

Is your Horse a COUNTRY or SINGLE Pleasure Driving Horse?

How do you decide if a horse is a Single Pleasure or Country Pleasure Driving Horse? Let the horse tell you. When you look at how he or she moves, its God-given talents, that horse is going to tell you. If your horse moves with a more vertical motion, it's likely he will do better in Single Pleasure Driving. A horizontal movement is more suited to Country Pleasure Driving.

Wow, that sounds so simple and clear, however we all know that is not the case. Let's take a look at conformation before we go any further.

Single Pleasure Driving

My ideal Single Pleasure Driving horse is one that is very upright, has an extremely laid back shoulder with a very large scapula, meaning that the length from the elbow to the point of the shoulder is a minimum three-quarters the length of the shoulder. The horse should have a good length of neck, but this is not the only criteria. I'd rather have an upright high set neck. The front legs should be the same length as the back legs with a nice supple pastern. I don't mind if the horse is a little on the long-backed side because it gives the rib cage the chance to be lifted up and to stay out of the way of that hind foot so when we engage that rear end, there's more room for the stride to get deeper. A horse with a steep croup is not as desirable. I like a horse that has a nice length of hip, not necessarily too short or long but one that matches that horse's body. If a horse has a longer back, you'll want it with a little longer hip. It should have a nice gluteal muscle that ties into the hock well. The Single Pleasure Driving Horse needs to have very vertical motion meaning when he is pushing from the hind end, he is propelling his front end up. At the top of his stride his knee is level or above his shoulder and parallel to the ground before his stride starts lengthening and descending.

Country Pleasure Driving

Country Pleasure Horses should be structurally sound in the same way as a Single Pleasure Horses. Of course a shorter scapula, straighter shoulder and a lower set neck will keep that front end from being able to go vertical, but will allow it to flow horizontal to the ground. The Country Pleasure Driving Horse's motion is very circular. When the rear end is well engaged you want to see this horse move up (not level with his shoulder) and forward out of the shoulder immediately. A Country Pleasure Driving Horse should have a lot of suspension and freedom to go along with that pretty horizontal motion. When a Country Horse extends his gait, it should be a very obvious lengthening of the stride. He should not fall forward on his front end and his head carriage should not change. The only change should be the stride length and the speed should increase.

Seeing the Differences

Ok does that simplify the differences any better? Maybe a bit!

Let's look at some photos to help us understand. In the first photo we see a very well engaged Country Pleasure Driving Horse, Samis Rocket Squirrel. When we compare him to the next photo the difference is very obvious. Notice that Samis Rocket Squirrel stride is lengthy and horizontal to the ground while JF Gizmo's Victory, the Single Pleasure Driving Horse's knee is hitting vertical before he lets his stride go forward. Notice that both horses are very deep-strided in the rear end. Their ribcages are up and out of the way leaving lots of room for their hind legs to get nice and deep to propel them forward. In the case of the Country Driving Horse, his rear end is propelling his front end up (knee) and horizontal. The Single Pleasure Driving Horse's rear-end is propelling his front end (knee) vertical, parallel to

the ground before the front leg starts descending.

In order to achieve the ultimate picture, the horse must be working from back to front. In other words he should be using his rear end to propel him forward to the bit. No you don't want to drive **off** of the bit; you want to drive **up** to the bit. When the horse responds to the impulsion from the rear end and the pressure of the bit, he should flex his throat latch. How perpendicular a horse's headset should be is also up to his conformation. As you can see by the Single Pleasure Driving Horse, Victory, he has a shorter straighter neck. He travels very upright because of his well laid back shoulder and high set neck but, he can not flex his throat latch to achieve a perpendicular headset so he travels with his nose slightly out. This is just fine for him and more importantly, the picture looks wonderful going down the rail. The other Single Pleasure Driving Horse, Winners, has a very long neck and clean throat latch on a well laid back shoulder. His neck is set very high. As you can see he easily achieves a perpendicular headset.

A Country Horse should have more curl to their neck. Yes, they too can be quite high headed. Again depending on their conformation, where their neck comes out of their shoulder will determine how high the Country Pleasure Driving Horse's head will be. They should then curl into their face. Most Country Pleasure Driving Horses display a very perpendicular headset. As you can see by the photo of the Country Pleasure Driving Horse, Sami's Rocket Squirrel, he has a beautiful curl to his neck and a very perpendicular headset. The other country horse has a bit straighter neck but also a perpendicular headset.

Athlete

It is absolutely mandatory to have good physical and cardio vascular conditioning with performance horses. The horse cannot just be well muscled like a halter horse. Performance horses are athletes. They have to be fed and conditioned as athletes. Their attitudes have to be honed as athletes.

Attitude

In a driving horse, attitude can be very influential. It's not always the most talented horse that wins, but the one with the attitude. Some of the horses out there winning may not be the most talented horses, but they supersede their talent because their attitude pushes them to go the extra mile. They just have it all; you can't train that into them. Attitude is very important in any driving horse, but is that attitude going to push them horizontal or is it going to push them vertical?

Overall a Country Pleasure Driving Horse should be a quiet well balanced forward moving horse. We want to see good impulsion and suspension in both trots. He should move out freely and loosely at the walk. This horse should not be breathing heavy or leaning on his check or side check. You should be able to see a taut but not a heavy held rein. This horse should always display a positive attitude. They should stand quietly in the line up and rein back easily and readily.

The Single Pleasure Driving Horse should also be well behaved. Many of these horses appear hot in the show arena but they should still show each of the gaits with ease. As the Single Pleasure Driving Horse is going down the rail he should be well engaged balanced and moving easily forward. His speed should be well under control and definitely not excessive in either trotting gaits. His walk should still be ground covering and free flowing. While in line he too should stand quietly and rein back with ease.

Conclusion

When looking for your next driving horse, look for the characteristics that will fit **you**. Depending on your experience, if you're going to work with the horse, you don't want a

horse that's spooky or scared, but one that's a little more bold and has some confidence, a horse that's not necessarily aggressive, but one that is friendly and inquisitive. Look for a horse that fits your attitude. People get along with horses like they get along with other people. There are ones you get along with ones you don't , so look for a horse you feel you can get along with.

Patty Cloke runs her own training stable in Sultan, Washington, where she has trained and driven to many World Championships in Country Pleasure, Single Pleasure, and Roadster over the past twenty plus years. She conducts several clinics every year and has also produced several DVD's discussing various aspects of training and showing performance horses. www.clokestables.com