



Behind the scenes at Bennington

Whether you're looking to get into driving, require some lessons to improve your performance or you're thinking of buying harness or carriage, Bennington can help. We catch up with the company's managing director Sue Mart, to find out more about what goes on at their Nottinghamshire base.

“Our lovely showroom contains an extensive range of new, ex-demo and pre-owned Bennington Carriages, as well as a whole range of products for driving and horse care,” says Sue. “For customers, we feel this is a great opportunity to see the carriages in person, test drive them if they wish and discuss their needs, with friendly and helpful advice from our team of experts.”

“Often, when people take up driving, they buy equipment on eBay or purchase a second hand carriage, without seeking any help or guidance. Doing this means you can easily end up with driving related items not being the right size or fit for the horse or pony, which can be costly if you can't send them back. However, this is easily avoided if you get the right help.”

“At Bennington we offer free advice, either over the phone or face to face. If people aren't too far away from us, we would encourage them to book an appointment to come and see us

so they can take a look at everything for themselves. For example, if someone is interested in buying a carriage we can advise them on the most suitable model for their needs. We have stabling on site, so people are welcome to bring their horse or pony along to be measured by us. If it isn't possible for the horse or pony to come to Bennington, we can clearly show owners how to take these measurements themselves.

“In our factory we have a dedicated team of 10 craftsmen, many of whom have been working with us for over 20 years. We've just taken on a young apprentice who will be trained by the more experienced team members, so the business continues to run at its best. Everything is done in house, with each carriage being individually handcrafted to bespoke specifications. Our carriages are made from steel and aluminium, which we

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The showroom has a range of new and second hand carriages, as well as many other driving related products for sale

The manufacturing process

1. Metalwork

Our craftsmen start by measuring and cutting all the raw materials to the exact length, using heat and specialised bending tools. This process continues until they have all the correct components needed for the carriage.

2. Welding

The components are all assembled into shape and re-measured. Once the craftsmen are happy each part is exactly the right shape and size, they begin plasma welding, which is a process that achieves stronger welds.

3. Wheels

Even the wheels are made here at the factory, and are manufactured in aluminium. At Bennington our trademark wheels are lightweight, designed to significantly reduce the weight of the carriage, hence it's easier for the horse to pull.

4. Shot blasting

All the carriages are shot blasted with media, including steel shot and aluminium oxide, to remove microscopic imperfections and provide the perfect surface for painting.

5. Powder coating

Next, fine paint powder is applied and baked at 220 degrees, to provide a resilient and durable powder coated finish.

6. Upholstery

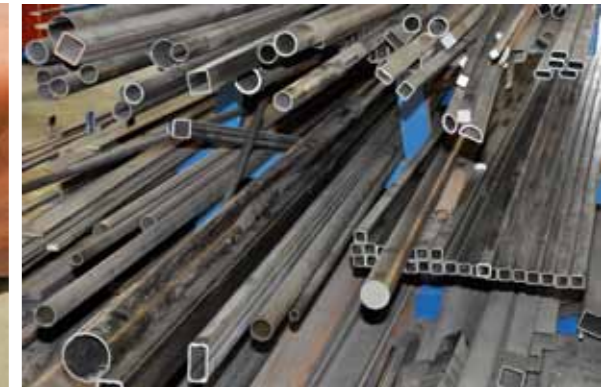
We have a resident upholsterer who will finish all the leather and fabric components.

7. Woodworking and final assembly

Finally, all the wooden components are made and once they are finished, the final parts are assembled, such as braking systems, tyres, upholstery and trim fittings.



The wheels are coach lined by hand



Steel and aluminium is received in straight lengths



Bennington can offer advice on any aspect of carriage driving

receive in straight lengths. None of the components are bought in, other than highly specialised items, such as braking systems and tyres.

“If you were to order a Bennington Carriage from us, there would usually be a four to eight week turnaround. There are so many factors to consider when we make a carriage for a client, from model and fit to safety and comfort. We pride ourselves in being able to produce the finest carriages, made to exacting specifications.”

“Over the years we have been asked to do many specialist commissions, including manufacturing carriages for the British Monarchy. However, one of the most exciting commissions we have ever received was to design the Cinderella Carriage for Disney Weddings in 1996. The coach is still in daily use and it's quite something. It illuminates at night, has a sculpture of two birds perched on the top of it and Suzy the mouse hitching a ride on the back. It can seat up to four people and is pulled by six grey ponies.”

Training at the Academy

Bennington offers a number of training opportunities for its customers and

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training area and grass fitness track. I am a UKCC Level 3 Driving Coach so I can offer expert tuition and advice. We offer stabling for £10 a day and can recommend good quality local accommodation, or guests can stay on site.

Plus, while you are here for training, you're more than welcome to have a look around the factory and showroom, see our carriages for yourself and find out more about how they are made. Our craftsmen love their work and will be only too happy to answer your questions.

For more information about Bennington and what the company offers, tel: 01400 281280 or visit: www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk.



Visitors can enjoy a factory tour