

# Carriage Driving Lessons in Cedar Rapids, IA

By Laurie Renda

Not too many years ago, I was participating at breed shows with my Peruvian Paso horses on a fairly regular basis. But it was becoming increasingly clear to me that traveling great distances to these shows was about to come to a halt. Neither my budget nor my time constraints could handle the travel, and I couldn't be away from home during my busy season at work.

In the back of my mind, I had been thinking that I might like to take up driving, as the discipline had always fascinated me. So as I began training my Baroque Friesian mare, "Missy," I researched carriage driving, hoping to get started on the right track. During the summer of 2008, I traveled to Prairie du Chien, WI, in order to watch the Villa Louis Carriage Classic and further my education. I was really impressed with the quality of the turnouts there, but what I really liked was the ability to show your horse no matter what breed or size. While at the event, I introduced myself to Michelle Blackler (of Serendipity Stables - Granger, IA), and discovered that we had an instant rapport. We had similar beliefs and respect for our equine family.

I started working with Michelle to help me get the best performance out of my horse and understand how to achieve my goals. I like to think I am fairly knowledgeable about horses, but what I learned in a few lessons from Michelle was more than I had learned in a lifetime. I had been doing plenty of ground work and preparing my filly for pulling the carriage, but I must say I wish I had met Michelle earlier as her ground work techniques have helped me to help my horse become even more beautiful as a carriage horse. So often, a trainer will tell you what to do, but not explain WHY to do it. Michelle, on the other hand, has a way of telling you something so that you REALLY understand it. More than once, I went away with that "AHA!" moment.

I knew of a few other fellow driving enthusiasts in the eastern Iowa area who were also interested in lessons, so I arranged for Michelle to come to Cedar Rapids and do some driving lessons at my farm. She has made a couple of trips now and we are working on a monthly, or possibly bi-weekly, schedule, depending on the number of interested drivers. I have not been surprised that everyone who has taken a lesson from Michelle felt the same as me: "I wish someone had told me that, years ago!"

Carriage driving has been a lot of work, but the reward has been well worth it. There is so much to learn, not just about harness and vehicles, but also about how the horse moves and how you as a driver can become a partner and not just a passenger. Putting it all together with Michelle's help has been very exciting.



Laurie Renda's three-year-old Baroque Friesian, "Missy," strides out during a lesson with Michelle Blackler.



Michelle Blackler, from Perry, IA, traveled to Cedar Rapids this summer to give lessons at Laurie Renda's place south of town. Here, Michelle instructs Maggi Tyler from Platteville, WI, along with her Gypsy Vanner gelding, "Eli."

If you would like more information, or to schedule a lesson, visit Michelle's website at [www.hossbiz.com](http://www.hossbiz.com), or call 515-360-8349. Laurie's contact information is 319-360-1078 or [touch@ccr.net](mailto:touch@ccr.net). Auditors are welcome. Please join us!

And for even more driving fun and excitement, make plans to attend the New Moon Carriage Classic in Perry, IA, on September 18-19!



Mickey Hanson of West Liberty and her Pinto pony, "Toby," participated in this summer's clinics.