

# DONKEY SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC

Website: [www.donkey.org.au](http://www.donkey.org.au)

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ABN: 82 148 300 307, Registration no. A0000117Z

## DRIVING DONKEYS

By Pat Streefkerk

Donkeys are very suitable for harness work and you can have a lot of pleasure driving your donkey around in a cart.

First, your donkey must be of a suitable age – not too young or too old – and of a suitable temperament. Almost any size donkey is suitable. Your donkey must already lead well and respond to your commands. It is best if you can train your donkey to ride first, but this is not always necessary.

Second, make sure you have your commands instilled – Walk on, Trot on, Steady, Halt, Stand, Right, Left, Back, - you do not need to use these exact words – but be consistent with whatever words you use. I find Halt better than Whoa, which can sound too much like walk. Then try these whilst driving your donkey in long reins and walking behind him.

You can start with a headstall if he is not yet accustomed to a bit, but must progress to a bit before actually putting him to a cart. Take him for walks in all sorts of places long reining like this.

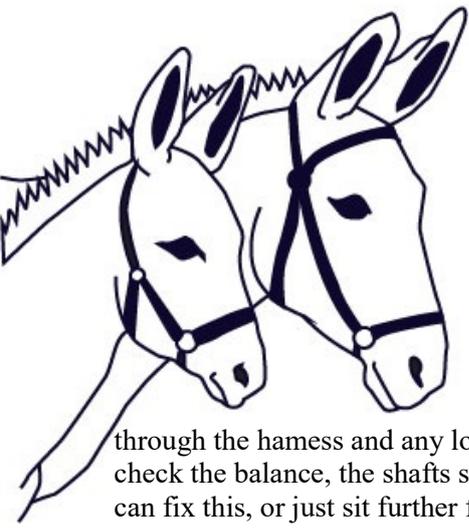
After this it is good if you have a helper, particularly someone experienced in harness!

Then try pulling a log or tyre behind him, you must use a swingle tree (a bar to separate the traces so that they do not tangle in his legs), and attach the log to this. At first, have this all attached with a means of easy release (eg hayband which you can just let go) if he is too worried. Only if he is completely relaxed about all this do you put him in the cart. Even then, at first do not attach the cart, just have someone help you hold it there while you walk forward with the shafts either side of him. Start in a smallish area!

Of course to do all this you need a suitable harness and cart that will fit your donkey and be strong and safe. Do not buy Indian leather harness, this can split at the stitching under stress, there are various synthetic harnesses available which are generally safe and strong and much easier to keep clean than leather. Zilco is an excellent brand. Measure your donkey around the girth, and see if this matches the diameter of the harness saddle when done up, to assess if it will fit. Donkeys are generally longer in the back than a pony and you may need to extend the backband. Donkeys are also bigger in the head and may need a size up in the bridle, and particularly a longer browband. I find most donkey go well in an open bridle (no blinkers) and I can just use a normal bridle. Make sure that your reins are long enough to sit on the ends for security –much safer if you should happen to drop a rein.

Your cart can be very simple, many are on motor bike wheels, bicycle wheels are not always strong enough. It needs to have a swingle tree to attach then traces onto, not just hooks on the shafts, and it is easier to get the balance right if your seat can move forwards and backwards. Springs make for a MUCH more comfortable ride for the driver. Of course, the cart must also fit the donkey. When put on, the shafts should slope just slightly up towards the head of the donkey, there should be at least about 60cm between the back of the donkey and the cart, and the shafts should be just a bit wider than the donkey at the girth.

To harness up, first have your donkey firmly tied direct to the fence or whatever, no hayband in this case, always have your donkey in full harness first, never put the cart on without the donkey having bridle and reins on first, and leave these until the cart is first removed. Do the traces up first, then the britchen straps. Make sure the reins are threaded



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through the harness and any loops on the neck straps. If possible, sit in the seat while still tied up and have someone check the balance, the shafts should sit lightly in the tugs, not heavy, not trying to lift up, adjusting your seat can fix this, or just sit further forward or further back.

The first time have someone lead the donkey for you, only try a walk until the donkey is well used to all this.

You should also have a driving whip – this is to replace your legs at giving signals and should reach the girth area.

Definitely wear a helmet, your head is very important and things can go wrong sometimes.

If your donkey is happy at this point you have done well, keep practicing and enjoy your driving.