

Cart Horse Angels to the Rescue: Protecting the Cart Horses of Cape Town

By: Regine Lord
Regine Lord shares her experience from 13 June 2012 with us.

With sirens howling, the bakkie of the Cart Horse Protection Association (CHPA) with horsebox in tow, is driving rapidly along Valhalla Drive and Duinefontein Road towards Philippi a patchwork of dairy and vegetable farms on the Southern Cape Flats. For more than nine years senior inspector Diana Truter, in charge of the CHPA's veterinary and rehabilitation unit, has crisscrossed the Cape Flats to provide emergency medical care to working cart horses and donkeys. Today, I have joined her on a callout to gain some firsthand insight into the challenges that the association faces in protecting these animals from abuse, and contributing to the social upliftment of Cape Town's carting community.

The people working for the CHPA have seen it all: badly shod and overworked horses pulling unroad-worthy carts, ill-fitting harnesses that cause weeping sores and permanent scarring, filthy cramped backyard stables without adequate ventilation, and horses that have been traumatically injured, even killed, in motor vehicle accidents.

In recent years, two horrific cases of horse abuse made headlines, when Mr Lonely and Bukshi were beaten and tortured to death. Bukshi's killers were eventually arrested, tried and sentenced (a victory for animal rights) – but, sickeningly, released during the presidential amnesty of June 2012. The case of Mr Lonely is still going through the drawn-out legal process. All these problems were compounded by poverty, ignorance and a lack of care and compassion, motivating the establishment of the CHPA in 1995.

The situation is gradually improving, thanks to the efforts of dedicated staff members. Most of them are based at the CHPA's Clinic and Training Centre, a converted warehouse at 92 Bofors Circle, Epping. Here, several clinics are run throughout the week. Diana provides veterinary services, including tetanus injections and free deworming medication, donated by the Department of Agriculture. In addition, mobile clinics are held in Philippi and Khayelitsha, and at outlying stable yards. Carties can purchase feed and wood shavings, and repair harnesses and carts under the guidance of harness maker and head groom Bollow. They can also have their horses shod by professional farrier Ashley Deelman and his two young apprentices, Chadwin Fischer and Lincoln September, who joined the team in

April this year. The ebullient Carl Naudé, who has been in charge of reception and administration at the Epping Clinic since 2007, fields calls from the public, law enforcement officers, and cart horse owners and drivers.

"I am on call 24 hours a day, every day," Diana tells me. "The carties know that they can phone me, day or night. If there is an emergency and their horse is sick, I will come – it doesn't matter how late it is."

Today, Diana is responding to a call for help from an anxious cart horse owner. Koos de Wee's chestnut mare Molly was pulling a cart, when she suddenly stopped, sweating and shivering uncontrollably. Once we reach Philippi, Diana briskly examines the distressed mare: Molly is trembling all over, her coat is ruffled with sweat, and her hindquarters are hard – these muscles should have some natural give. The diagnosis: azoturia. When a well-fed horse is not worked for a day or two, and then given a sudden increase in workload (such as on the Monday after a relaxing weekend), the muscles can literally seize up.

This is why it is also known as 'Monday morning disease'. Azoturia is excruciatingly painful, and can cause serious damage if not treated correctly. Molly is quickly loaded into the horsebox and transported to the clinic for medical treatment. That evening, Diana will take her through to the CHPA's Recovery and Rehabilitation Centre (fondly called the R&R) at Firlands Equestrian Estate between Somerset West and Gordon's Bay. Acquired a few years ago, the peaceful R&R is a safe haven for sick, injured, abused or neglected cart horses. Pregnant mares are sent there to foal down in safety and comfort.

Megan White, the association's fundraising manager, confirms that they want to regulate the industry, to weed out the bad apples, and ultimately reduce the number of working cart horses. They keep accurate and detailed records of everything. In September 2010, they began to issue unique identifying number plates for each of the registered working cart horses, and in January 2012, they resumed micro chipping. In May 2012, they had 425 horses on their register; of these, 239 were working horses, used mainly to collect scrap, while only six were used to hawk fresh produce. Veterinary and farriery services are provided to about 100 non-working horses too.

Their latest initiative is to implement driving licences, with owners and operators training for the E53 licence (the Equine variation of the K53 test). Motorists often complain that carties do not belong on the roads at all, accusing them of driving recklessly and ignoring traffic rules. The South African Road Traffic Act does allow animal drawn vehicles on public roads (though not on national roads). Hopefully, the licences will encourage good driving habits, while making it more difficult for irresponsible drivers to hire a horse-and-cart. When I ask Diana what motivates her, she says simply: "If you help the horses, you help the people. There is a saying that helps me every single day: 'The shortest distance between two people is a smile.'"

This positive attitude encapsulates their approach: cooperative and mentoring rather than aggressive and confrontational. Protecting Cape Town's working horses involves educating owners and operators, providing essential services (e.g. veterinary and farriery), and raising awareness among the public. Initially, the carties were suspicious of the inspectors who confiscated their horses for neglect or more serious infractions. They have since learned that, if they are willing to change negative behaviour patterns, their horses will be returned in good condition. It has taken years to establish such mutual trust and cooperation, but – it has definitely been to the benefit of both the carting community and the hardworking horses and donkeys that continue to trot up and down Cape Town's roads.

If you would like to make a contribution to the Cart Horse Association please contact:

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You can follow Regine Lord's blog on <http://namibiansands.wordpress.com>



Molly is recovering nicely at the CHPA's Recovery and Rehabilitation Centre, located at Firlands Equestrian Estate between Somerset West and Gordon's Bay.



Nicely turned out horse-and-carts trot down the streets of Pinelands.



Back at the Epping Clinic, Molly receives the appropriate medical treatment.

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