



Tom O'Carroll: In the Driver's Seat

His soft-spoken voice, wry smile and gentle demeanor would engage the most spirited yearling; he did captivate this filly! I had the pleasure of interviewing Tom O'Carroll on January 10th at his farm, Good Hands Training Center, located in Navasota, Texas. The purpose of the interview was to shine a spotlight on this charming Irishman, his horse sense, and driving school. The South Central Region of the IDHS(NA) wants to introduce you to Mr. O'Carroll and hopes that you will be able to attend his upcoming clinic (March 5) when he will demonstrate his philosophy on starting young horses.

At a young age, in Ireland, Tom realized he had a direct line of communication with horses, able to gain their confidence and change their behavior. Word spread about Tom's abilities after he convinced a difficult horse, that could not be touched by a farrier, to stand quietly for shoeing; it took Tom "five minutes to straighten out a bad horse." It was such a

feat that people began challenging him with even more difficult horses and his reputation grew. He states that his work is "gratifying", given the opportunity to "figure out the horse and get the horse right. Most accidents are caused by handlers, not the horses themselves."

Tom recalls that he has always been driving. As a young lad he used the farm horses for pulling the wagon while he gathered turnips in the fields. The horses would stop and go according to the verses he was singing as he worked. When 14, Tom began driving Irish Draughts, and commented, "There is no horse greater than the Irish Draught. The breed has a great temperament, great work ethic, are willing and easy to work with."

In 1960, Mr. O'Carroll moved to the United States and began training in New York State. He drove teams in competitions for Rusty Burdick. When Mr. Burdick moved to Texas, Tom decided to move as well after experiencing a few weeks of a mild Texas winter. Tom's reputation as a "horse miracle worker" has continued to spread throughout the state. Problem horses continue to be "put right" at his farm, and many young horses are started in their careers in the most favorable way. He has numerous accomplishments as do his students, and is proud to report that he and his students are "accident free."

After touring his lovely training facility and meeting the horses destined to pull carriages and carts, I asked Tom, "What is left?" As expected from a professional with a passion for his work, he answered, "It's endless. Everyday I learn something new. It is so gratifying to see people mesh with their horses. Years later I see them doing things properly and continuing to enjoy the sport. My work has paid off."

In addition to his gentle persona when dealing with both people and horses, Mr. O'Carroll is an expert on carriages and makes and restores harnesses. A few years ago, "The Eyes of Texas" a television program, had their eyes on Tom and reported his magical work with horses and the sport of driving. "There is nothing nicer than hearing the rhythmic sound of hooves and noticing all around you—the wild flowers and creatures of nature. Driving has something for everyone—arena driving, combined driving, endurance driving, and of course, noncompetitive driving." Tom asserts that "driving is the fastest growing segment of equestrian sport; it gets in your blood!"

Those attending the South Central region clinic will be treated to meeting and learning from this Irishman with a soft-spoken voice, wry smile and gentle demeanor. You are invited to come as an auditor or to bring your horse to be stabled at Good Hands Training Center and take a private lesson the following day. For more information about the clinic please contact Sue Holland (281) 419-2972.

Thank you, Tom, for your stories, your enthusiasm, and your expertise. As we say in Texas—you weren't born here, but you got here as soon as possible!

For more information on Tom O'Carroll, visit his website www.tocarroll.com .



Thank you to Dr. Jean DeWitt Ph.D. for interviewing Tom and writing this article. Dr. Dewitt is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Houston Downtown who has claimed that she can see an Irish Draught in her future!