

In the spot

If this year's Paard & Koets driving fair in the Netherlands visit. Not only does it give you an opportunity to complete the driving requisites on offer but it also allows you to watch and participate in the activities featured throughout the day – in particular the driving

A breeds area gives you the the chance to get up close and personal with many of the continental breeds you might associate with driving, Friesians, KWPNs, and Fjords, as well as some of less well known to us in the UK such as the heavy Boulannais horse, or the French Merens. Our own native breeds were well represented with Connemaras, Welsh, New Forest, Highland, Fell, and Shetlands.

Each day the displays in the three arenas featured everything from breed shows to driving clinics and natural horsemanship. The main ring was definitely the Mecca for the driving enthusiast with demonstrations being staged every 20 minutes throughout the day. A wonderfully varied programme kept you on your seats, including driven dressage, New Forest Pony racing, scurry driving, Spanish gaited horses, and an amusing and novel 'all things dotty' show which included a host of all things spotty, including Dalmatian carriage dogs and pair, tandem-driven and long-reined Appaloosas.

Into the ring

The highlight of the Saturday is most definitely the evening driving show where your allocated seats allow you access to an inspirational driving programme. Saskia Van Heesch, an international driver and a Dutch 'A-class' driver, gave a driving clinic, showing how her immaculate presentation – driving her well matched pair of Lipizzaners, resplendent in burgundy harness – and attention to detail in her driven dressage has gained her high esteem in Holland. Perhaps the only disappointment here was that the commentary was in Dutch and so was, in the most, lost on those of us non-Dutch speakers in the audience.

Perhaps the most innovative display followed – a dry ice smoke screen, lighted tapers and a four in hand of miniature mules being long-reined by a horse rider over jumps. Not an activity for the

Conny Albers from Victorian Secrets adds authenticity to one of the replica carriage exhibits.



Willy Nieuwburg was awarded the Tinello trophy for the highest score for driving a traditional carriage.

Marleen Dresscher, from the show's organising company Total Fair Support, expected over 35,000 people to pass through the doors over the three days of the event, held at the Brabanthallen in S'Hertgenbosch – a venue akin to our NEC at Birmingham. A good number in the crowd were English, having made the journey over, either to participate – this was the first year that scurry driving was being showcased by the Scurry Drivers Association – or to soak up the atmosphere.

Around and about

The venue boasts substantial trade stand areas, three arenas - one large grandstand and two smaller - cafes and a restaurant, as well as an area to leave all those items that you couldn't resist buying, leaving you free to walk around unhindered by heavy bags.

Harry Mulder with his pickaxe of Friesians to a replica sporting break.



Light - Paard & Koets

*is anything to go by, it is certainly well worth a
that Christmas wish list from the myriad of carriage
and learn from the varied programme of driving
driving show, held on the Saturday night.*

feint-hearted, but it added an air of anticipation as to whether the mules were in fact all going to do the jumps at the same time. They did manage it, much to the appreciation of the crowd – and no doubt the rider who was long-reining them!

The British Scurry Driving Association had been invited over to demonstrate their sport – which until then had not been seen in Holland – and they put on a fast and furious scurry driving competition, making the most of the crowd's very noisy – but appreciated – vocal support. The audience participation at this event certainly did lend an electric atmosphere to the whole proceedings.

The Dutch traditional driving competition winners were next in the ring. The turnouts included a pickaxe of Friesians to a replica shooting brake, a 1910 French dos-a-dos carriage and a delightful hooded gig.

Clash of Titans

No driving show seems complete without a marathon competition and this one was no exception. Four Dutch driving trials pairs competitors: Riny Rutjens; Dutch champion Harry Verstappen; internationals Tom Engber and, making her second appearance that night, Saskia Heesch – were led off by nine-year-old Manou Brans, with her Welsh Section A around the cones and two obstacles. Manou had won the marathon in the Dutch-Belgium driving competition this year, coming second overall.

This was followed by a pas de deux by pairs drivers, father and son combination Karel (father) and Arjo (son) van Kekem, both of whom started driving just eight years ago. This formidable father/son combination have stormed onto the driving trials circuit, both being part of the Dutch silver medal winning team at the FEI World Pony Championships at Dordrecht in 2007.

Turning to the traditional, a race between two coaches followed. A road coach put-to a four in hand of Shires and a park drag, horsed with a team of Gelderlanders, both with a full complement of passengers aboard, raced – and yes they did race, if the white knuckles of some of the passengers gripping onto their seats were anything to go by – around a figure of eight of cones.

The show concluded with Dutch World champion Jan de Boer and FEI World Cup driver Koos de Ronde taking a bow in the spotlight to a thunderous standing ovation by the Dutch crowd, making it obvious just how much the sport is held dear to this nation.

See www.pardenkoets.nl.

*Tom Engbers thrilling the
crowds during the marathon.*



Coralinde Benschop and her four in hand of donkeys.



Harry de Ruyter with his park drag negotiating the cones in the Traditional Driving display.



Harry Verstappen, Dutch National Champion 2007 (pairs) and winner of the indoor marathon in Saturday's driving show.