

Driving/Ground Driving I
Little Hooves 4-H Club

This is the first of several lessons leading up to driving (mini pulling a cart) and will cover the parts of harness, putting the harness on, and the "aids" (reins, whip, and voice). Parts of the harness are shown below but some of the numbers may be hard to read. Also, there are regional differences in some names such as #3, often called Blinders. The strap that holds the breeching to the metal footman's loop on the cart (not shown) is also called a holdback.

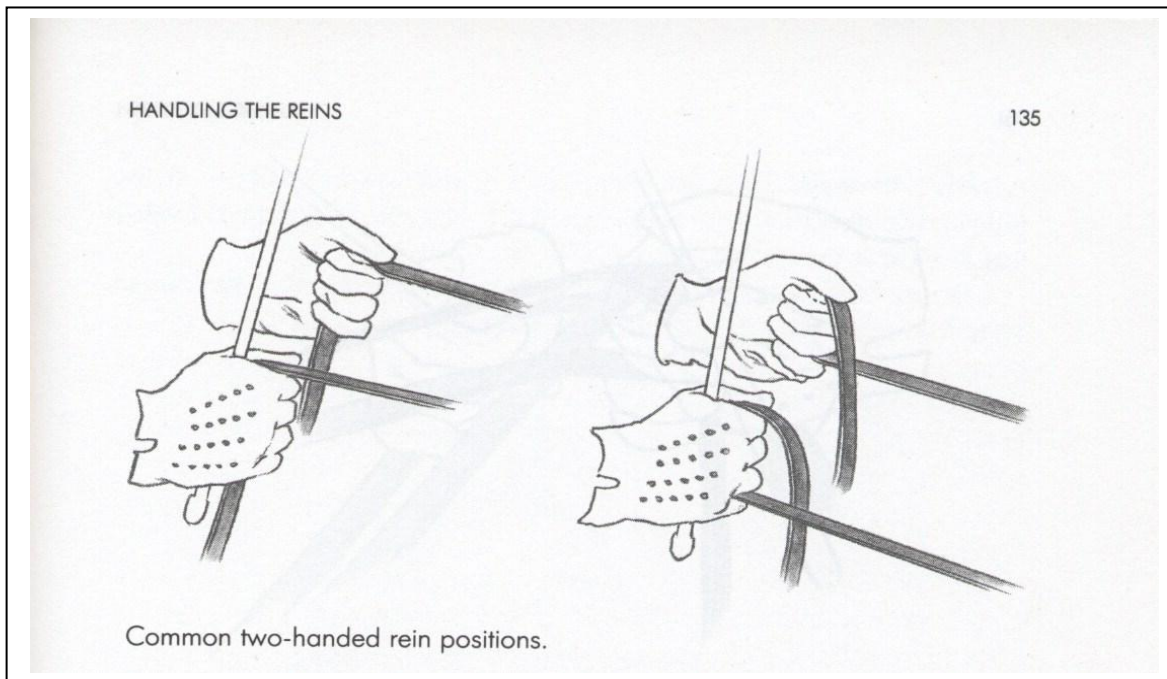


The harness is usually stored in three major parts. The saddle, girth, backstrap, and breeching are in one piece and put on first. The girth is buckled like a riding girth - loose at first and tightened gradually, then the breeching and crupper are carefully placed under the tail and the crupper is buckled. Make sure that the cupper is not tight against the underside of tail but has some free play. If holdback straps are attached and a cart won't be used, they need to be secured somehow so they don't flap. The breast plate and traces are not needed for most steps of ground driving, but are put on next if pulling a cart. The bridle is put on last, using one hand to open the horse's mouth and smoothly and carefully raising the bridle so that nothing hits an eye. The throatlatch is buckled and the reins are threaded through the terrets and attached to the bit. It is very important to have each part adjusted to fit the horse in order for him to drive comfortably. In the photo above, note the proper adjustment of the breast plate (not too high or low on the chest – just below the point where the neck meets the chest) and breeching (about the same height as the breast plate). Proper adjustment of the tugs is shown by the ends of the cart shafts ending at about the point of the horse's shoulder, the shafts are angled very slightly upward, and the traces are mostly hidden by the shafts. To avoid constant adjustment, it is a good idea for each horse to have its own harness, or at least its own bridle.

Holding the reins:

Reins are usually held one in each hand, while also carrying a whip in the right hand. The reins can enter at the top of the hand, between thumb and forefinger and exit at the bottom or enter the bottom of the hand either below the pinky or between the pinky and ring fingers, and exit at the top. If you are or will be riding, you

should probably have the reins coming up from the bottom, as that is what is used for English riding. It also places more fingers against the reins, so may give you more control. Gloves are a good idea.



If one rein has a small loop, the end of a pinky can be placed in the loop to prevent the reins from getting caught on the cart or dragging. Another option is to sit on the ends of long reins when in the cart. When holding the reins, it is important to maintain "contact" with the horse's mouth so that you don't surprise him when you use the reins to slow down or stop. There should always be a straight line from the bit to your hand (same as for riding English) and the amount of contact will depend on the horse. The goal is a light contact, with the horse accepting the feel of the reins and not tossing his head, pulling the reins through your hands, or opening his mouth.

The whip:

Unlike riding, your only "aids" when driving are the reins, your voice and a whip so the whip is important. A whip should be carried in the right hand and pointing somewhat forward and upward. If you think of the horse as 12 o'clock, the whip should point to ten o'clock and be half-way between horizontal and vertical. When using the whip, you need to either move the right rein to the left hand or be very careful not to bump the horse's mouth with the bit when you move the whip. A light tap should be all that is needed, either on the rump or near the saddle to urge him forward, at the outside shoulder to get around a corner, or on the inside near the girth to get him to bend properly. Whips often have a lash on the end to make it easier to reach the shoulder. Never flip the reins on the horse's back as an aid but always use your voice: "walk" or "walk on," "trot," "trot on," "whoa," and "easy" if the horse is scared or needs to be slowed. It is common to use the voice first and only use the reins or whip if there is no response to the voice.

Next lesson will be actual ground driving.