

Corvettes, Porsches, Cadillacs, Jaguars, and... Carriages?

by Linda Freeman and John Stallard, photos by Linda Freeman



A LIGHT RAINY MIST DID NOT KEEP spectators away from the 18th annual Keeneland Concours d'Elegance benefiting the Kentucky Children's Hospital at the beautiful Keeneland Racecourse in Lexington, Kentucky. The Concours highlighted over 160 of the finest collector vehicles in the country, from antiques to future classics. Over the years, the Concours has donated more than a million dollars to the Children's Hospital.

Even though it is a car show, a common question volunteers at the Keeneland Concours d'Elegance get from spectators arriving at the show grounds is, "Where are the carriages?" This was the sixth year that antique carriages were a part of the show. Because the Corvette was the featured marque, the carriage class theme was Sporting Vehicles. The carriage selection committee chose eight carriages for the class that included two breaks, two traps, two spider phaetons, a gig, and a Gooch show wagon.

Sporting carriages were driven by the owner or some other amateur (as opposed to a professional coachman). As a class, sporting carriages can be sub-divided into those intended for driving in the park and a less formal variety designed for use in the country. During the spring and early summer, wealthy socialites of the late nineteenth century enjoyed "taking the air" in the park, either in a carriage or on horseback. Most took great pride in their fine horses and stylish carriages, aware that they would be the cynosure of all beholders. Prevailing standards of good taste demanded that there should be no excessive display. The carriages were finished in quiet colors, and the horses,

LEFT TOP: The 1899 Spider Phaeton by Healey & Co., exhibited by Dr. and Mrs. Thomas P. Burgess, Bridgewater, Virginia, was the winner of the Concours d'Elegance class for carriages.

LEFT: The runner-up of the class was the c.1900 R.M. Stivers Gooch Wagon, presented by Dr. Susan Orosz and Eric Bergman.

especially those used in ladies carriages, should have great presence, quality, and impeccable manners.

Less formal sporting carriages were designed for country use. People drove them to attend shooting fixtures, foxhunts, races, and for daily traveling and errands.



RIGHT: Dan and Ann Doran showed the Buckeye Buggy Co. Kensington Break.

ABOVE/BELOW: This 1923 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost Playboy Roadster had a body built by Brewster and Co., New York.

The Carriage Class is a Spectator Favorite at Keeneland Concours d'Elegance



Keeneland Concours d'Elegance ...



These were often finished with varnish (rather than painted), trimmed in brown leathers instead of the more formal black or patent leathers, and may have wicker or cane-work elements. An example is the four-wheeled dogcart, a vehicle of British origin designed for use on shooting expeditions and having, in its original form, accommodation for gun dogs under the rear seat.

The Carriage Museum of America sponsored the carriage class at the Keeneland Concours. Three judges, Michael Rider, Dana Banfield, and Howard Kietzke, used the Carriage Association of America Carriage Showcase scoring card in selecting a winner.

The scoring was very competitive, but ultimately the class winner was the 1899 Spider Phaeton by Healey & Co. exhibited by Dr. and Mrs. Thomas P. Burgess, Bridgewater, Virginia. The Spider Phaeton is the equivalent of today's zippy little sports car. The 'Spider' became most popular in the 1890s and was considered the most suitable owner-driven carriage for fashionable young men. The Spider Phaetons were light and stylish. Due to their extremely delicate line and lack of bulkiness, they were almost entirely used for park and show-ring driving.

The runner-up of the class was the c.1900 R.M. Stivers Gooch Wagon, presented by Dr. Susan Orosz and Eric Bergman, Curtice, Ohio. Vivian Gooch was considered the best 20th-century English all-around horse showman. He designed a show carriage made

LEFT: Meredith Giere invited children to sit in her pony trap to have their pictures taken.

BELOW: The 1906 Orient Buckboard was an early-motorized carriage advertised as "The Cheapest Car in the World. Everyone Should Have One." It had a top speed of 35 mph.



exclusively by Mills & Son in London. Later, several carriage companies, including Stivers, made copies. Gooch became the eponym for a high-quality show wagon. It was a sturdy, light-weight vehicle that had either three- or four-spring gear.

Other participants in the Keeneland Concours Carriage Class included Lynn and Raymond Tuckwiller of Raphine, Virginia, who brought their 1904 Back-to-Back Trap to the Concours. A trap is a light, often sporty, four-wheeled carriage, usually accommodating two to four persons in various seating arrangements, such as face-to-face or back-to-back. This natural wood country vehicle was used to travel to sporting events such as polo or steeplechasing. The seat configuration can accommodate two to four passengers. It is a versatile vehicle in that it can be pulled by a single horse, a pair of horses, a unicorn, or a four-in-hand.

Joe Jennings of Paris, Kentucky, exhibited his Orange Hunting Break, built by Henry Hooker & Company. Named after the small town of Orange outside of New Haven, Connecticut, it was manufactured in a limited number in the late 1800s, and very few have survived. This break was owner-driven for short trips into the countryside and could be pulled by a pair of 15-16 hand horses. This particular carriage reportedly was part of the Frank Lloyd Wright Estate, then restored in 1994. Hooker & Company made early bodies for Cadillac.

Dan and Ann Doran, Hamilton, Ohio brought their Buckeye Buggy Co. Kensington Break, manufactured by the Buckeye Buggy Company, Columbus, Ohio. Described as a four or six-passenger vehicle, the Kensington had full platform gear, and the second seat slides back for more legroom or forward to allow a third seat facing rearward. The side panels feature hand-carved ornamentation painted red in a recent restoration by Willi Green. Price when new was \$700.

Stacey and Meredith Giere of Brecksville, Ohio, brought a Pony Back-to-Back Sporting Trap made by Walborn and Riker. In the late 1800s, a Walborn & Riker pony vehicle was the ultimate status symbol. Manufactured in St. Paris, Ohio, the vehicles were all custom made, and only the well-to-do could afford the luxury of ownership. When this carriage was rescued by a friend and gifted to the Gieres, it needed a complete restoration to come back into show quality. The restoration credit goes to Brian Eick of Wooster, Ohio. This carriage comes with a beige parasol top. It is believed to have been used to transport children to everyday events.

Two interesting exhibits at the show that had engines also had a carriage connection. The 1906 Orient Buckboard, owned by Tom and Faye Littrell, was an early-motorized carriage advertised as "The Cheapest Car in the World. Everyone Should Have One." It was in production from 1903-1907, originally cost \$400, and had a top speed of 35 mph.

Not many people know that carriage builders, to stay relevant, became manufacturers for cars. For instance, the 1923 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost Playboy Roadster owned by John Shalhoub had a body built by Brewster and Co., New York. H.R. "Tack" Hardwick, a Harvard football star, originally ordered it. At the time of manufacture, it cost \$10,000 - \$12,000 and had a top speed of 49 mph.

Vehicle owners set out a variety of carriage appointments to complement their displays. These encouraged spectators to ask questions and the exhibitors enjoyed sharing information about their vehicles. Some children even sat in Meredith Giere's pony trap to have their pictures taken.

If you are in the Lexington, Kentucky, area next year on the third Saturday in July, plan to attend the not-so-ordinary event that highlights the history of nineteenth through twenty-first-century vehicles. ☺

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