

To whom it may concern,

I have been asked to comment on a number of photographs and some videos of Atlanta City Carriage horses that have been sent to me. First let me note in fairness that it is difficult to make specific diagnoses regarding equine medical problems or conditions based solely on photographs and videos but, in this digital age, it is becoming increasingly common for clients to send in pictures and /or lameness videos and to request some form of veterinary comment.

In my clinical experience there are four main problems areas seen in carriage horses. One set of issues are related to feet and hoof condition because of the hours spent on hot, dry and hard surfaces. The constant pressure and concussion cause horses to have split or damaged hoof walls and to have sole tenderness or soreness. Additionally, housing horses in wet, muddy or damp areas will soften and weaken hooves and lead to weak feet, bacterial and fungal infections and lameness. Another area of concern is tack (harness, shaft, neck collars and bits and bridle) rubs, abrasion and skin damage. With too much work in short time spans without enough time off to recover or with ill-fitting or poorly repaired tack these problems can become major and potentially cause long term damage to the horse. Abrasions from tack, however, are a part of life in the hot humid south and there is similar evidence of rubs and skin abrasions from pads and equipment among southern high school football players. The point being that these issues are common, but the care and attention given to tack related injuries to horses in work should be the determining factor in assessing the welfare of the horse. Because these horses are in consistent and often heavy work, weight maintenance and proper nutrition is another area of concern as well. Weather conditions, especially in hot, humid locations such as Atlanta (or Charleston, S.C.), greatly affect carriage horse comfort and performance. The management of carriage or work horses in extremes of weather should be another area of major focus.

Unfortunately the pictures and videos sent to me for review showed problems relating to all four of these major areas. Some horses with severely split or cracked hooves were shown pulling carriages. While these horses were not noted to be lame at the time, if these issues are not addressed the horses will eventually develop lameness issues. Additionally, pictures were provided that showed the "rest" areas for these horses when they are not working. I observed a horse standing in deep mud and manure without any dry area to be seen. Constant exposure to soft or wet ground surface serves to soften up the foot and make it less likely for that tissue to survive the constant hoof wall trauma that is part of the normal daily activities of a city carriage horse. These horses should be kept in clean, dry paddocks and their feet attended to on a daily basis. Numerous products designed to toughen up the equine hoof and sole should be used.

Multiple photos of tack/harness sores were provided, some with the horse still in tack and working on city streets. Such lesions are of a serious nature and should be treated immediately and aggressively and the affected animal should be removed from work until the area heals. Tack related lesions are being treated much more seriously in all areas of equine work and sport because they are

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generally man-made and speak directly to the welfare of the horse issue. The Federation Equestrian International (FEI), the governing body of equine sport worldwide, considers tack related wounds and trauma to be so important that it has placed premium importance on all such tack issues in all FEI competitions.

Some of the horses that I observed were thin (body score 4 to 4.5) and probably required additional nutritional support. One video showed an Atlanta horse panting rapidly while it stood in the hot sun just after completing a route (the people in the carriage were standing with the horse for photos). This horse was panting with a respiratory rate of over 110 and should have likely not been working in those conditions or at least been actively cooled with water baths and fans after the activity. More care and attention should be directed to these horses and their various issues. Strict cut off times for work in adverse weather conditions and/or temperature parameters should be instituted and closely followed (see guidelines that are used for carriage horses working in hot weather in Charleston S.C.)

Overall, some of the horses that I was shown appear to be thin and many have skin lesions or tack related injuries. While I have no problem with carriage horses and respect the rights of owners to use them for commerce, I would encourage better care and evaluation and constant monitoring of these animals. How we treat them is a reflection of our city and of our humanity.

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