

IT'S SHOW TIME

Many Opportunities to Showcase your Shire

By Kim Murchison

When I was a little girl, I hung over the rail at the National Western Stock Show and swore that one day I'd be doing that. "That," of course being showing Ladies' Cart at the Draft Horse Show. I think many people get involved with and even purchase their Shires after having a similar epiphany. One of the great aspects of the draft horse industry is its ability to involve the whole family and allow many facets for exhibiting your Shires. This article will showcase some of the many opportunities that are out there for showing your Shire.

Many areas have "local" draft horse (or driving horse) clubs that get together on a monthly or bi-monthly basis and host driving events. Our local draft horse club hosts farming days, poker runs, arena fun-days, progressive dinner-drives and fun drives. It doesn't matter what kind of horse (mini, Quarter Horse, draft) or mule you have, everyone is welcome to come and participate. These days are not usually competitive, but more educational and cooperative. We even have days where new members with young horses can come and get help with harnessing and starting their youngsters. Some of our members have no horses at all and are just "interested in," or maybe looking to buy their first driving horse and want to get experience. If there isn't something like this in your area, start a local club yourself and encourage others to join. These clubs are very easy to start and run and usually receive good support. Our local club collects a small fee from each family, part of it goes to our State Draft Horse Association, and part of it goes to our club to fund our activities. We almost always host a potluck lunch/dinner with our club meetings and these are a great time to talk with each other and get to know new members.

Several areas of the country have "all-breeds" shows or summer circuits. These are smaller shows that usually have age-level halter classes, riding and driving classes. Although you would be showing your Shire with light breeds of horses, these are great shows to "get your feet wet". It can cost anywhere from \$5-\$15/class and give you an opportunity to get your horse some show experience. Even if you just take your horse down to the show grounds and drive/ride it around during this event, your horse gets a great experience seeing and hearing all of the "show" sites. It's a great opportunity to practice braiding your manes and tying up your tails as well.

There are Draft Horse shows all over the country, especially during the summer months. These shows concentrate on halter classes and driving classes for all breeds of draft horses. Some of the shows are smaller, local shows, others are larger shows, but all of them offer classes for just about every draft horse owner. The following classes are available:

Halter Classes: These are strictly conformation classes that judge the overall movement and conformation (body style/shape) of your horse compared to other horses in the class. You should be dressed in nice slacks/pants and a clean shirt (many farms have polo shirts with their farm logo on them). Your horse should be well trained (work with them at home to practice); clean, shod (usually with scotch bottom shoes), and braided up to participate in these halter classes. Halter classes are more beneficial for the younger horse that a person is planning on breeding. You can find out a lot about your horse by talking with the judge after the class about why he/she

placed your horse the way he/she did. Be prepared to hear about your horse's strong "points" as well as their "faults." These remarks are helpful in choosing what animal to "breed" that animal to down the road. You always want to breed them to a horse that will complement their conformation, not detract from it. Remember that each halter class is one person's opinion on that day and horses rarely place the same way twice.

Pleasure Classes: Some shows offer "pleasure classes" where the horses and drivers are judged on their "way of going" and "pleasantness to drive." Picture taking your horse for a drive down a country lane. In these classes you can show in breast-collar harness or even farm-type (nylon) harness as long as it's clean and fits properly. Your horse may be shod with Keg shoes or even barefoot, but should be clean and braided properly for the ensemble that they are pulling. You may see a men or ladies' pleasure driving cart class. The horses will be asked to walk, trot (usually a slow trot and fast trot), and back. Occasionally the judge will ask the drivers to perform other maneuvers as well to show how well the horse is broke to drive.

Farm Classes: These classes are offered for the people that use their animals mainly for farming purposes. Some of the classes that might be offered are: log skidding (team or single), farm team (on the rail and obstacle), and the feed team race. These classes should showcase the "drivability" of the horses and their willingness to work for their driver. They are judged on "way of going" (do they work together, are they serviceably sound) and ability to do the task at hand. Many classes work on a point or time system as well. These are fantastic classes to "practice" for at home and participate in, as they are "fun" and usually very "crowd-pleasing" as well.

Amateur Classes: These classes are offered for the "newer" people that are getting into showing draft horses. There are usually amateur cart and team classes in the draft horse division. These classes are usually judged 50% on the horses' look/movement/way of going and 50% on the driver's ability. These are great classes that allow newer drivers the chance to get out there and show and not have to compete with the people that have been doing this for several years in a professional capacity. This idea has carried over from the light horse breeds that have seen great participation by amateur owners. Drivers should have their horses well trained, clean, harness properly fitted, horse(s) braided and shod for these classes. Many of the judges will actually speak with the drivers in these classes to tell them what they "liked" about the drive and what could be improved upon in the future.

Hitch Classes: These classes are offered for anyone interested in competing from cart classes up to the 6- and 8-horse hitches. Whether you are showing a carthorse or a 6-horse hitch, these are the top of the industry as far as breeders and showmen that are showcasing their horses. The competition here is high and horses that participate in these classes should be in their prime. You'll see the fancy bio or patent-leather scotch-collared harnesses as well as show carts and hitch wagons. These horses are shod with scotch-bottom shoes, clean and fit, and all manes and tails are braided up.

Youth Classes: The draft horse industry emphasizes the youth classes as a way to build the draft horse industry in the future. You will see classes for youth (usually 8 years old to 18 years old) in halter, cart, and team. These classes are judged on the youths' ability to properly handle and

drive their horses. Many judges will spend time talking with the youth after the class to explain why they placed the class the way they did. Many of the best showmen in the industry started in these classes when they were youth.

Riding (Under Saddle) Classes: Many draft horse shows are embracing the aspect of riding draft horses as well. Classes such as English, Western, Hunter Hack, Dressage, and Bareback are popping up all over as the drive to ride our draft horses increases. Horses should be clean, fit and properly tacked up depending on the class that they are in. Horses may or may not be shod and may or may not be braided. Many Shire owners are also showing their horses in United States Dressage Federation shows around the country.

The American Shire Horse Association offers National and Regional Shire Shows throughout the country to allow Shire owners to exhibit their horses with and against other Shires. Classes are offered for registered halter, cart (mare, stallion/gelding), team, 4-horse hitch, and 6-horse hitch. The goal is to place Regional Shows in close proximity to many Shire owners and encourage their participation. The National Shire show currently rotates between the east coast, Midwest, and west coast and is held once a year. Since the Shire is somewhat unique in its build compared to other draft horse breeds, it's nice to be able to compete against other Shires and see how your horses "stack up." Regional Shire shows are scattered around the country to accommodate Shire owners and enthusiasts. The "level" of showing at these events depends on the entries that can be pulled in. Some of these regional shows host amateur, pleasure, and farm classes as well as hosting halter, hitch, youth, and riding classes. These are great events to meet other Shire owners and exhibitors and see what kind of Shires are out there.

Whatever you choose to do with your Shire is up to you, and there are many avenues that you can take. Try and make contact with other draft horse owners in your area, and seek out their advice and guidance. Get on the phone and email draft horse owners/breeders with questions. If you think you want to show, take the time and attend a few of these shows to watch what goes on before you take your horse out. Don't hesitate to call a fellow draft horse breeder and ask them questions or even ask to "crew" for them at a show to see how it's all done. We have many people that come to shows with us to help out and learn what it's all about. You have to start somewhere and most draft horse people are fantastic about answering questions and offering helpful suggestions when you need them. The draft horse industry is truly one of the best groups of people with whom to be involved.