

Carriage driving – combined driving trials

by Karen Gruss



The marathon is a cross-country course of approximately 20 km incorporating eight natural or man-made hazards. Here is the author of the article, Karen Gruss, negotiating a hazard



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Carriage driving is a display of the elegant and graceful coaching skills of days gone by. In modern times, coaching skills are no longer seen, but the sport has progressed into combined driving trials. These are based on the three-phase ridden event. The competition consists of three phases, namely dressage, the marathon and obstacles.

The dressage phase is a test of obedience, freedom and regularity of paces and overall appearance of the equipage. The marathon, on the other hand, is a cross-country course of approximately 20 km incorporating eight natural or man-made hazards that are driven in sequence. Within the hazard there are six labelled “gates” that have to be driven in alphabetical order. The driver is

given a time allowance, after that, penalties are given. The marathon is exciting to watch, as it is the ultimate test of fitness and stamina of both horse and driver.

The obstacle phase is driven on the last day. It is a test of both fitness and obedience after the marathon. A course of 16 pairs of orange traffic cones with tennis balls balanced on top is set. The driver is given a limited clearance, calculated on the measured width of the carriage, and penalties are given for dislodging balls. The scores of all three phases are added together to determine the winner.

Carriage driving became a recognised equestrian sport in South Africa in the early 1970’s. A team has represented South Africa at two world events in Gladstone, USA and Posnan, Poland. Four drivers having been awarded their national colours. **SAH**