



5 Minutes to MIDNIGHT

by Janice Reiter • photos courtesy of Victoria Carriage Tours unless otherwise noted

Is it possible to turn back the hands of time?

The worlds of make believe, romance and fairytales are alive with images of magnificent horse-drawn carriages. Unfortunately in our enlightened society the agenda of many animal rights groups is to make sure that is exactly where the horse-drawn carriage remains—figments of our imagination.

Pumpkin or Coach

Animal rights activists feel vehemently that horses should be “free.” Why don’t we ask the Bureau of Land Management just how well that is working out for the American Mustang. A recent documentary entitled “UnBranded” paints a sobering picture of the problems associated with the romantic ideal of being free.

It is an extremely sad commentary on society when the whole horse industry finds itself, to differing degrees, in the crosshairs of the animal rights radar. Regardless of the discipline, group organizers have to think twice on where and how to



advertise and market their event. Every year the Calgary Stampede has to deal with the ongoing furor created by the chuckwagon races. The large Cloverdale Rodeo in British Columbia, though they claim not to have bowed to any pressure tactics, abruptly removed four controversial cattle events several years ago.

The latest group to feel the sting of the animal rights whip is the carriage horse industry in Victoria, British Columbia. The city has long promoted itself as a little taste of Dickensian England. Partake in high

Left: This lucky fellow is enjoying a leisurely walk in the woods.

tea at the stately old Empress Hotel while gazing at tall ships in the harbor and old dobbin, with a driver in livery at your service, to go for a jaunt up to Beacon Hill Park.

Victoria is located on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, it is as far

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Cherry blossoms mean spring in the capital city.



Dr. Joe Bertone collecting a cortisol sample in Central Park. Photo courtesy of Joe Bertone.

Voice of Reason

For three days in August of 2014, Joe Bertone (DVM, MS, DACVIM, Professor of Equine Medicine at the College of Veterinary Medicine, Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, California) and his highly qualified team ventured to New York City for the purpose of conducting a study on the city's carriage horses and document their levels of stress. The study was designed to find any and all possibilities of stress in the horses' lives.

At the Clinton Park Stables, Bertone's group had their pick of all the horses, so they made their selection from the horses stabled on the second floor. This was done purely for the benefit of those with two legs so they wouldn't have to keep running up and down stairs with equipment. A group of 13 horses were randomly selected and tested four times throughout their day.

What actually did the study examine? Cortisol, a hormone released in direct correlation with stress levels, was measured in the horses' saliva and manure. Temperature changes of the medial canthus (front area of a horse's eyelid), another stress trigger point, were charted using an infrared camera. Apart from the study the researchers also looked for evidence of equine gastric ulcers. The conclusion was definitive; there was no evidence of stress.

The Western University of Health Sciences issued a press release in March 2015 entitled, "NYC carriage horses less stressed than those in pastures" (The article can be viewed at <http://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/Study-Finds-No-Evidence-of-Stress-in-NYC-Carriage-Horses/>). To date, Dr. Bertone has presented his results to the International Federation of Applied Animal Behaviorists, in Fort Worth, Texas (February 2015); at the Scientific Meeting of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, Indianapolis, Indiana (June 2015); as well as the 14th Congress of the World Equine Veterinary Association, Guadalajara, Mexico (October 2015), and at the Annual Convention of Equine Practitioners, Las Vegas, Nevada (December 2015). The study has also been accepted for publication by the *Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*.

So it is fair to say that the study and its results carry weight in the veterinary community. Information based on quantified, scientific facts, rather than pure hyperbola, is exactly what the public needs to hear.



Duty calls, a beautiful landau carriage travels along in front of the Parliament buildings.

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west on the West Coast as you can get. It is a city that can only be reached from the mainland by sea or air. As the provincial capital it is also a government town, full of politicians and political wannabes, and every spring you can count on three things: One, the cruise ships begin migrating north and pull into port; Two, the Butchart Gardens come to life and three; there will be a group wanting to ban horse-drawn carriages.

In 2015, Jordan Reichert of the Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada, ran, unsuccessfully, in the Canadian federal election in his hometown of Victoria. On his web site (www.jordanreichert.ca) under the heading "What I will do for Victoria." The first item on his list is ban the horse-drawn carriages.

Now, in 2016, Reichert has rallied as the spokesman for

the Victoria Horse Alliance, a group whose sole purpose appears to be getting rid of the carriage industry. He is media savvy and was able to generate considerable attention as he prepared to take his case of animal exploitation to the city council in March.

"Each spring there are groups that call for the banning of horse-drawn carriages in our city," advised city councilor Charlayne Thornton-Joe. "They go to the media, they start petitions and they come to Council to request that we do so. Unless a member of Council brings forward a motion supporting their request, nothing occurs. In this case, currently no Council has done so."

Glass Slipper

Victoria has drawn up a comprehensive set of by-laws covering all vehicles for hire, including horse-drawn vehicles. With a maximum of 18 licenses available, split between single horse-drawn carriages in the downtown area and the 20-passenger trolleys operating out of Ogden



All the carriage horses are turned out together.



Old dobbie and a driver in livery outside the Fairmont Empress Hotel must mean it's time for high tea. Fresh baked scones with strawberry jam and clotted cream, a favorite tradition since 1908.

Point, there are presently two companies in operation: Victoria Carriage Tours and Tally Ho Carriage Tours. Horses must be stabled outside the city and all are subject to a veterinarian's complete physical exam twice a year. There are restricted areas that the horses cannot go into, as well as strictly adhering to published hours of operation.

Each spring, Erika Paul, senior animal protection and outreach officer with the Victoria division of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) does a farm inspection and reports back to the city. "There is an open line of communication between both of the carriage

companies, their veterinarians and the city," said Paul who worked with the city to help create the by-laws, which are reviewed regularly.

Tourism is the city's largest industry, with over 3 million visitors annually. Ogden Point, 1.49 miles from downtown Victoria, has the distinction of being the busiest cruise ship port in Canada. Kirsten Denham, communications and marketing manager for the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority, reported that they are expecting 227 ships in the 2016 season, with over 533,000 passengers. Some days will see as many as five ships docked; days like this take a great deal of orchestration to ensure that the horse-drawn trolley schedules operate smoothly. This is where Victoria Carriage Tours shines. Owner Katarina Gallagher and her husband, Tom Walker, together with a software developer, created an all-encompassing program that allows them to see the daily operation in real-time. Every item of their business is detailed, color-coded and accessible on iPads and phones, no more paper log sheets. "No matter where you are you know what's going on," Gallagher said with pride. "If we notice a day is slow, we pull the horses off and send them home."

Home for the horses is 20 acres in Brentwood Bay, about a 30-minute drive from the Parliament buildings and right down the road from

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Katarina Gallagher, owner of Victoria Carriage Tours, enjoying a day out riding.
—photo courtesy of Tom Walker.

Victoria Carriage Tours has been in business since 1978; the second owner, Katarina Gallagher, purchased the company in 2003. Operating 24/7 with two shifts per day in the high season, the company has nine single horse-drawn carriages (seating 4 to 6) and seven 20-passenger trolleys. Weddings, special events at Halloween and Christmas, along with a steady influx of movie work keep the 35 staff members hopping. The horses and crew worked on the recent Disney musical fantasy TV movie, *The Descendants*, filmed on the steps of the Parliament building.

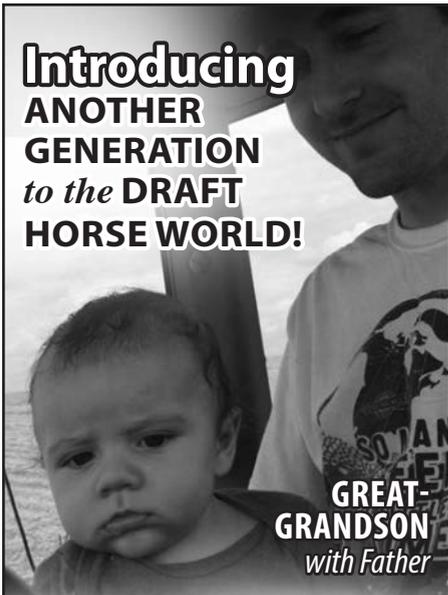
Gallagher is a long-time horsewoman who got into a business with horses. As such, her animals' welfare is paramount. They are family, not simply a means to a paycheck.

For more details be sure and check their web site: www.victoriacarriage.com.



A red bow in a forelock, the trolley decorated with garland and a brilliant sunny day, must be Christmas in Victoria.

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the world famous Butchart Gardens. Currently there are 36 equine residents—four warmblood riding horses and 32 carriage horses, including several retirees. There is a 12-stall barn and 16 large shelters, four acres are set up as an all-weather gravel paddock. There are also four acres in forest along with an abundance of grass pasture. The horses are turned out every evening. “We strive to provide as much natural environment as is possible on the West Coast,” stated Gallagher. “Home life is super important; it translates to a calm demeanor when on the job. These horses have a work ethic, they are not afraid of anything, they are truly working horses.”

After the Ball

In Reichert’s report to city council he wrote, “The bit is entrenched in an industry that uses pain as a means of behavior modification to make an animal into a malleable machine for profit.” He also uses the analogy of a bit being the same “as a choke collar on a dog, where pain is used to communicate obedience.” How do you argue with such profound logic?

With knowledge. Victoria Carriage

Tours and Tally Ho Carriage Tours are currently collaborating on creating an information pamphlet (not ready at press time) to hand out to all passengers.

Councilor Thornton-Joe said, “I will continue to monitor the industry and the safety of the animals and the passengers. I also believe that the market will assist in deciding whether the industry will continue. If people are opposed and do not ride them, as with any business, they will cease to exist due to a lack of customers.”

After the council meeting Gallagher noted that local ridership increased and people driving by would routinely roll down their windows and voice their approval and support. “Some people come down everyday just to visit the horses.”

Well done Victoria.



It was the accepted practice in Babylon 4,000 years ago, that for a month after the wedding the bride’s father would supply his son-in-law with all the mead he could drink. Mead is a honey beer and because their calendar was lunar based, this period was called the honey month, which we know today as the honeymoon.

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