Excerpt from a GALA Conference notes and provided to attendees

**Training Your Llama to Drive: Principles and Tips for Success**

Bobra B. Goldsmith

1. Choosing a likely candidate: What age and temperament?

First – Set your goals: What kind of driving do you want to do?

1. Mainly PR type of driving?—parades, birthday parties for kids, weddings?
2. Pleasure driving for your own fun, with friends?
3. Pleasure driving in shows and obstacle driving?
4. All of the above?

Making your choices, as suggested above, is important, for it will, to a degree, govern you choice of llama and your training program. It’s possible, of course that you may change you driving goals as you progress with driving and that’s fine. However, it will be helpful to choose a llama with the build and temperament who will best fulfill your goals. And there are some llamas who will do “all of the aobe” very nicely.

Briefly, let’s consider what type of llama will best fulfill each of the above goals. For PR driving, you may want to choose a llama who is already calm and experienced in PR activities. It is not a big problem to expand his skills to include quietly pulling a cart while being led. Or, with further training, he can be driven from the cart at a walk and jog. For the PR driving llama almost any size and build will do, providing the harness and cart fit properly. A calm, patient personality is the most important factor.

For pleasure driving for your own fun, a llama with a bit more ambition might be in order. Physically you would want him to be able to move along steadily at a nice jog, carrying you and another person in the cart. An average or above-size llama would be nice, but even a smaller one of 275 lbs would be adequate, providing you use a lightweight cart and don’t have to drive on hills. In addition you want him to be willing a clam when faced with new situations.

Show driving in pleasure and obstacle classes necessarily includes the same characteristics as for pleasure driving, above, but you might like in addition, an extra measure of ambition and willingness, maybe a little bigger size, excellent movement, and perhaps, as icing on the cake, a stylish way of going.

Since pleasure driving for fun and for showing is the most challenging, most of the discussion for this session will be geared towards those goals.

What age is appropriate to start a driving llama? While there is a lot of pre-driving preparation and training one can do with a young llama, I don’t feel that llamas are physically or mentally ready for ground training before two and a half to three. I’ve know of llamas who were taught to drive successfully beginning at ages from three all the way up to twelve years.

How do you judge a llama’s temperament as appropriate for driving? We need to face the fact that not every llama will make a good driver, even though he might have a good build for it. The mental attributes of intelligence, personality, and willing obedience are paramount and more important than build. And speaking of build, it goes without saying that the driving llama should be sound and have good conformation. It would be a pity to spend the necessary time to teach a llama to drive, only to have him break down because of poor legs or some unsoundness. However, I should like to mention that driving seemed to strengthen the slightly weak hindquarters on one llama we trained.

One other prerequisite: Training a llama to drive takes skill, sensitivity, and a commitment on the part of the trainer. One also needs a dedicated assistant part of the time. Do YOU have the qualities necessary plus the time and determination to follow through on your llama’s training to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion? If you have any doubts along these lines, consider and easier way to reach that goal. Take your llama to a professional trainer who will train the llama and then give you the driving lessons necessary to “operate” your trained llama.

1. Pre-driving preparation: Sound basic training & experience

There is much one can do with a young driving prospect to prepare him for the challenge of driving. Most important is to be sure his basic training is such that he is both obedient and willing. A llama who acts spoiled and argues with you when you ask him to do some simple things will not make a good driver, unless that attitude is overcome. (see last year’s Conference Notebook for ideas on how to achieve willing cooperation with your llamas.) In addition, by exposing your young llama to a variety of experiences away from home, he will become comfortable in new of strange situations and will be more secure later when he is put to the cart. Take him for walks where he will gradually encounter cars, bicyclist, joggers, dogs, horses, etc. Alternate walking and jogging part of the way with him so that he becomes flexible in his gait, but avoid having him canter or gallop at this stage. You can introduce word commands at this time, also.

…