

# THEY' RRRRRRRRR AT THE POST! -



## Miniature Harness Racing

By Carolyn Aarup, Dakota Winds Farm Miniatures, Ontario, Canada

**T**he cool damp evening air rushes over you, exciting your senses and giving you an exhilarated rush of adrenalin which sweeps over you as you glide quickly along. The sound of hooves pounding the ground and drivers' shouts urging their horses on surround you as you head around the bend. You hear the crowd's cheers and the clanging of the chainlink fence rings out as they excitedly bang on it to encourage the horses and drivers on. As you cross the finish line and the announcer shouts the winners out, you are overwhelmed with complete exhilaration and a sense of accomplishment knowing your hard work and training has brought this moment of success to you.

These sensations are a well known feeling among large horse owners of harness racing such as the Standardbred racers. In the past, Miniature horse owners have had to be content to merely dream of doing the same thing with their Miniatures until now.

### Miniature Harness Racing Overview

Due to gaining interest from the racing community and the public, Miniature Harness racing is beginning to grow in popularity in the United States and Canada. Their races are run on full-sized race horse tracks usually complete with a race announcer giving the racing fans in the stands a play-by-play of the race

as it is being run. These races are usually open to any size of Miniature horse, with some races splitting the entries into A & B divisions. The length of race compared to a full-sized harness race has been scaled down to a quarter mile around the track rather than the usual full mile.

These races are often run as "Exhibition" races which are positioned between the regularly scheduled large horse harness races and may or may not be wagering races (legal bets placed on). There are usually 7-8 "Post Positions" which are the positions assigned or drawn for each horse for the start of the race. Following the race, the winner is announced and often presented with a winner's cooler and officially photographed just like the large horse races.

### Ready to Race?

Training a Miniature for racing is based mainly on endurance conditioning. The horse must gradually be worked up to trotting for greater lengths of times and speed until the horse is in good enough shape to hold their fastest trot for at least the quarter mile while not being stressed or fatigued. Depending on the condition of the horse when it starts training for a race, bringing a horse up to the proper condition can take weeks and even months to reach

this proper level of fitness. It is also of utmost importance to ensure that during the conditioning program, the horse's feed intake is increased and feed type is adapted as necessary to meet the horse's more demanding nutritional requirements.

It is imperative to ensure that all equipment used in a race is in good working order. For instance, ensure that harnesses are complete in parts, made of strong material, and stitching is in good repair. Tires on cart or sulky need to be properly inflated, bolts tightened and working parts in good shape.

Although not necessary, some drivers will wear authentic "racing silks" sporting their farm colors. Horses must be raced in 2 wheel vehicles which can include regular metal "pipe" carts, wooden carts or even authentic racing sulkies. Many miniature horse tack dealers carry racing equipment, making Miniature Harness racing even easier to get into.

### Race Day

Generally, most race rules and procedures are standard, however it is best to obtain a copy of the official race rules for the race and be familiar with them prior to entering a race.

*continued on page 36*

## MINIATURE HARNESS RACING

*continued from page 34*

---

On race day, drivers must check in at the official Race Office, pay the entry fees and receive the post position assigned previous to, or drawn by each of the drivers on race day. At this time, drivers will also be given confirmation of "Post Time".

They should allow themselves adequate time to harness and warm up the horse prior to the race. Close to Post Time, drivers are expected to be ready to go onto the race track immediately following the finish of the previous race, as those horses are exiting the track.

The drivers are then required to drive their horses in for a "Post Parade" which is simply trotting past the grandstand in their post position order while the announcer reads out the horse's post position number, name and driver's name as they pass the grandstand. The horses are expected to stay in their post positions until they have passed

the grandstand, then proceed to the track area where the race will begin.

Drivers align themselves in their proper post positions (#1 being closest to the inside of the track called the "rail"). The horses are driven up to the mobile starter gate which keeps the horses in formation until the race officially starts. Once the starter gate drives toward the starting point of the race, it will release the horses by speeding up, moving away from the horses and closing the gates.

In harness racing, horses are expected to remain at a trot and not break into any other gait. Penalties or even elimination can result for certain infractions of the rules (e.g. if a horse breaks or if a driver acts in an unsafe manner).

### **Harness Racing Literally "harnesses" Attention**

Miniature harness racing offers Miniature Horse owners one more way to enjoy their Miniatures. It offers the opportunity to enjoy a sport which

is full of excitement and challenge. It offers the public a new insight into the capabilities of Miniatures and provides them with a unique entertainment experience. These wonderful little equine are proving once more that there is yet another element to their versatility. Perhaps as a result of these miniature horse races, retired racing enthusiasts, who believed they would only ever participate in the harness racing sport as a spectator, are thinking twice about staying in retirement.

*Carolyn Aarup is an Executive member of the Miniature Horse Club of Ontario and has written a number of articles related to Miniature Horses in various publications. She currently breeds, trains and shows her Miniatures in Meaford, Ontario, Canada. [www.dakotawindfarm.com](http://www.dakotawindfarm.com)*

*Photo courtesy of Kelly Spencer, Iron Horse Photo [www.ironhorsephoto.ca](http://www.ironhorsephoto.ca)*