



Are you ready for the season ahead?

Sue Mart from Bennington Carriages kicks off her new training series with some great advice on how to make sure your carriage and harness are fit for the purpose this season.

Whether you're getting ready for a full-on season of competition or enjoy driving purely for pleasure, it's essential to ensure all your equipment is in good working order. A pre-season carriage and harness check will give you peace of mind that everything is in tip-top condition, allowing you to drive safely and perform at your best. Here's what to consider.

Carriage checks

- Give your carriage a good clean to remove all the mud. It is better to do this by hand or using a hosepipe, as power washers are highly pressurised and may cause damage. Keep any leather parts, such as the seat straps, supple by applying saddle soap.
- Have a good look around your carriage to check for any obvious signs of wear and tear.
- Remove the wheels and check the bearings. If you spot any signs of rust, the bearings must be replaced. Otherwise, regrease them.
- Check the brake fluid, remove brake pads and check for wear. You don't want the metal on the brake pads touching the discs as this will score the discs and they will then need replacing (See 4). Your local mechanic or carriage manufacturer should be able to assist with this or check out the 'how to' videos on the Bennington Carriages' website.
- If your carriage has pneumatic tyres fitted, check the tyre pressure as advised by the carriage builder.
- If solid tyres are fitted, check they are secure in the channel. If they are loose, this will wear the channel.
- Check the wear of the tyres, replacing any that are worn.
- Oil all moving parts, WD40 or 3 in 1 oil are good products for this. Check all bolts are secure.

Top tips

- Remember, your carriage is a major investment and should withstand extensive wear and tear if you look after it well. Therefore, general upkeep and maintenance is imperative to ensure safety and prolonged use.
- Microfibre cloths are particularly good at removing stubborn dirt from your harness.
- Always allow leather to dry naturally away from direct sunlight and artificial heat.

1. New bearing.
2. Greased bearing.
3. Clearly damaged bearing.
4. Brake pads, badly worn to the metal and an example of how they should look.

- Follow the carriage builder's recommendations for servicing or if you don't feel confident doing this, take your carriage to a reputable mechanic or the manufacturer.
- Restock and check your dedicated carriage toolbox and order any spare parts, such as bearings and brake pads, so you are ready and prepared for the season.
- Finally, touch up any paint chips and give your carriage a good polish until it gleams. That way, you'll keep it in tip-top condition for longer.

Harness checks

- Take your harness into the warm and strip it all apart to give it a thorough clean. This will allow you the opportunity to check for any wear and tear of the parts. Pay particular attention to the buckles and stitching as these are more prone to wear and rotting. If you need to replace any parts, contact your harness supplier or saddler. While a good saddle soap can help to preserve leather for longer, try to avoid excessive use of leather oils, as too much oil can rot stitching quicker. You can find a more in-depth guide to cleaning your leather harness, on our website as detailed below.
 - On your next drive, check the harness fits correctly. Don't forget, your horse or pony may have changed shape – gained more muscle, for example – which might mean you need a larger breeching seat.
 - If your horse or pony is coming back into work after a winter off, and is on a fitness plan, check regularly for signs that the harness is rubbing. I personally like the Zilco Wool Liners for the girth, saddle, and breast collars, but any well-fitted pads will offer some protection against rubbing. Wash pads regularly to prevent a build-up of sweat and mud and make sure they are dry and securely fastened to avoid them slipping and therefore rubbing.
 - If you have any concerns over the fit of your harness, contact your local driving coach or BDS approved instructor for advice.
- *To find out more about how to maintain your carriage, or to book it in for a 'while you wait' service with us, visit: www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk or call us on 01400 281280.*



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A professional harness fitting to ensure correct fit

Join in with the fun

Keep an eye on the Bennington website for dates of training days run at the Bennington Carriage Driving Academy by Sue Mart UKCC Level 3 coach and BDS Approved Instructor. Or why not make a stay of it and come for the weekend? We offer a range of experiences, from our 'Try Carriage Driving' days for those new to the sport, to training days for more experienced drivers.

- Visit: www.benningtoncarriages.co.uk/driving-academy for more details.

