

HORSEMEN'S *YANKEE* PEDLAR

VOLUME 47 • NUMBER 12

FEATURES



42 The Standardbred

Meet this versatile breed whose talent, heart and temperament make them the ideal choice for everything from endurance and eventing to trail riding and pleasure driving.

46 The Abboud Family

Boston native and fashion designer Joseph Abboud and his family share how the horse world has enriched their lives.

50 The Art of Sleighting

Explore the history and romance of this time-honored tradition and learn how some New Englanders are keeping the sport alive today.

54 Horse Lover's Holiday Shopping Guide

From homemade horse treats to charm bracelets to tack trunks, find the perfect gift for everyone on your list.

AFFILIATE NEWS

SUZANNE GEIGER

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 88 New England Horsemen's Council | 106 Friesian Horse Council of New England | 124 Rhode Island Driving Club |
| 90 Connecticut Horse Shows Association | 106 Maine Horse Association | 133 American Saddlebred Assoc. of Maine |
| 92 Bay State Trail Riders Association | 108 Eastern Connecticut Draft Horse Association | 162 Connecticut Dressage & Combined Training Association |
| 94 Northeast Colonial Spanish Horse Club | 108 Northwest Connecticut Draft Horse Association | 163 Southern New Hampshire Dressage & Combined Training Association |
| 96 Yankee Walkers, Gaited Horses of NE | 110 Yankee Miniature Horse Club | 168 National Barrel Horse Association MA01 |
| 98 West Greenwich Horseman's Association | 112 Maine Miniature Horse Club | 169 National Barrel Horse Association MA02 |
| 100 Standardbred Pleasure Horse Organization of Massachusetts | 114 Colonial Miniature Horse Club | 169 Connecticut Ranch Horse Association |
| 102 Aquidneck Island Horseman's Assoc. | 118 Massachusetts Carriage & Driving Society | 170 Massachusetts Six Shooters |
| 102 Tri-State Horsemen's Association | 122 Saratoga Driving Association | 172 New England Pinto Horse Association |
| 104 Northeast Friesian Horse Club | 122 Colonial Carriage and Driving Society | |
| 104 Connecticut Trail Riders Association | | |

The Art of Sleighing

A Winter Wonderland, 19th Century Style

BY ELAINE KEELEY

It is January 1894, and a substantial amount of snowfall covers the city of New York. The mad rush of enthusiastic sleigh drivers creates a mess of Sixth and Seventh Avenues before the light rollers can roll the streets.

Central Park, however, resplendent with fresh snow on its gentle slopes, presents itself with good footing. The morning hours become hectic with daredevil horsemen and their fast trotters put to Portland Cutters. Designed for speed, the Portland Cutter has, by this time, become the standard two-passenger sleigh throughout the United States and Canada. These lightweight vehicles, painted in harmonizing colors, have curved dashers, thinly curved one-piece runners and delicate spreaders. As noon arrives, so do the "downtowners" and their nondescript, primitive box-sided tub sleighs, milk and grocery sleighs, and bulging eight-seaters called "New-Englanders." As late afternoon approaches, however,

high society flocks to the park in their considerably more stylish turnouts. Colors such as dark green, ultramarine blue or black make up most of the sleigh bodies, many curvaceous and refined. These sleighs are delicately striped with lines of gold or gold-leaf, black, and an even finer line of a lighter version of the body color. Depending on the sleigh design, dashers are either straight and high, with silver wire screens at the top to protect the driver from flying snow and ice, or curved like the necks of swans for the same purpose. Decorative elements such as eagle head mountings in brass or silver, intricately carved body mouldings, and horsehair plumes in colors to complement the vehicle add drama to the entire package. Gentle sleigh bells adorn the high-stepping horses, some driven in pairs, others four-up, while

their owners sit snug under fur lap robes of the highest quality, their feet warmed by brass foot warmers loaded with hot coals. Barouche and Victoria styled sleighs, with intricate and delicate truss work, seem to be a favorite choice of the wealthy. Such finery makes the pedestrians and skaters on the lakes that dot the parkscape take notice—more importantly, so do fellow

society members parading about in their own sleighs.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, literally hundreds of sleighs could be seen in Central Park on a single winter day during the Victorian era, and people would come from great distances, traveling through harsh conditions, just to witness this magnificent spectacle.



A photo from January 1908 showing a four-passenger bob sleigh and a pair of horses. Note how the sleigh's occupants are dressed: heavy mittens, heavy coats, lap robes, hats and goggles.



LISA CENIS

Preserving a Romantic Notion

In spite of the grand picture left to us by newspaper accounts and Currier & Ives prints, sleighing, as a means of transportation, was not a lighthearted endeavor. If the proper precautions weren't taken, people and horses could lose their lives under the severe conditions winter dropped on the pre-mechanized world. Horses needed specific shoeing to prevent them from slipping on ice and to keep snow from balling up under their feet, which is very dangerous during travel as well as for long-term soundness. Those that traveled by sleigh needed to keep warm, and for long periods of time, to prevent frostbite and hypothermia—hence the popularity of heavy fur coats, heavy wool lap robes and carpets, and the use of footwarmers. Having the right sleigh for the job at hand was equally as important. The fancy, delicate sleighs enjoyed by the wealthy in such cities as New York and Boston would simply break apart in coarse, rural landscapes. Although sleighs, mostly cutters, two seaters, and large bobsleds, continue to be made by modern day manufacturers, those

that properly restore original antique sleighs have earned a considerable amount of respect in the contemporary driving community. "Typically," says Ken Harris, a craftsman from Colchester, Conn., "it takes me about 150 hours to restore a sleigh the size of a swell body Albany Cutter." This may include body reconstruction, painting, striping and upholstering. "I try to restore my sleighs with historically accurate paint colors and designs," continues Ken. As with carriage restoration, "it is important to use colors that were prominent to the era of the individual sleigh." Likewise, he upholsters the sleigh in fabrics such as velvet, mohair, or wool broadcloth. These types of materials were overwhelmingly preferred over leather, because they would help to keep the passengers warm. Another important aspect to sleigh restoration is the use of accurate wood types. "Hickory or ash was most often used for the runners and body; poplar made up most of the panels of the sleigh. Oak is no good; the acid in this type of wood corrodes the metalwork on the sleigh." Although sleighs in all conditions,

original and restored, are relatively easy to find at auctions or through dealers, the impressive, intricate sleighs of the upper class are extremely rare and are coveted by museums and private collectors. "People who have [sleigh] collections have a real love affair with sleighs," muses Ken. Judging him by his meticulous and artful restoration work, it is safe to say that Ken Harris, too, is smitten by the timeless beauty of sleighs.

Sleighing into the 21st Century

Suzanne Geiger and her husband, Gib, operate a commercial sleigh ride, farm stand, and bed & breakfast business from Mountain Valley Farm in Waitsfield, Vt. As picturesque as the

Gib Geiger taking tourists for a sleigh ride with his Belgian team in his four-passenger bob sleigh, piano box design.





Alyse Aubin driving Sweet Prince to a 3/4 size Cutter. Note the line of three shaft bells on the shafts at the horse's hindquarters.

name implies, with terrain just as up and down as it sounds, the sleigh trails must be groomed on a daily basis during the winter season, which for them lasts from November through March. The sleigh ride business offers some uniquely trying conditions for the Geigers and others in the industry. "Lousy trail conditions make us very nervous," reports Suzanne. "Most group sleighs are built for level sleigh tracks, and they can be heavy and large, to hold a lot of people. It is easy [for

the horses] to pull on the level," she says, but not "up and down long slopes." Not only do the slopes create a dangerous possibility for tipping over, the Geigers are realizing that, as the years progress, such strenuous work is taking its toll on their aging horses. Now, the Geigers no longer use the heavy bobsleds, but put their horses to the smaller two-seater or antique cutter they own, although cutters, too, present a downside. "For us on the hills and uneven trails, we prefer the bob sleighs rather than the cutters because the bobs can run separate from front to rear, running up and over things and taking their own



Bob Koopman driving Lionheart to a rare Canadian sleigh called a "Hammel Speeder," which was designed specifically for speed. The runners are 52" apart in order to stabilize it around corners.

stand what is involved." On the other hand, Suzanne concludes, "it is so satisfying on those crystal clear days when the snow is glistening and the visitors are so thrilled, getting that once-in-a-lifetime experience. We love that!"

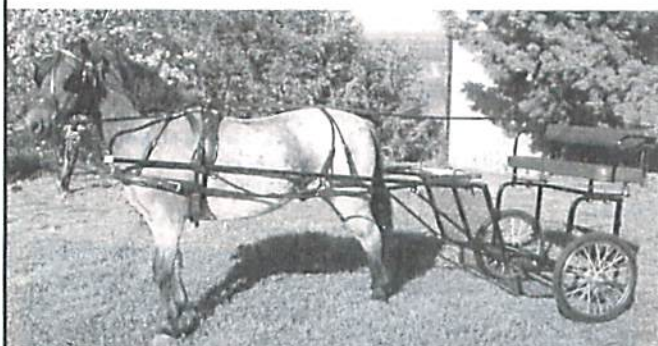
Regional Sleigh Rallies

"This is such a peaceful sport," says Alyse Aubin of Sutton, Mass. "The sound of all the sleigh bells jingling when we get together at a sleigh rally is, for me, the most gratifying thing. Even without bells, just the sound the runners make through the snow is so beautiful." Sleigh rallies, even when well planned, have the dubious disadvantage of being dependent on very specific weather patterns, and many have been known to fall victim to last-minute cancellations. Here is a small list of associations and museums in New England that make an honest attempt to hold sleigh rallies each winter. Visit their websites for information and contact numbers.

The Winter Classic at Orleton Farm, Stockbridge, Mass., sponsored by the Colonial Carriage & Driving Society, www.colonialcarriage.org. Skyline Farm, North Yarmouth, Maine www.skylinefarm.org. Waters Farm, West Sutton, Ma., www.watersfarm.com. Winter Sleigh Driving Series, South Woodstock, Vt., sponsored by the GMHA, www.gmhainc.org.

course to meet the uneven terrain." Sue adds, "Our small, single-horse cutter is absolutely gorgeous and fun to drive, but only in perfect snow conditions." Such conditions include the right kind of snow, fluffy and light, as well as the right amount. About six inches is the ideal—much more and it can be drudgery for the horse unless properly rolled, any less and the runners hit bare ground. What lies under the snow, however, can be the most ominous. Any amount of snow over a sheet of ice is a guaranteed wreck. "There is a very good reason why sleigh travel is, for the most part, a thing of the past," explains Suzanne. "We often get calls from people staying at a hotel over by the ski area, wanting us to pick them up in a sleigh and take them to a restaurant six miles away." Simply impractical. The lack of direct experience the average person has in the world of the horse and sleigh creates a lack of knowledge of the reality of not only what sleighing is like in modern day terms, but what sleigh travel was really like before the early 1900s. "Sleighing is something that most people see only in the movies. They truly don't under-

Drive to
www.horsecart.com



- *Perfect for training or pleasure driving
- *Can be converted into a sleigh
- *Sizes from mini to draft
- *Affordable at \$450-\$545

American Cart & Harness
541-476-5321

The Beloved Sleigh Bell

Bells have been used to decorate horses since 800 B.C. They were used to ward off evil, thought to protect horse and horseman from injury and illness, and flaunted the owner's wealth when plated with gold or silver. They've held a very prominent place in popular culture for generations, from children hearing Santa's sleigh bells on Christmas Eve, to hearing the songs "Jingle Bells" and "Silver Bells" on the radio. Sleigh bells had a very practical side to them as well. Sleigh bells, saddle chimes and shaft bells warned pedestrians and vehicles in the street of the presence of

an oncoming carriage or sleigh. Although sleigh bells were being manufactured in the United States as early as the 1700s, the production rate was meager until the early 1800s. Established in what is now considered the American Sleigh Bell Heyday, William Barton started a thriving industry in East Hampton, Conn., giving the town its nicknames of "Belltown" and "Jingletown." In 1839, East Hampton produced about 14,000 bells. By 1850, the town's bell mills were producing nearly three million bells a year.

