

FEI DRIVING FORUM, EQUESTRIAN CENTRE DE PEELBERGEN KRONENBERG (NED), 11-12 APRIL 2023

Discussion, debate and consultation were at the heart of the first FEI Driving Forum held on 11 and 12 April, where the community gathered in person and online to discuss the status quo and the future of the Discipline. The Forum was open to all members of the Driving community including Officials, Athletes, Trainers, Course Designers, Organisers and National Federations, and attracted 88 participants from 24 nations attending either in person or online with a fully hybrid set-up allowing remote participants to watch live and interact as and when needed.

Held purposefully prior to the Kronenberg CAI2* and 3* and FEI World Cup™ qualifier, the setting and timing of the Forum proved highly beneficial, and further enhanced the convivial atmosphere with the discussions staged in a long, glass building nestled between two outdoor arenas, where the Delegates could share their views on the future of the Discipline whilst watching a wide range of Driving turnouts being exercised ahead of the event.

Alongside FEI Driving Community Representatives, the FEI Driving Committee and FEI HQ Driving Staff, the Forum was also attended by FEI President Ingmar De Vos (BEL), FEI Solidarity Director Jean-Philippe Camboulives (FRA), EEF President and member of the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing (EEWB) Commission Theo Ploegmakers (NED), EEF Vice President Quentin Simonet (FRA), and Professor Kathalijne Visser-Riedstra (NED) from the EEWB Commission.

Moderated by [Carriage Commentator](#) founder and editor in chief Sarah Dance (GBR), the Forum provided a platform for all members of the community to have their say, with most topics and sessions including representative panels in order to present and share the different perspectives and requirements from the key stakeholder groups.

A summary of all the discussions session by session is provided below.

To watch the Driving Forum 2023 in Replay, click [HERE](#).

11 April 2023

Session 1: Opening by FEI President Ingmar De Vos (BEL) and Introduction by FEI Driving Committee Chair Károly Fugli (HUN)

FEI President Ingmar De Vos welcomed Delegates to the venue and online, reminding participants of the strong heritage Driving had within the equestrian world and Driving's pioneer status as the first non-Olympic discipline to join the FEI in 1970. He took a moment to explain the decision-making process and especially how members of the community could actively contribute and have their say in Rules Revisions either through their representative bodies/stakeholder associations with whom the FEI has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or directly through their National Federations.

"This forum is about consultation, and I think it's about understanding each other's perspectives, it's about thinking outside the box, accepting accountability, being brave to push the boundaries, and most important of all, about working together. But it's also a clear message to you that the FEI wants to listen to you, wants to hear your voice and that we do not operate in a vacuum."

Prior to concluding his opening statement and passing the floor to FEI Driving Chair Károly Fugli, he thanked him for his commitment and great legacy, as he nears the end of his 12-year term as an FEI Board Member and Chair of the Driving Committee.

He was followed by Driving Committee Chair Károly Fugli who spoke about the status of the Discipline, the FEI Rules Modification Policy and Governance processes, while clarifying the next Rules revision timelines (minor and major). He touched on the views and strategy of the Driving Technical Committee over the past 10 years and for the future.

Session 2: Equine and Ethics Wellbeing Commission // Social License to Operate

- **Presented by: Professor Dr. Kathalijne Visser (NED) & Theo Ploegmakers (NED)**
- **Panel: Károly Fugli (HUN), Jeroen Houterman (NED), Bram Chardon (NED), Sarah Dance (GBR)**
- [Supporting documents](#)

The initial focus on the first afternoon was Social License to Operate (SLO) in terms of horse welfare, which was presented by Theo Ploegmakers (EEF President) and Professor Kathalijne Visser-Riedstra who are both members of the Equine Ethics and Wellbeing (EEWB) Commission. The EEWB was formed by the FEI in June 2022 in response to growing public concern over global challenges such as climate change, resource use and animal welfare, and from the FEI perspective, specifically to address societal concerns related to the use of horses in sport.

Theo and Kathalijne presented 51 slides, and began by explaining that SLO is an unwritten social contract between the public/society and an industry/organisation. They said that equestrian sport is unique and more vulnerable to negative public opinion because it involves use of an animal which can provoke a more emotional and less evidence based response than other areas of society. There are currently changing societal attitudes around the use of animals and an increased engagement where people form their own conclusions, often based on images, which is greatly impacted by social media. The public do not make a distinction between horses used for either leisure or sport, or between the Disciplines, or whether the activity is an FEI one or not, and often do not distinguish between the wider use of animals across the species. Key factors to consider are credibility, confidence, transparency and trust.

The findings of a public survey were presented whereby 14,000 respondents from 14 countries were asked a series of questions relating to horse welfare. From this cohort, 64% have some or occasional interaction with horses, 27% have never interacted with horses, 8% have regular interaction and 1% are professionals. The data showed that

most respondents did not think the horse enjoyed being used in sport and there were concerns about its welfare, especially in the 23 hours when it was not in work; specific areas of concern were both welfare and safety, and 52% felt that equine welfare should be improved. Regarding the future, 47% felt that the horse would be used in sport, but only with modifications to ensure their welfare is improved.

Another survey was undertaken whereby 27,710 members of the equestrian community from 116 countries were questioned. The largest cohort of 12,193 was local competition level stakeholders, followed by 10,601 who were leisure riders or drivers then 7,897 which encompassed 'All FEI'. They had concerns across all Disciplines, with most concern about Endurance (73%), followed by Driving and Eventing (68%), then Racing and Show Jumping (67%). Among the equestrian stakeholders, 78% said that welfare standards needed to be improved.

In conclusion, 67% of the public did not feel that the horse enjoyed being used in sport whereas it was 50:50 between the equestrian stakeholders as to whether the horse enjoyed being used in sport or not.

The presentation ended with lively discussion between the panellists, the EWB Commission and the delegates around the three following questions:

1. What are the main areas of risk for your discipline in terms of SLO?
2. What do you feel are issues that might negatively impact horse wellbeing in your discipline?
3. What do you want to do within your discipline to help to maintain SLO for the whole of equestrian sport?

Session 3: The Discipline Today

- **Presented by: Manuel Bandeira de Mello (POR)**
- [Supporting documents](#)

Session 3 was presented by FEI Driving Director, Manuel Bandeira de Mello, who spoke about FEI figures and trends, and what aspects needed to be tackled to ensure the continuity of the discipline. He began by stating that Covid-19 had significantly impacted Driving then showed that the most popular classes are H1 (single horse) and P1 (single pony), and that there had been a decrease in the number of H4 (horse fours). Conversely, the figures show an increase in the participation of youth Athletes since 2013. He continued to present the status of Officials in Driving today, whereby following a clean-up of inactive Officials in 2017, there were now 28 National Federations (NF) with Driving Officials, and the potential shortage of Level 1 Judges in the future. He noted that events are time consuming for the Officials, and although there are an increasing number of events, there is a decreasing number of venues. The presentation concluded with figures relating to participation at European and World Championships across the different categories over the past decade, with different categories and age groups showing different trends.

Session 4: The Discipline Tomorrow // Strategy for the Future // SPORT

- [Supporting documents](#)

Dressage

- **Presented by: Károly Fugli (HUN)**
- **Panel: Franz Schiltz (LUX), Andrew Counsell (GBR), Joaquin Medina (ESP), Bram Chardon (NED), Martin Hölle (HUN), Edwin Kiefer (GER)**

After a coffee break, the Forum reconvened with a discussion about Dressage. Chair of the FEI Driving Committee Károly Fugli gave the presentation and discussed the challenges for this phase such as time, financial impact for OCs, media, spectators and he laid out a timeline for the revision of Dressage tests across the classes. He presented the new Driven Dressage Test modifications policy agreed upon by the Driving Committee, who will appoint a Driven Dressage Working Group for each new Test. The group will be comprised of top-level experts, while the modification process will be spread over three stages;

1. Assessment of the applicable Dressage test. Identification of the areas and movements that need improvement, modification, and/or replacement. Determining the level of difficulty required between the star levels.
2. Creation and review of the Dressage test by the Working Group and Driving Technical Committee.
3. Finalisation of the test and organisation of a testing session.

Mid-term modifications (2025) and long-term modifications (2029) in regards to the Dressage competitions were also proposed. Then he led the panel and discussions around expiration dates for Dressage tests and how many years they should be used for i.e. 4, 6 or 8 years or for two Championships, the development and consultation process for new tests, lengths of the arena in particular for H4, a change to the H2 (horse pairs) test in 2024, canter movements, one-handed elements and a reminder that the majority of H2/P2 (pony pairs) Drivers are amateurs.

There was general agreement that the tests and the size of the arena must go together i.e. a test should be constructed specifically to fit the arena.

Marathon

- **Presented by: Jeroen Houterman (NED)**
- **Panel: Franz Schiltz (LUX), Andrew Counsell (GBR), Joaquin Medina (ESP), Heather Briggs (USA), Bram Chardon (NED), Martin Hölle (HUN), Edwin Kiefer (GER)**

The discussion was led by FEI Driving Committee Member Jeroen Houterman who listed the key areas of the Marathon, the challenges faced by Course Builders and venue hosts, and the importance of welfare of the horse. Areas which were covered were the mid-term modifications in 2025, dislodgeable elements, whether a mobile obstacle should be protected with knock downs, the wish for flowing routes, placement of balls in terms of visual impact, importance of the size and square meterage of the individual elements and how these factors impact how an obstacle is driven. Also, whether to abolish Section A and the need for penalties and rules, or only have a Warm-Up and leave it to Drivers to decide how to prepare.

Finally, the number of obstacles was discussed and whether there should be reduced numbers for different classes, or if it would be possible to drive the same obstacle more than once, and perhaps have different obstacles for horse or pony classes as well the minimum square meter size per element.

Cones

- **Presented by: Franz Schiltz (LUX)**
- **Panel: Jeroen Houterman (NED), Andrew Counsell (GBR), Joaquin Medina (ESP), Bram Chardon (NED), Martin Hölle (HUN), Edwin Kiefer (GER)**

The final session of day one was about cones and was led by FEI Driving Committee Member and FEI Driving Athlete representative Franz Schiltz. Areas covered were the impact of the cones on the overall results, possible new formats, number of clear rounds and how many are desirable in a class, that the course should be fluent for the horses and should there be an optimum time. The challenges for Course Builders were acknowledged, plus the importance of setting the times and pace, and a reminder that this phase should not be approached like a 'second marathon'. The general feeling was that the cones competition is good.

After much lively and interactive discussion, which included contributions from the remote attendees, the Forum concluded at 18:30 with a wrap-up given by FEI Driving Committee Chair Károly Fugli which was prepared by Cindy Timmer (NED).

12 April 2023

Session 5: FEI Driving Development Projects

- [Supporting documents](#)

National Federations Development

- **Presented by: Heather Briggs (USA) & Fritz Otto-Erley (GER)**

The second day of the Forum commenced with two presentations from National Federation representatives, who face very different challenges in their respective nations. Heather Briggs, who is also the Driving Committee Deputy Chair, represented the US NF and emphasised the difficulties in bringing together drivers and running events due to the vast distances involved in travelling across the USA which in turn increases costs and brings logistical challenges. She mentioned the emerging driver programme, how the US NF is developing athletes, elite drivers and horses, the resources available such as clinics, evaluations and webinars, licensed Officials' programmes, and show and venue development.

Fritz Otto-Erley spoken on behalf of the German National Federation, and gave an overview of FEI and national driving events in his country, noting the loss of some key event venues. There has been a decrease in H4 drivers and a loss of nearly 25% of international competitors since Covid-19. The number of female athletes is increasing while the number of males is decreasing. There has been a reduction in the number of German Officials, due to age, frustrations about changes to the sport and a new education system. He stated that many Youth Drivers have continued successfully into the senior level.

FEI Driving Youth Cup

- **Presented by: Károly Fugli (HUN), Karin Marlin Strauss (SWE)**
- **Panel: Heather Briggs (USA) & Jeroen Houterman (NED)**

Károly Fugli opened the session and introduced the FEI Driving Youth Cup Project as a clear reflection and acknowledgement by the FEI Driving Committee of the need to encourage Young FEI Driving Athletes to progress in the sport, given the steady and impressive rise in quality and skills of this demographic in recent years.

Currently, the only FEI-named event for Young Athletes in Driving is the European Championships. This event only being held once every two years is problematic for Young Athletes given their window to compete in their respective age categories is limited (Children: 12 to 14 years old, Juniors: 14 to 18 years old, and Under 25: 16 to 25 years old). The Driving chair also referred to the geographical restriction to European Athletes, which also hinders the promotion and expansion of the sport globally.

In order to keep Young Athletes, who represent the future of the sport, inspired and motivated, the FEI Driving Committee is proposing to create the FEI Driving Youth Cup, to be held annually, and open to Athletes globally.

Key factors are the innovation of different and accessible formats which are easy to understand and straightforward to implement for OCs and venues, not too time-consuming, attractive for all the different stakeholders, while promoting good Driving and safeguarding those involved.

This project will also act as a roadmap for the future of the sport, as a new format of the discipline can be tested, and the accent on the Single Horse/Pony classes will be emphasised.

Karin Marlin Strauss (SWE), who has helped to draft the FEI Youth Driving Cup project, provided additional details, emphasising that H1 and P1 would be classified together in all age categories, with one arena to be used (either indoor or outdoor) and that the event would be staged over one or two days to ensure children do not have to take time off school to participate. The format will be Dressage and a combined Marathon with qualification via standard events which will lead to individual classification. There will be five FEI Officials at each event, the horse inspection will be on Day 1 before the event starts, and the aim is to integrate classes into existing events.

Overall, it was acknowledged that it is important to keep the incentive to participate and to try to hold Championships more regularly, perhaps annually, as Youth Drivers can miss out in the intervening years or be lost to the sport. It is hoped that the series will be launched in 2024 and tried out at Test Events, then run in 2025. It is also hoped that the relatively simple format will ensure that there is a more global reach and so that the Events and Championships can be extended from European to World.

FEI Driving World Challenge

- **Presented by: Jean-Philippe Camboulives (FRA)**
- **Panel: Manuel Bandeira de Mello (POR), Heather Briggs (USA), Jeroen Houterman (NED), Benjamin Aillaud (FRA)**

FEI Driving Director Manuel Bandeira de Mello introduced the World Challenge project, based on a format that is already working in Jumping and Dressage and is currently being piloted in Driving, Para Dressage, Vaulting and Eventing. He then handed over to FEI Solidarity Director Jean-Philippe Camboulives who joined the Forum remotely from Switzerland. Camboulives explained the aim, timeline, progress and outcomes of the series in other Disciplines.

The Challenge series as a whole is a development tool which aims to provide the opportunity for less experienced Athletes to compete in Driving events without leaving their own country, whilst also introducing the sport to new nations and new audiences. For driving, the format will be hybrid and a steppingstone to the established FEI level classes, and will also seek to provide new national Officials and Coaches with the chance to gain experience in Driving. There are three categories, A-B-C, and H2 and P1 will be classified together. National Federations can apply to host FEI Driving World Challenge events and so far, three nations, Brazil, Greece and Slovakia, have applied.

Driving Coaching System

- **Presented by: Jean-Philippe Camboulives (FRA)**
- **Panel: Bram Chardon (NED), Andrew Counsell (GBR), Benjamin Aillaud (FRA)**

FEI Solidarity Director Jean-Philippe Camboulives took the lead on the Driving Coaching System referring to a more structured national coach education system which is being created to assist National Federations who are less established in Driving. At its core is ongoing education, from basic coaching to high performance, all supported by the FEI while drawing on successful programmes such as those used by the likes of The Netherlands and Germany. By early 2024 it is hoped that a Level 1 course for National Driving Coaches will be available to all NFs and in due course, these systems should be aligned across the nations.

Session 6: The Discipline Tomorrow // Strategy for the Future // EVENTS

- [Supporting documents](#)

Development of Youth

- **Presented by: Heather Briggs (USA)**
- **Panel: Karin Marlin Strauss (SWE), Bram Chardon (NED), Jeroen Houterman (NED)**

Deputy Chair for the FEI Driving Committee Heather Briggs illustrated the aim to identify youth needs by attracting more Young Athletes, having more Championships and developing a long-term international Athlete. On a practical level, education and training should be provided, and there should be an increased focus on sustainability. The panel further noted that Youth Drivers will rely more on social media, so are likely to share more 'behind the scenes' footage of them with their horses which could be positive in terms of SLO.

Carriage Driving and the media

- **Presented by: Sarah Dance (GBR)**

Overall moderator for the Forum, Sarah Dance presented an overview of media and the sport of Driving. Her extensive experience in Driving both as an athlete but also from a media perspective having founded the [Carriage Commentator](#) and reporting extensively from Events, she opened by defining what media means – communication – and illustrated how much it has changed in recent times. Social media platforms have impacted the speed of sharing news, views and images, much of which is based on personal opinion. Once something has been posted, it remains in the public domain and there is little to no control on the extent of its reach. Specifically for Driving, searches tend to lead to HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, or carriages and horses being used for tourist rides. For FEI Driving, the FEI Driving World Cup™ receives the most coverage but also provokes some of the strongest responses, both positive and negative.

Driving Events

- **Presented by: Jeroen Houterman (NED)**
- **Panel: Franz Schiltz (LUX), Joaquin Medina (ESP), Heather Briggs (USA), Benjamin Aillaud (FRA)**

FEI Driving Committee Member Jeroen Houterman led the topic and presented figures which showed the impact of the results of the individual phases (Dressage, Marathon and Cones) on the overall result. The current scoring system was examined and compared to alternatives, for example using different percentages or coefficients, or changing the number of penalties for knockdowns or cones.

Overall, it was felt that each phase should count equally towards the final results and that there should be a balance. Discussion followed about the value of the Dressage, which is currently heavily weighted, plus the importance of knowledgeable commentators at events who can relay to onlookers what is happening and make it all more accessible.

FEI Driving World Cup™

- **Presented by: FEI Driving Committee // Károly Fugli (HUN), Heather Briggs (USA), Jeroen Houterman (NED), Franz Schiltz (LUX), Joaquin Medina (ESP), Benjamin Aillaud (FRA)**

The final session of the Forum involved all members of the Driving Technical Committee and was opened by FEI Driving Director, Manuel Bandeira de Mello. It provoked much discussion as subjects such as allocation of legs, format of the competition, use of equipment (specifically whips), entry and transportation fees, plus prize money were raised. There have been some rule changes ahead of the 2023-24 Series.

It was stated that some events (London and Maastricht) said that if they did not have to have a Drive-Off after Competition 1 then they would not, which in turn led to input that this might impact how attractive this is to sponsors, some of whom only support the first round and may prefer the excitement and climax of a Drive-Off. Whether all Drivers, or only the top three, are included in the Drive-Off was also discussed. Other factors such as scheduling and the importance of working with show organisers, and for the FEI to retain some flexibility, were also raised. Whether there should be a different course for the two rounds and if this could be managed by Course Designers and the

building team, and how much time it would add to the overall allocation, were discussed alongside how much a course changes between the first drive and the Drive-Off.

After more lively and interactive discussion, the final word went to FEI Driving Committee Chair, Károly Fugli who wrapped up the morning's proceedings, assisted by Cindy Timmer (NED), and the Forum was formally closed at 13:00.