

Introducing a Horse to a Cart

Active driving competitor, judge and clinician Muffy Seaton advises.

Q. At what age should a horse begin getting introduced to the cart?

A. Horses can be started in harness as older 2 year olds, but keep in mind, their attention span--or lack of it--at this young age. In my experience, most 2 year olds don't have the concentration or focus to allow much driving. By the time you get them hooked to a carriage, it's time to unhook them!

I think you can start doing groundwork with a young horse around the time he is weaned. It's just basic handling, though, and not any real formal training. Take the weanling for walks just with a halter and lead rope to get him used to dogs, traffic, et cetera. You are preparing him for what he might see when you drive down the road later on.

You can long line with just a halter, but I recommend that you have a header with you just in case.

When your weanling becomes a yearling or young 2 year old, it's time to introduce him to an open bridle and keep long lining. You don't want to hook him to a carriage yet because he's not strong enough to pull much weight, but after doing all the first steps, you could have him pull a very light drag so he gets used to noise behind him. If all goes well, you could be driving him lightly by the time he's an older 2 year old.

My preference is to do all the groundwork on a pony/horse in the fall of his 2 year old year, then turn him out for the winter and bring him back in the spring and start working him regularly. I want to make sure he knows how to stop and turn by the time I introduce the cart. I want to make the experience as safe as possible for him and me!

Remember, you must take lots of steps in training a pony/horse to drive, and if you miss any one of them, it might cause problems later. Please educate yourself in how to train a driving horse, or find a reputable driving horse trainer to help you.

Read more about driving expert Muffy Seaton.