

More than just a wash down!

Sue Mart of Bennington Carriages gives some hints on how to look after your carriage.

With the festivities over for another year, it's a good time to think about giving your carriage a little TLC with a thorough service. Whether you are competing or pleasure driving, regular maintenance of your carriage will ensure a safe drive, better performance and even give you that competitive edge.

A good wash is the place to start. Not just so it looks clean, but also because dirt hides a multitude of problems such as rust, corrosion and metal fatigue. Grit can lead to wear and corrosion if the muddy bits are left unattended. Regular washing with a soft sponge and brush should be part of your carriage maintenance routine. Don't use anything too abrasive or high pressure jet washers or you could damage your paintwork.

Checklist

How often do you check the wheel bearings, tyres, tyre pressures (on pneumatic tyres), brake fluid, pads and discs? You should be checking these every month, especially if your carriage gets heavy use. Now is a good time to go through these in detail and replace anything that is showing signs of wear and tear.

To give your carriage a thorough service you need to check the shafts and attachments, swingle tree, quick releases, springs, paintwork and extending axle. You are looking for issues such as cracks and corrosion, misalignment

of the springs, anything 'sticking' that should be running smoothly, dryness where the part should be well lubricated and play or gaps where there shouldn't be (such as between tyre and rim). In addition you should check for metal fatigue and loose or missing nuts and screws.

If you have a two-wheeler the correct balance is critical so that the shafts float in the tugs with no pressure or weight on the horse's back, so check the screw mechanisms and the shaft attachment brackets. On a four-wheeler your service should include the delayed steering arm (if fitted), the turntable and the pole unit.

It is worth noting that the top competition carriage drivers tend to do these checks before every competition. A carriage is a major investment and withstands extensive wear and tear even if it is only used for pleasure driving. When you've put so much effort into the partnership between you and your horse, you really don't want a technical hitch with the



carriage to compromise your safety or to blow away your chance of success. Nor do you want to put yourself or your horse at risk of injury with a poorly maintained or inadequately balanced carriage.

Top: Maintenance classes at Bennington Carriages are regularly held

Bottom: How often do you check your wheels?

A helping hand from Benningtons

Bennington Carriages offer a range of servicing options for all their carriages, which is worth bearing in mind if the thought of doing it all yourself is a bit daunting. The service will be tailored to your specific carriage and can be done on a while-you-wait basis by appointment. All carriages get a full visual inspection and all major components checked over, adjusted and lubricated as necessary. Advice is also given on wear and tear items such as wheel bearings, tyres and brake pads that might need replacing.

If you want to have a go at maintaining your carriage yourself, but aren't sure where to start, or you are a novice and you want to know more about how your carriage functions, then the Bennington Carriage Maintenance Class might be for you. You can learn the fundamentals such as changing wheel bearings and brake pads, bleeding your brakes, checking for fatigue and wear and tear, as well as other essential hints and tips.

The classes take place at the Bennington Carriages' factory in Long Bennington near Newark so you get to meet the team of skilled craftsmen who built your carriage and have a look around the factory too. The class is approximately four hours long, costs £75 and includes buffet lunch, refreshments and goody bag.

Details of the class are on the Bennington website www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk (look under Driving Academy). For dates email sue@bennington.co.uk.

Also on the Bennington website (under the Carriages/Carriage Servicing and Maintenance tab) are some useful pdfs including a *Quick Glance Maintenance Checklist* and a *Guide to Servicing Brakes* and there is a link to a handy YouTube video on *How to Change Brake Pads*.

