I am doing."

Strong biting demands a soft hand but produces a good response from and control of the horse.

Having said this a number of sets of harness often approach perfection and deserve 19 and even 20/20.

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Carriages

Generally the standard of carriages has improved to such an extent that I cannot see how they can be better.

20% could be cleaner but 99.9% are in top condition.

Passengers

I have found that 90% of passengers in the turnouts are dressed correctly appropriate to the style of the whole equipage, town, and country or more formal. Certainly not in fancy/historical dress.

Some observations on judging methods

It is important that a judge, whether a lady or gentleman, has had broad experience in all aspects of this type of competition.

Their dress must be immaculate, lounge suit or blazer, bowler or Panama for the men. Elegant dress or suit for the lady with appropriate hat and suitable to work in. Complementary to the efforts the driver has put into its turnout.

The judges attitude to the driver during presentation should be pleasant, putting the driver and grooms at ease in what is often a stressful occasion for them.

The judge should avoid making controversial personal observations about the turnout with the competitor only referring to well established facts. Personal likes and dislikes should be discussed at official competition seminars elsewhere.

While officiating the judge should always be friendly and courteous and particularly encouraging to competitors new to the sport. On occasions harsh comments from a judge has discouraged drivers to continue in the sport.

If on rare occasions a judge is surprised to see an unfamiliar feature before him/her, the judge may ask a question of the driver but never reply with a strong categorical opinion. The time for that is for discussion with the driver after the event.

Very high or low marks on the score sheet should be justified by an appropriate short written comment. Hence the utility and even necessity of a secretary.

The judge should not dwell on minute details of clothing, people, horses etc. which might seem derogatory but always find a positive point in commending perhaps to the groom, for example, on the quality of his horses, his harness or his carriage, when the case arises.

Competence, courtesy and modesty are the essential qualities of a judge!

Our voluntary attendance.

Event Organizer considers the judge as a friend and, as such, he/she is supported for the duration of the event.

A judge who accepts the invitation of the Organizer as a friend, should not normally expect traveling expenses. This corresponds to the spirit of the AIAT, based on friendship and freely sharing of knowledge.

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