

A Classic Carriage Ride

When you are looking for a unique way to add class and nostalgia to your next event, a horse drawn carriage will add a romantic, exclusive and unforgettable experience for the bride, groom and guests.

Prior to the nineteenth century, carriages were mostly used as functional transportation for the European upper class. However, in the mid nineteenth century, coachbuilders, along with carpenters, painters, seamstresses, and various artisans began building carriages with an artistic flair. During this time, the horse drawn carriage went from simple transportation, to families possessing multiple carriages for special occasions like weddings and funerals, while having other carriages for display, or some to function as fast, light travel.

Nearing the twentieth century, carriage driving, or 'coaching' became more of an upper-class sport than an efficient travel method. Around this time both the steam locomotive and the automobile were becoming more mainstream, and thus transportation by carriage was no longer needed.

Lately, carriages for special events have made a comeback and again are a favored type of transportation, especially for weddings.



A wedding carriage can be hired for just the short trip to the church or for an entire day. One favorite option is to have the carriage pick up the bride and her father at their hotel, and bring them to the wedding site. After the wedding, the carriage will then whisk the bride and groom away while guests cheer for them. Many clients have commented to me that a relaxing carriage ride after the wedding is the perfect time to unwind, be alone, and just connect with each other prior to the reception. Other options include using one carriage for the bride and groom and another larger one for some of the wedding party. For other weddings, particularly large outdoor weddings, I have been hired to use a wagon to transport wedding guests to and from the wedding site.

Before booking a carriage, there are a few things to consider; the first is to find a company that can provide this service.

Wedding carriage companies can be found in most cities quite easily: query the search engines or read through local directories, yellow pages or business directories. Plan well ahead, as with all other things to do for a wedding. This gives you the chance to compare companies and prices. Place your reservation in time and be aware that you might need to leave a deposit. This depends on the individual company's policies.

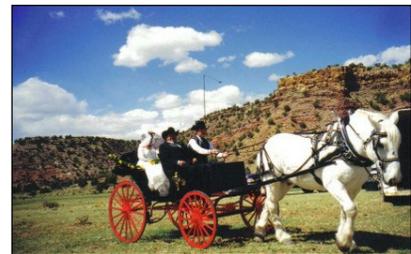
A company is best contacted via their website or telephone. Inquire about design, color and size of the carriage used. Also, who will be driving the vehicle? How much experience does the driver have? Inquire as to what the driver will wear for the wedding. Some companies offer a variation from a top hat and tuxedo for formal weddings, to a cowboy hat and western clothing for a western themed wedding.

Inquire about the horses (temperament, breed, if they use a single horse or a pair, the color) and let them show you the horses and harness. It should be the best tack, in good repair, shiny and clean. Make sure the horses are accustomed to working in the environment the wedding will take place in. For example, are they accustomed to heavy traffic or loud vehicles like motorcycles and busses? Are the horses in good health and will they be clean and properly groomed? Another important question to ask is if the animals pulling the carriage will actually *be* horses. Some companies use mules to pull their carriages and this may or may not be suitable to the wedding party.

There are many carriage and wagon designs available. Most people like a white Vis-à-vis which is an open carriage with a “Convertible” top that can be put up in case of rain or snow, pulled by a matching pair of horses. A Vis-à-vis can transport up to four adult members of the wedding party. Wagons and wagonettes can also be used if there is a need to transport more people at one time.

You should make sure that there will be enough room for a person wearing a wedding dress to mount and dismount the carriage. Remember, the bride will wear fragile or high heeled wedding shoes as well. In case the weather is colder than expected, plan to have the bride take some warm wedding garment with her for the carriage ride.

Inquire also about the carriage decorations. Usually the decoration will be done professionally by a florist or the company or person who hires out the vehicle. But do tell them about your imaginations, your wedding colors, your particular theme or what you would not like.



Prior to being hired, a carriage company, and the person hiring the company, needs to be concerned about the route in which the carriage will take. In most cases, a representative of the company would drive or walk the route to make sure there are no obstacles that will impede the horses. Some obstacles to avoid are some storm drains, cattle guards and very steep or slick streets. It is in your best interest to make sure there will not be any other activities going on the day of the wedding that could mean streets you plan to use will be closed. Also, as the carriage will be pulled by horses, the distance a carriage must travel is a major consideration. Typically, a carriage will travel about 5 miles per hour, so this must be factored in to your overall plan.

With our current economic situation, cost is a factor in choosing transportation for your special event. While carriages can be more expensive than a limousine, prices are usually competitive. Ask for specifics of what the cost includes. What is the length of time allowed and will there be an extra cost if you go over the allotted time limit? When does the time start? Many companies

have a minimum charge. This is necessary to cover all the “Behind the scenes” work prior to and after the wedding. What is the cancellation policy in case of rain, snow or other inclement weather?

Remember that horses are living, breathing animals and think for themselves. If you hire a company that has experience in providing this type of service, it is very safe. However, accidents can happen and caution should be exercised in the planning of the event. For example, most horses do not like to have a mob of guests throwing rice or birdseed at them. If you plan to do this, work with the driver to make this practice safe. Also, make sure the company you hire has all necessary permits and liability insurance for the jurisdiction you are working in.

During the wedding, it should be known that the driver must be seated in the driver’s seat of the carriage anytime guests are in the carriage. Therefore, be prepared to have someone available to help the passengers in and out of the carriage. When there are not passengers in the carriage, it is acceptable for the driver to stand in front of the horses. The driver must maintain contact with the horses at all times when they are hitched.

While there are many considerations prior to hiring a horse-drawn carriage, most issues can be easily overcome if the carriage company will spend the time to work them out with you. The reward will be a fairy tale end to a special day and a lasting memory that the wedding party will cherish for years to come.



Eric Roybal owns and operates Bear Creek Adventures LC of Pecos, NM and has been providing carriages and wagons in New Mexico and surrounding states since 1992. Please visit his website at www.bearcreekadventures.com or call him at 505-757-6229.