



There are a couple of us green drivers in Waterloo. Sharon has started driving singly with Andy. I started a team, Bliss and Howdy, at the clinic at Jerry's with Bob Tomaskie in March. This being my first shot at driving a team I consider myself very green.

Sharon and I met and spoke with Donna Norgaard at the MDHMA meeting in Whitehall in May. During our conversation we found out that Donna gives a few clinics a year, one being Driving with Confidence. After her explanation of what she does at the clinic we decided that this could be very beneficial to both of us. We signed up on the spot. During the 2 months in between our sign up and the clinic we both got some cold feet. We heard that she has several people who come every year for this. In other words, they didn't sound like green drivers. Uh Oh, are we going to the wrong clinic? I also saw Donna at the Amish Horse Progress Days in June. When I explained I had a green team, she didn't sound too excited about the combo of a green driver plus a green team.

Second Uh Oh.

For me, I was back and forth about a dozen times deciding if I should take the team or just go singly with Ike. Two days before, Sharon and Ken convinced me I would be sorry if I didn't take the team. So on July 16 we loaded 2 carts, 3 mules and the rest of our gear in 2 rigs for the 5 hour drive to Roy, MT.

When we arrived about 6 that evening we found that the other regular participants were last minute cancellations. The only other participant was Bonnie Morgan from the Bitterroot Valley.

She had a team of mini mules that had not been hitched together. She had a driving accident at Montana Mule Days this year and was in the process of rebuilding her confidence. Now things were sounding a little better. Three green participants. Each at different levels but all very willing to learn.

After each of us explained over dinner what we were hoping to gain at the clinic, and where we were with our mules, Donna formulated a plan for the weekend. She would evaluate each of us individually the next morning and go from there. Friday morning after breakfast we began. Sharon up first. Andy performed just as Sharon explained. Donna was able to make suggestions, tweak harness, make cart adjustments and give her ground driving exercises as well as some "time out" periods for Andy at the trailer.



Next up, Bonnie. After evaluating her team, Donna explained why one of her mules was not ready to be hitched as a team. Bonnie was given her assignment of desensitizing, ground work, and time out sessions as well. Bonnie did harness, hitch and drive the other mule singly.

Me next. After ground driving, Donna had me hitch and away we went. A little balking as the gate required her to get out of the cart and walk through the gate first. We then were out into her field which is mowed and outlined with cones. Uh Oh, no fence. She's a believer that if there's a runaway have a huge field so there's no fence to get in trouble with. After circling the mowed area, no problem. Howdy and Bliss did great. She did help me with line control and several other tips that worked like a charm for me and the team.

During her ride along I tried to explain a problem I have had with Bliss. Since the mule was doing so good she couldn't see first hand the issue. Well, that changed when I took the team back to be tied for unhitching. Donna did have an exercise for me. It has involved a lot more ground driving, use of the whip and focusing my energy on

where I want to go. In other words, driving forward instead of stopping and trying to fix the problem.

All three of us the next morning worked on the ground using all the suggestions and tips she had given us. After lunch we all hitched and worked through a cone pattern. This exercise gave us practice using our lines, whip commands and focusing our energy on where we wanted to go. Later that afternoon, Sharon and I took a drive down the road. What beautiful scenery, thousands of round bales in the fields, tall grass and blue skies with puffy clouds. All our mules did good going out. Sharon had a little problem with Andy taking the bit and charging forward on the way back. During dinner that night, Donna suggested a different bit for use the next day.

Day 3 we were to meet up with the dreaded obstacle course. Uh Oh number 4. I am not afraid of obstacles but I knew that my team, although broke to ride and pack, just have not been exposed to much. Andy also has been known to be a little spooky of things he hasn't been exposed to. Donna had a solution for that as well. Lead all the mules through first without blinders. After 15 minutes or so of this we had all conquered a simulated bridge, life sized plastic antelope, flags and different cone patterns. We all hitched, including Donna with her team of very impressive mules, and drove at leisure through the course.



Next obstacle was leaving the course and driving through her creek. Uh Oh number 5 as Bliss is not the greatest at crossing water even when riding. Off we went. Donna leading, Sharon with Andy, me and the team and Bonnie with her single. After focusing my energy on where I wanted to go, giving cues on keep moving forward (and following the others) we were through. After several crossings, no hesitation, no problem. We then finished the weekend with another drive down the road. As the up hill would have been a huge effort for the mini single, Bonnie drove Donna's team. What a great way to finish.

Not all the problems were fixed in 3 days. Sharon and I did leave though with information that

we can use from now on. Harness tips, line control, voice and whip commands as well as how to focus our energy, and the benefits of all these changes will allow us to make the problems we had fixable after time. We both felt that what we learned was far beyond what we hoped to get out of the clinic. Donna and Jim were both so hospitable to open their home, prepare all the meals and provide excellent housing for our mules that we couldn't be more appreciative. The fact that she is so open to sharing her knowledge was invaluable.

We are both hoping that we can attend next year and hopefully become regular participants. Because for me, all the Uh Oh's definitely became Ah Ha's!

DONNA NORGAARD'S DRIVING TIP:

This year we saw various animals in need of some tweaking in their training. The most obvious fault was the inability of the mule to go forward with straightness. When we see an animal going with his/her head turned either right/left and not straight that is usually a forward problem. More "energy" is needed from the driver (voice, whip) to encourage the animals up into the bit. When the animal is coming up into the bit with straightness we soften our feel on the lines to reward but we don't throw away the feel completely. This is a hard concept for the new driver who hasn't quite developed the feel on the lines yet.