



*Eivind-Erik Sorensen
Driving Hanno, left*

Learning to Drive: Lessons from a Beginner, By Eivind-Erik Sorensen

When I first saw an ad for a Friesian listed with Legacy Friesians, I knew that this was the horse for me! I had been researching breeds for their temperament, ability to excel under saddle, and, most importantly, with an ability to drive. I have wanted to learn how to drive but knew that anything like a pony or smaller breed of horse would limit my ability to ride as well. I knew that a Friesian would be perfect! My imported gelding "Hanno" is now four-years-old and has been in training with Megan Sibiga since the summer of 2005.

My original plans called for focusing on improving my skills as a rider, becoming familiar with dressage principles, and helping Hanno to develop a solid foundation under saddle before taking on the added challenge of driving.

So...my "plan" was to wait until the summer of 2007 to begin the next phase of our journey and wait until then to obtain a cart. However, while volunteering at our booth at the Expo in Albany last March, I met Bill Schuil from Pacific Carriage Company. He had some of his carts and carriages on display and I had an opportunity to talk with him about my horse and interest in driving. After talking with Bill and seeing their beautiful line of carts and carriages, I knew I had to have one!

Fast forward to this past summer and I ended up ordering a cart from Pacific Carriage. Bill was extremely helpful in determining the proper size of wheels for the cart, general dimensions, etc., that would be best suited to my horse. Our new cart arrived in August and we began taking driving lessons with Megan right away! Prior to the arrival of our new cart, Megan also put me in touch with Celine Rickards from Carriage Driving Essentials

for ordering a harness. Celine helped me to obtain a Zilco harness made with synthetic material which is easy to clean and maintain...a beginner's best friend indeed!

Some of our beginnings did have a few set-backs. For example, there was confusion regarding measurements for the harness, forgetting that I also needed a whip (really?), a road sign (you mean we're going out on the road?), and a few other "details". However, none of these issues kept us from moving on and entering the world of driving.

As it turned out, Hanno did require a lesson or two on the subject of moving forward while simply wearing the harness. Previously, he had been under saddle and driven briefly while in the Netherlands as part of his preparation for the annual stallion inspection. The feel of the straps that sometimes flap and bind was something that he needed to get reacquainted with before we hitched him to the cart. But on his first trip out he drove ahead like he had been doing it forever! It was incredible! It can't be this easy I thought. It isn't...learning to drive is hard! Hanno and I are fortunate in that he resides on a farm that has many acres to ride and drive. As a beginner, I have been grateful for the huge flat fields without too many obstacles to worry about.

Well...it has been a few months now and Hanno and I still have our driving challenges such as dealing with obstacles, learning how to get through gates without getting caught, turning in time before running into something, etc.

The recent change in weather and loss of daylight has re-

duced our ability to drive outside. Learning how to drive a cart in an indoor arena is a whole different ball game! The cart that seemed so well-suited for outdoor driving now seemed so huge and learning to make turns quickly took on a whole new level of skill and has become even more important.

Thanks to the support of many people (only some of whom are mentioned in this article), Hanno and I can now drive solo and enjoy our time together even more. I would encourage anyone who has an interest in learning to drive to attend some driving events, watch some videos, check out publications like Carriage Driving World, and consider joining the American Driving Society. The world of driving is huge and I, for one, had no idea just how much is out there about the sport and the centuries of tradition inherent in areas throughout the world. Friesians were featured on the most recent cover of "The Whip", the journal of the American Driving Society.

My (re)entry into the horse world seems to have taken on a bit of an international flair. My horse is from the Netherlands, our cart is from Canada, our harness generated from New Zealand, and Hanno's future shoes may come from Sweden...and I appreciate it all everyday! It has become a true partnership with my Friesian and I have enjoyed every minute of our time together both under saddle and now driving together in our cart to see where we may go! (see photos above)

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