



# Taking up the reins of a new sport

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CARRIAGE driving courses are being offered to beginners as part of a scheme to encourage people to take up the sport.

Bennington Carriage Driving Academy, at Long Bennington, is offering free one-to-one sessions as part of a project called Driving Back To Sport.

The project, supported by Sport England, aims to encourage adults to take up the reins.

Coach and managing director of Bennington Carriages, Miss Sue Mart, said: "It's exciting to be part of the scheme.

"We have the facilities here so we want to get the sport out to the public.

"People think it's expensive but it can be affordable.

"A lot of parents get a pony for their child and they go through pony club.

"When their child leaves home they are left with a pony but if they break it to harness they can have great fun driving it round the roads or even competing."

Miss Mart is a qualified coach and teaches carriage driving in a two-seat carriage led by one of her horses, Dillon.

She said: "It is a great sport for all ages and for all abilities.

"We find it is good, for instance, for people who have retired and are looking for a

niche in life and fancy trying something a bit different.

"We do a lot of driving for the disabled here as well. The feedback we get from them is amazing and it gives them a sense of achievement."

Miss Mart learnt to drive as

a child after her father, Mr Michael Mart, who trained as an engineer, built a carriage for the family's Shetland ponies.

Mr Mart went on to found Bennington Carriages, which

was awarded a Royal Warrant in 1972.

Miss Mart and her sister, Wendy Palfrey, have competed internationally at carriage driving and were selected to compete at the FEI World Combined Pony Championships in 2009.

## Exhilarating first time

**ANDREW BUTLER, on work experience with the Advertiser, had a lesson in carriage driving. Here he explains what the experience was like.**

THE closest I had previously come to transport of the equine variety was on a fair-ground carousel.

So when given the chance to try out the sport of carriage driving, it was with a mixture of excitement and trepidation that I climbed aboard the four-wheeled wagon.

Mounted at the rear of Dillon, the horse, I took the reins and set off.

Starting at an assured walking speed, I was surprised at how gentle and subtle you have to be.

Slight tightening of the reins, making sure you sit up straight, and even pressing down with



**COACH Miss Sue Mart gives Andrew Butler the chance to get used to holding reins before he tries carriage driving.**

your feet on the carriage all altered the direction of the horse.

"It is about communication, and not domination," Sue Mart, told me.

For a first-timer it was incredible to see how easily a well-trained horse can respond.

This became abundantly clear when I tried to stop.

After the first attempt went slightly awry, I was told to sit up and talk gently to Dillon. It worked perfectly as he came to a standstill.

After a few minutes, we picked up the pace.

As Dillon started to trot it became more exhilarating, despite the speed being only 6mph.

As I climbed down and moved into the carriage centre, I noticed how exciting this sport can get. Pictures of fast and furious water splashes and quick cornering showed I had experienced nothing more than the slightest taste of what the sport could lead to.

For the moment, however, I was content with nothing more than a gentle trot.

Enjoyable, simple and different — carriage driving was far better than a carousel.

**ANDREW BUTLER takes the reins with Miss Sue Mart and Dillon, the horse. 060112MW2-55**