



A NYC carriage horse named Sunny, owned by Chateau Carriages, waits for passengers at Central Park South on 59th Street. By law, drivers are required to blanket horses while they wait for passengers in inclement weather when it gets below a certain temperature.

—photo: courtesy of Chateau Carriages

CARRIAGE HORSES ... THE CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

by Elaine Joseph

Big Money & Big Ambitions

In December of 2010, I began an article about the New York City (NYC) Carriage Horse Controversy for the Spring 2011 issue of *The Draft Horse Journal*. In the article, I gave what I thought was fair audience to different sides of the controversy: NYC carriage industry spokesman, Stephen Malone; Dr. Pamela Corey, the chief equine vet of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), which oversees the horses by charter; and Laura Eldridge, who was, at the time, the Executive Director of New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets (NYCLASS) [she was shortly thereafter replaced].

NYCLASS was founded by Stephen Nislick, a real-estate mogul and owner of high caliber hunter-jumpers. Its co-founder, Ed Sayers,

is President and CEO of the ASPCA—on a side note: Ed Sayers announced his resignation from the ASPCA in July 2012, expecting to step down at the end of the year to pursue “other opportunities in the nonprofit arena.” If you think there may be a conflict of interest here—Ed Sayers being in charge of the organization that is, by charter, responsible for overseeing the carriage horses, and co-founding an organization to get rid of them—it only gets worse. NYCLASS is a 501(c)4 non-profit organization. The relevance of NYCLASS’ non-profit status is this: as a 501(c)4, they are able to use substantial, non-taxable funds procured through donations for the purpose of lobbying. When researching the legal definition of “lobbying,” it was found, under the Internal Revenue Code, that “lobbying is support of or opposition to,

By law, all NYC carriage horses must be registered with the Department of Health. They are each given a four-digit identification, which is stamped into a front hoof. They need to be re-registered, and the hoof re-stamped annually, for as long as they are working in the city. This horse has, incidentally, since taken up residence on a private farm in New England.

or a call to action on, specific legislation.” Specific legislation refers to the complete range of proposed bills and legislative enactments, at federal, state, and local levels, from constitutional amendments to local zoning ordinances. NYCLASS’ “cause,” as I reported in my original *DHJ* article, is to eliminate the carriage horses. The 68 carriage medallions (licenses), according to NYCLASS, will be replaced with 68 replica antique electric cars, estimated to cost as much as \$175,000 apiece. NYCLASS is actively fundraising to produce the first





In spite of the fact that the NYC Mounted Police Unit's horses are stabled in Manhattan and work day-after-day in the same traffic and weather conditions as the city's carriage horses, there is very little public protest against their use.

—photo by Terry Joseph

prototype, but it has yet to be built. Instead, \$12,500 of donations went into building a two-foot long, table-top model introduced to the world in October 2011. In order to implement these cars as a tourist attraction in Central Park, NYCLASS insists the carriage horses **MUST** go. In order to make the horses go, a bill, A997-2013, was introduced into New York legislation in 2010. Besides prohibiting the horse-drawn carriage trade in NYC, A997-2013, should it be passed, would put into law the where, when, how and to whom the private carriage horse owner would be required to "dispose of" his or her horse. The language of A997-2013 reads, in part, as follows:

§ 17-3[29]30 Disposition of licensed horse.

a. The department shall be notified of the transfer of ownership or other disposition of a licensed horse within [ten] five days thereafter. Such notice shall include the date of disposition and [if sold in New York City,] the name and address of the buyer or other transferee and such other information as the commissioner may prescribe.

b. A horse shall not be sold or disposed of except in a humane manner, which, for the purposes of this subchapter shall mean one of the following:

1. The owner shall sell or donate the horse to a private individual who signs an assurance that the horse will not be sold and shall be kept solely as a companion animal and not employed in another horse-drawn carriage

business or as a work horse and will be cared for humanely for the remainder of the horse's natural life; or

2. The owner shall sell or donate the horse to a duly incorporated animal sanctuary or duly incorporated animal protection organization whose president or executive director signs an assurance that the horse will not be sold and shall be kept solely as a companion animal and not employed in another horse-drawn carriage business and will be cared for humanely for the remainder of the horse's natural life.

c. Records indicating the name, address and telephone number of the private individual, duly incorporated animal sanctuary or duly incorporated animal protection



A NYC carriage horse waits outside Clinton Park Stables on 52nd Street. By law, NYC carriage horses must always wear identifying tags on them, usually displayed on their bridles.

—photo by Terry Joseph

organization to whom the horse was sold or donated together with the assurance specified above shall be sent by the owner to the department within five days after such sale or donation. A copy of such record shall also be maintained at the stable.

Let me repeat:

"The owner shall sell or donate the horse to a private individual who signs an assurance that the horse will not be sold and shall be kept solely as a companion animal and not employed in another horse-drawn carriage business or as a work horse..." Can any other horse owner deny the implications of the language of A997-2013 on the future of private horse ownership? Does

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By law, NYC carriage horses must spend a minimum of five weeks outside of the city. Many spend months at a time "on vacation" at farms in Pennsylvania, upstate New York and Connecticut. Here, one of the horses from Chateau Carriages goes on vacation on their farm in Pennsylvania.

—photo courtesy of Chateau Carriages





Claims by Animal Rights Activists that many international cities such as Paris have "banned the cruel horse-drawn carriage industry" are repeatedly used in their propaganda against the trade. It is an attempt to convince the public of the need to ban it in American cities. This photo, taken in May of 2012 at the Eiffel Tower, proves their claim about Paris, at least, to be false.

—photo by Brandon Taelor Aviram

Carriage Horses continued

anyone else see this bill as potentially gross misconduct of legislative power over the rights of the individual property owner?

Should this bill be passed and carriage horses banned from NYC, the four existing NYC carriage stables will be emptied of their living breathing NYC icons. Real-estate moguls will have opportunity to pounce on the properties on Manhattan's west side, considered by the city's Department of City Planning as the "last frontier in Manhattan-Hudson Yards." The "Hudson Yard Redevelopment Project" has the potential of adding 111 million square feet of new, prime, sparkling space to Manhattan's west side. Is it a coincidence that two of the four carriage stables are within the boundaries of this very ambitious project? Is it coincidence the other two are just blocks away from its boundaries? The 19th century structures—built not as tenement buildings or warehouses as the animal rights people continually mislead the public into believing, but as actual stables—will be purchased and demolished with the intention of filling their golden footprint and lofty air space with flashy offices, posh apartments, retail centers, parking garages ...

A Horse Named Charlie

On October 23, 2011, I received a frantic phone call from a close friend and carriage operator in NYC. A horse he was sending to the park that day

to them for a necropsy. The necropsy, performed by veterinarians at Cornell University, did not give any definitive answers as to why or how Charlie died. What they did find was that Charlie had a cracked tooth, and stomach ulcers. According to the press release published by the ASPCA on October 31, 2011, "the gross necropsy report indicates that Charlie was not a healthy horse and was likely suffering from pain due to pronounced chronic ulceration of the stomach and a fractured tooth." The press release goes on to say, "According to Pamela Corey, DVM, director of equine veterinary services for the ASPCA's Humane Law Enforcement department, Charlie was not healthy for a career in an urban carriage horse business. We are very concerned that Charlie was forced to work in spite of painful maladies."

Fearing for her professional reputation within the veterinary community, Dr. Corey published a retraction just days after the original press release was made. She stated that her supervisors pushed her, under "intense pressure" into reporting "slanted conclusions" about Charlie's death, with the intention

named Charlie had just suddenly inexplicably died on the street not far from the stable. Within hours, a photograph taken by an animal rights activist of the robust grey gelding lying in the street emerged and went viral over the Internet. The ASPCA went to the stable and interrogated the owner, convincing him to relinquish Charlie's body

of generating sympathy and outcry from a public uneducated about horses, in order to help facilitate their goal of a carriage horse ban. Dr. Pamela Corey was suspended without pay for her retraction of her initial statements, and responded in kind by filing a complaint against the ASPCA with the State's Attorney General's Office.

Hack Line, Front Line

On the frontlines known as Central Park South, the carriage horse operators line up day after day with their horses and carriages to make a living for themselves and their families. Typically, these horses are drafts or draft-crosses. Standardbreds are also used. Most of the city's 210+ carriage horses are well-fed, sleek and quiet in nature. Totally accustomed to the hustle and bustle of this great city, they stand with hind leg cocked, head drooping, napping in the sunshine. It takes a unique horse to live and work in this city, and the New Yorkers are brilliant at finding them. The ones that remain uptight, unable to safely adjust, are resold outside of the city, often back to the same Mennonite or Amish where most originally come from. Unable to trace licensed horses once out of the city, the animal rights people claim the horses suspiciously "disappear," accusing the drivers of selling them to slaughter. The very nature of the carriage horses being quiet and unflappable tends to outrage the animal rights activists, too. They are described as "sentient beings" that are always "depressed"



Oreo, the Paint made famous recently on the Internet, with Pam Rickenbach and Paul Moshimer of Blue Star Equiculture. Oreo was retired to Blue Star, and has since been adopted by Randy and Mindy Levine. Mr. Levine is the Yankees President.

—photo courtesy of BSE

and "exhausted." Horses tripping are horses "collapsing." Every weekend, groups organize protests at the hack line, screaming and hollering at passengers riding by in the carriages, hurling insults, making children cry. Their verbal assaults at the drivers include a propensity for ethnic and racial slurs (many of the drivers are Irish and Turkish immigrants), and the response from these hardened New Yorkers is often, as you can imagine, equally harsh. In August 2012, a well-known activist was arrested on assault charges for kicking a carriage driver. In December, a female carriage driver was accosted in Times Square very late at night when the rubber came off the wheel of her carriage, and a "pedestrian" grabbed her horse and wouldn't release it. Coincidentally or not, a well-known activist was right there when it happened, and their 15-minute video of the assault appeared on Youtube. When the weekly protests are all over, the activists, from groups such as the Coalition to Ban Horse-Drawn Carriages, WAR (Win Animal Rights), and NYCLASS, post videos and pictures and misleading statements about the drivers and their "poor abused" horses. Monetary donations are expected to "stop the abuse" of carriage horses. Literature against the trade is passed out to tourists staying in the world-class hotels around Central Park. NYCLASS holds star-studded fundraisers to "save" the horses, duping even high profile companies into donating to the cause. (Straight Arrow Products, Inc., makers of Mane N' Tail products, is one such example. After having been misled into donating for the "cause," the company publically recanted their support of NYCLASS when industry supporters gave them evidence of the facts surrounding this campaign). NYCLASS has its followers convinced that once the trade is abolished, the horses will be sent to "loving sanctuaries," where they will live out the rest of their days unchained from the cruel carriages, but they have yet to offer any proof that such able sanctuaries actually exist.

"Social Media is ruining the reputation of the carriage horse industry," says Chantel Semanchik, who spent eight years driving carriages in NYC, and is now the owner of Cape May Carriages in Cape May, New Jersey. "In just the last year, I have

really seen attitudes changing for the worse. People come up to me and say, 'Your horses are so well cared for, not like the horses in NYC.' I say, 'Have you ever actually been to NYC?' The answer is usually no, but that they read about them on the Internet. I treat it as an opportunity to help educate people. I explain that the animal rights activists protesting the horses are fanatical. I explain to them, that when the NYC horses are gone, they will protest your riding horses and

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your family pets, next." She continues, "Where the protesters were once just there, protesting the trade, Social Media has made it personal, and the attacks are getting worse and worse".

Making Good of a Bad Situation


In April 2012, Blue Star Equiculture (BSE) of Palmer, Massachusetts, became the official retirement facility for the Horse and Carriage Association of NYC. During a special event called "Clip

Clop NY," designed as both an open house for the industry and a benefit for BSE, industry spokesman Stephen Malone publically announced the retirement of Paddy, a Percheron in his early twenties. BSE has since received and adopted out five other NYC carriage horses. The list includes Oreo, the infamous Paint that was photographed struggling with police officers unskilled at handling horses, after he had bolted from the Columbus Circle area of Central Park South, ditch-

ing his driver and passenger-laden carriage along the way. Photographs now routinely used by the protestors show Oreo struggling on the street—a poster child for those who think the carriage trade is inhumane. Oreo, according to Pamela Rickenbach, a co-founder of BSE, has since been adopted out to the wife of the president of the Yankees baseball team.

Pam says, "We have also cared for two other retired carriage horses from NY, although their original owner was not a member of the association." Not all medallion and/or horse owners in NYC belong to the Association. Along with the New Yorkers, BSE has taken in, and adopted out, four horses from Philadelphia, and numerous other draft horses, riding horses and ponies.

When asked why she thinks the animal rights movement against the New York carriage horses is so injurious to the carriage industry as a whole, Pam replied, "The blatant misinformation, and the manipulation of an unknowing and concerned public further destroys the connection we have with our equine partners. Horses have been working in productive partnership alongside humanity for thousands of years now. It is only in the last century that we have disconnected from our dependence on them as the prime movers of early America. Most carriage industry people care deeply about the welfare of their horses and hold valuable information about what is good or bad for their equine partners. Unfortunately, public perception has been so colored with misinformation that the carriage industry leaders are not taken seriously or allowed to speak about their own issues. This has caused an 'us' against 'them' mentality among the advocates for both sides of the issue."

Why is the issue of New York's carriage trade so important to the rest of us? Fact of the matter is this issue isn't just about New York carriage horses ... or the commercial carriage industry. At stake are our rights as horse owners. It is about our right to work with horses, to live with, and make a living from our horses. The groups working against the trade are relentless. When the animal rights activists are done with New York, they will be at your door next. If you remember nothing else, remember this: What happens in New York, trickles down everywhere, opening up the door to a negative image of working horses *everywhere*. 

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