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Handling and steering horses

The best explanation ever is by [Edwin Howlett](#) who ultimately inspired [Benno von Achenbach](#).

Arguably there's actually 2 correct rein handling techniques:

- * Coachman.
- * [Achenbach](#).

[Achenbach](#) devised his style from the late great [Howlett](#) under whom he tutored. [Howlett](#) was a classicist and drove only Coachman but [Achenbach](#) thought it was a little tricky! Hence he devised an adaption and which some folks seem to think are interchangeable and the same... but they're not.

Both require the reins to be held in the left hand and with the right hand used as an assister hand. Both require the left arm to be held across your body.

I drive coachman style every day and always. I will concede that [Achenbach](#) has it's use and is better than trying to drive as if you were riding a horse with a rein in each hand and arms forward.

So Reins in the left hand only and you NEVER EVER open your hand. The steering is achieved by moving your wrist in coachman with the right hand used for the whip, waving at passing folks 😊 or as an assister hand only in complex or emergency situations or for the likes of taking loops when driving multiples. So basic commands for left and right are done merely by moving the wrist and this action in itself gives and takes the corresponding reins.

In [Achenbach](#) the right hand would be fiddling about taking the command away from the left hand by being in front of it and steering by moving reins there whilst trying to hold the whip

The [Achenbach](#) system has the right hand in front of the left to undertake steering. [Achenbach](#) can be used with reins for a team of 4, but mostly is used with single horse wagon-driving.

In [Achenbach](#) style the right hand is used much more and for virtually all steering. The left hand supports the reins.

In [coachman](#), all steering is done with the left hand alone with the exception of taking loops. The prime purpose of the right hand is for waving at folks taking your photo. The right hand comes in for **shortening, loops and as an assister in emergency**.

Then there's the one I'd be happy to argue about and even assert that it's not actually even "proper driving" and that's 2 handed rein handling.

Driving with arms out and a rein in either hand as you would riding leads to the following problems:

- Leaning on the horse's mouth or dropping contact altogether - and partly because the horse is some distance away and according to the gradient, there is a lot of lengthening and shortening to do.
- The right hand holds the whip and it's unhorsemanlike to apply the whip with a hand that still has hold of the rein! It means you're giving the horse all sorts of contradictory signals.

Neither **Coachman** nor **Achenbach** precludes the use of the right assister hand and its there when you need it.

Truth is though that because its so hard to find a trainer to start someone off with **Coachman** or **Achenbach** that the skill and technique often is never actually fully and properly developed. Those relatively newer to driving need to appreciate that when Horse Drive Training (CDE) was first developed as a sport that the marathon phase was most often always driven **Coachman** or **Achenbach** style. There's no difference in times now and courses if anything have got easier because of the concern for safety. The dressage phase absolutely had to be and throughout. Now there's just an element whereby you have to drive a single-handed circle. So for anyone serious about driving competitively they will have to move to advanced tests where they've to execute a perfect circle and deviations with reins held in one hand.

All too often nowadays, drivers make their rein adjustment before they commence their move and then clamp two reins in one hand and sort of hope things stay on track and because they actually can't handle the reins in a single hand. This means that the horse often falls in and turns its head away and the circle is pretty terrible!

Appreciate that the reason the rules were changed was not because 2 handed technique was quicker or better in any way at all. It was purely because the sport wanted to attract more to it. Trust me the best and I mean THE best drivers, all can handle single-handed. Its how they started and drove for years before they competed and its how they train and practice dressage etc. at home.

Increasingly over the past 10 years I've been re-training drivers (not just UK) who are already competing. Quite simply they're coming to learn Coachman rein handling and because they're experiencing practical difficulties in every day driving and also poor competition performance scores when going up the levels.

Truth is though that if you don't learn correct technique in the first place, that its limiting and there's a heck of a lot you'll never be able to do.

No different to what type of riding you use.

To see the **Howlett** family website also visit:

http://www.thehowlett.com/historique_02_jean_goujon.html