



CARRIAGE HORSE CONTROVERSY: A MODERN DAY DILEMMA

by Elaine Juska Joseph

In 1877, Anna Sewell published her one and only novel, *Black Beauty*. It was one of the first novels to be told through the eyes of an animal in autobiographical style and was influential in enacting new laws to protect the working animal from unnecessary cruelty and neglect.

Very few need an introduction to the story of *Black Beauty*. Chronicling the life of a Victorian Age carriage horse through good times and bad, to this day it leaves quite an impression on the reader. Because of the novel and subsequent films, even the least knowledgeable layman knows the "evil of the bearing rein," ... the "cruelty of long hours in harness," and the "devastating effects of cobblestones and difficult terrain on a horse's legs." In spite of the many human characters in the novel that lead hard-working lives, caring for their horses with the utmost respect and diligence, it is the cruel, heartless teamster that leaves the biggest impression. Yet Miss Sewell, herself physically

handicapped from an accident as a teenager, was not only concerned about the way working animals were being treated in her lifetime—she had the utmost sympathy and concern for the working class people whose lives were affected by the cruelty of society as a whole, with its lack of compassion for the weak and less fortunate.

Considering where you are reading this, there is a very good chance that you use the horse and carriage for pleasure, for work or as your sole means of daily conveyance. Some of you may enjoy showing your teams in harness. Many of you use horses in harness to plow your fields, plant and cultivate your crops or to otherwise "make a living."

Some of you bring your horses into urban areas via truck and trailer to work in hack lines or to do weddings and other specialty carriage rides for the public's enjoyment. Still others, and by contrast it is very few of you, live and work in some of the world's largest cities, alongside your working-class urban horses. But for all of you who fit into either of these



Visitors enjoying a horse-drawn carriage ride in Central Park.



A protestor holds up a poster depicting past horse and carriage accidents in the city to try and scare off potential customers.



Brandon Taelor Aviram photos

Carriages on Central Park South.

categories, this mode of transportation is not antiquated, as the animal rights activists would like the world to believe, and you'll do everything in your power to keep your lifestyle intact.

The question has arisen as of late, however, as to the "appropriateness" of the modern day horse and carriage, particularly in the larger cities. Animal rights groups and other organizations are trying hard to pass legislation in numerous cities that would outright ban the industry. The trouble with large cities is that what happens there could eventually trickle down everywhere. If it becomes illegal to drive a horse and carriage in the city, will it someday become inappropriate to drive one through smaller towns or on country back roads or in the show ring or your back yard? For a select group of highly-opinionated people, working the horse in harness is, quite simply, an unacceptable and cruel practice, anywhere, anytime.

Activists & Hack Lines

New York City is a great place to visit. Broadway musicals or off-off-Broadway plays; eating at world-class restaurants or in ethnic corner delis; shopping at Sak's Fifth Avenue or in a "secret room" full of knock-

offs in Chinatown. New York has something for everyone—including horse-drawn carriage rides, and the industry's persistent protesters. Nearly every weekend, groups of animal rights activists can be seen hanging out at Central Park South, placards and posters in hand, grimacing at and berating potential carriage customers. Buzzwords and catch phrases abound here, whether the individual knows what they are talking about or not. The protesters will tell you that these horses live a "miserable nose-to-tailpipe existence," and that the horses are "depressed," "forced to work as slaves" and not permitted to "do the things that come naturally to horses," such as interact with each other in a herd or roll after a hard day's work. The animal rights activists (ARAs) will tell you that "there is a high incidence of horses bolting into traffic," causing horrific accidents and resulting in death and injury, and will show you decades old pictures to back up their claim. "In New York City, there have been three carriage horses die from accidents in the past 25 years," says Stephen Malone, a second generation, Irish-American horseman who has been making his living here in the industry since 1987. "One such accident occurred after a horse was electrocuted by an accidentally electrified

manhole cover and was put down afterwards because of its injuries," he explains. "There are currently 215 active carriage horses and 68 carriages in the city. Every day, these carriages go back and forth through the city. So, those statistics really aren't that deplorable, given the number of carriages in the streets every day without incident." Stephen continues, "Contrary to what the ARAs will tell you, what the activists think are issues with carriage horses in the city, are not issues at all." The examples are almost limitless. "They continually make the claim, for instance, that there is no drinking water for the horses at the park. The ARAs will post photographs and videos on the Internet of the permanent water troughs in the park that are shut off in the winter (December through March), filled with snow and garbage, accusing us of not watering our horses while they are working. The ARAs claim outright that we 'force' our horses to work in a dehydrated state each day. What they don't show you in these pictures and videos," he continues, "is the portable water trough on Central Park West that we pay to have manned each and every day, through each shift, in order to get our horses fresh water. This is just one example of the many, many lies

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Brandon Taelor Aviram photo

Carriage Horse Controversy continued

these activists are spreading about our industry. When I started driving carriages in 1987," he says, "the activists were there, but they were not as diligent as they are now. The Internet is making things so much worse. Every Tom, Dick and Harry can open a blog about our industry, spread untruths and not have to answer to anyone. There is an amazing amount of ignorance perpetuated by these activists."

The Role of the ASPCA

"We respond to every complaint about the carriage horses," says Dr. Pamela Corey, the Director of Equine Veterinarian Services of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' Humane Law Enforcement Department (The ASPCA voluntarily oversees the carriage industry in New York City). With adequate information, the officers can go either to the hack lines or to the stables and investigate a complaint. "Unfortunately, we feel as though we are stuck in the middle sometimes. Complaints come in, but they are often vague." Calling in about a tired brown horse on a black carriage, for example, just isn't enough information. "The city regulates the carriages and horses. Each carriage has a license plate, and the driver must log in and log out every day. By the license plate we can monitor which horse was out during the time frame in question."

The city routinely monitors all aspects of the trade. According to Dr. Corey, "The weather is carefully monitored, for example. Snowstorms are a big concern because the stopping power of cars is diminished in such storms." The ASPCA has the power to suspend all carriage rides based on the temperature, too. 18 degrees

or lower in winter, 90 degrees or above in summer and the horses are required to go in. "This past summer was particularly bad, temperature-wise," she claims, with approximately 50 days reaching above the maximum temperature. Dr. Corey states that although they do sometimes see some abuses, the majority of the city's horses are in good condition. "In 2010," she says, "we did not see a lot of lameness or sores. On the afternoons that protestors congregate at the hack lines, we will get complaints that the horses look 'sad and tired', or 'lame.' But," she admits, "we usually find that the condition of the horse is normal for its breed and age." Most of the carriage horses in New York City are drafts and draft crosses, with a few Standardbreds as well. "Sometimes," she says, "a routine inspection of a horse may bring on a suspension. We just want to see the driver do the right thing in caring for the horse. Very rarely," she says, "do we ever see any gross abnormalities or lameness in any of the carriage horses."

Although the city regulations regarding carriage horses have improved over the years (their most recent overhaul was in early 2010), Dr. Corey thinks the changes could have been even better. For example, regulations now require that each city carriage horse receive a minimum of five weeks vacation time from the city. Most horses are sent to vacation on Amish farms in Pennsylvania. "We



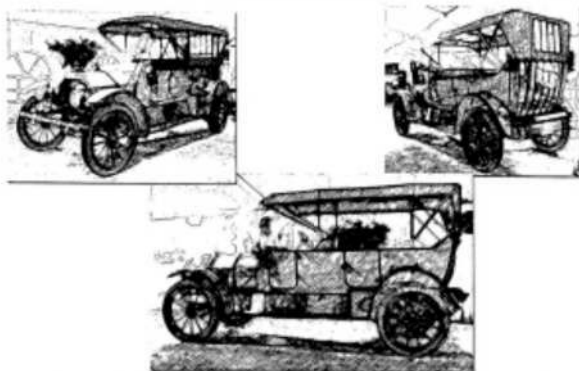
Dr. Pamela Corey of the ASPCA.
—courtesy of the ASPCA

would have not necessarily opted for five full consecutive weeks off," she says. "That, in and of itself, causes problems." Stephen Malone says, "most of the 'issues' we are accused of by the animal rights activists have been addressed in the bill 'Intro. 35' that was passed in Spring 2010. They say our horses don't get

turn-out—our horses now receive a minimum of five full weeks vacation in the country. They claim our horses are not properly cared for, yet we are now required to have our horses vet-checked twice a year. They say our drivers are not properly trained, but we have implemented an 80-hour apprenticeship program. If the temperatures drop below 55 degrees and it is raining, the horses get raincoats! Brakes are now mandatory on all carriages, as is reflective tape to make them more visible at night. The ARAs still, to this very day, claim that our stables have standing stalls, restricting our horses' rest." The fact that many experienced horsemen use standing stalls for their working horses in rural settings obviously has no influence on the ARAs opinion of them. Stephen continues, "In fact, NONE of our stables now utilize standing stalls—all the box stalls are a minimum of 60 square feet. And even though we were not required to put in sprinkler systems in the event of fire, we voluntarily installed them in the stables that didn't already have them." One of the biggest changes made when this bill passed was the

mandated fare increase, from \$34 to \$50 per ride. "We are accused of 'lining our pockets with money made off the backs of our horses'," says Stephen. "What the ARAs either can't understand, or refuse to acknowledge, is that the money we make directly affects the total care of our horses. It is simple economics. The ASPCA did not support this bill," he says incredulously of Intro 35. In fact, the ASPCA web site claims that the passing of the bill and the rate increase did nothing more than "reward bad behavior," and in spite of Dr. Corey's assertions that "most of the city's carriage horses are in good condition," an ASPCA press release claims the bill did nothing "to enhance the integrity of the carriage industry" or improve the "inhumane treatment of the horses." "What we have here," says Stephen, "is a political game. The president of the ASPCA, Ed Sayers, is in bed with another organization, New Yorkers for Clean, Livable and Safe Streets [NYCLASS]. There is an agenda here

"ECO-CARRIAGE" PROPOSAL - PROTOTYPE -



The above illustrations are the electric replica antique cars proposed by NYCLASS to replace horse-drawn carriages in New York City. —courtesy of NYCLASS

much larger than the welfare of the carriage horses," he claims.

NYCLASS

"We are a non-profit organization, founded jointly in early 2009 by Steve Nislick (the CEO of Edison Properties, LLC) and the ASPCA," says Laura Eldridge, the Executive Director of NYCLASS. "Steve lives on Central Park West and was spurred

into action by the condition of the carriage horses he often saw near his home," she says. "The desire in founding NYCLASS was to get the horses off the streets and retire them from pulling carriages." Because the APSCA has long been in favor of a ban of the carriage industry in the city, Laura says they were interested in what Steve was proposing as an alternative tourist attraction—replacing the carriages with electric, antique replica cars. "NYCLASS is opposed to the carriage industry in New York," says Laura, "because we believe there is no humane way for an animal to labor under the conditions you find in midtown-Manhattan." Laura claims that market

research shows that many tourists would be interested in riding in the cars rather than the carriages, offering a larger range for travel to tourist hot-spots as well. "I don't think these cars will take off," says Stephen Malone of the proposal. "First of all, the by-laws won't allow for the cars in the park," he says. "Secondly, people don't want more cars in the street! On the other

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hand, I say, bring them on, but not to replace the carriages—I'll work alongside them! I think the truth is, people won't be interested in riding in cars. They tried it once with a trolley, and that failed. People love the horses."

First Amendment Rights vs. Fundamental Rights

Providing the weather is not hindering the trade, horse-drawn carriages line Central Park South, from Columbus Circle to Fifth Avenue, seven days a week. A popular tourist spot, people from all over the world come to Central Park to experience its beauty by horse and carriage. Says Stephen, "We are legally licensed to make our living in this manner. The city regulates us.

We are ambassadors to the city, and hopefully the tourist that rides with us will leave the city with a favorable experience. But the ARAs, they start waving placards in the tourists' faces, jumping into carriages while they (the tourists) are sitting there, degrade the customers by calling them horrible names and making all kinds of accusations against them and us. The protestors are out of control! The harassment we receive is so far over the line." So far over the line, in fact, that the carriage trade in New York City is now backed by the Teamsters Union, Local 553. "The Teamsters felt that we operators were being used as a political football," explains Stephen.

Numerous ARA organizations abound in New York City, and even more are national and international in

scope. Some, and they will remain nameless here, are listed by the FBI as domestic terrorists. Many groups and individuals are very vocal on web sites, blogs and social media sites, letting loose with what should be considered cyber bullying. They regularly hold open protests at the carriage stands, not just in New York, but in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago and other locations. They promote protests in front of the carriage drivers' homes as well, often accosting the driver's families. Says Stephen, "We call in the police, and even with the police there, they continue to harass our customers and us, claiming first amendment rights."

It is not only an unattractive scene, but a dangerous one. "Where is the ASPCA during these protests? Not here protecting our horses from these people, that is for sure."

"The truth is," says Dr. Corey on the issue, "the horse and carriage trade in New York is a public relations nightmare." Unlike the carriage trade, the various animal rights groups not only enjoy political and social support, but also find financial backing. Still others, independent of the larger, organized associations, seem to get political and financial support in spite of their publicized disdain for the ASPCA and its law enforcement officers. With this support comes the ability to advertise against the carriage industry in magazines and other promotional material targeted directly at New York's tourist industry. Many carriage operators in New York are well aware of this "public relations" fiasco, and are currently making self-regulated improvements amongst themselves to help give the outsider a better perception of the carriage trade.

"At the end of the day" says Stephen, "we still have to carry on and make a living, even while being threatened."

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