

# BRIEF HISTORY OF HARNESS GOATS

...There is also record of a Goat pulling a plough in Crete at about the same time. In the Himalayas goats are still used today as they have for centuries, carrying packsaddles loaded with luggage across rough terrain.

The Goat appears many times in mythology. Thor, the God of Thunder, drove a pair of fierce horned billy goats to draw his chariot, each time he threw his hammer it caused thunder and lightening. (Next time you hear Thunder, remember, it is just Thor driving his pair of goats across the sky!)

At the beginning of the twentieth century it would have been quite normal to see a goat cart on the streets in many countries across the world. Many European families owned a goat cart or carriage for their children to enjoy, from the lower classes up to royalty. Whilst the former built very basic carts from recycled materials, the latter, of course, had some very elaborate vehicles. The son of Napoleon III and Empress Eugene had an impressive calash, drawn by a white goat. This apparently was the Prince's favourite 'toy' Our King George V is seen in his wedding photograph dated 1893 with children in a goat carriage.

On the great estates and in the gardens of larger houses a goat carriage might often be found. It was used for pleasure but more importantly under the direction of a groom, a boy could harness and drive, learning the art of driving so necessary at that time.

Harness makers of the period showed goat harness patterns in their catalogues. They would all be made from leather. The poorer classes would make rough harness from upholsterers' jute webbing.



It is interesting to note that both of the car-makers, Peugeot in France and Studebaker in America started from very humble beginnings, advertising goat and dog carts for sale.

Many different items were carried in the carts, besides children. Milk was delivered, vegetables, barrels of water, and in America 'Buck' Beer was advertised being transported in a goat cart. It is known that a basket maker used a goat cart to carry willow shoots, and another goat cart was used by a travelling salesman selling kitchenware.

In 1891, came the introduction of Bank Holidays and with the advent of railways, towns people were able to travel to the seaside for day out. Cottagers living near the coast saw an opportunity and pressed donkeys and goats into service. The donkeys carried ladies up and down the beach, their saddles covered with a white cotton cloth to avoid soiling the riders fine clothes and goats pulled tiny carriages giving rides to children. Sadly the goats were often abused and ill treated.

Local councils at seaside resorts later licensed all operators giving goat carriage rides and conditions improved somewhat. In Brighton, the last known Harness Goat Licence was issued in 1953.



Examples of old postcards can sometimes be found of these Victorian goat carts, some of which were beautifully made by professional carriage makers.

As horse drawn carriages reached their zenith, so too did the miniature vehicles built for goats. They had to be lightweight. (A goat should only pull about 1 ½ times its own weight) These beautiful little vehicles were usually made to order by a local carriage maker. Sadly many were destroyed, but from time to time another old goat carriage is found amongst the cobwebs of an old carriage house. They were built of wood with iron fittings, exactly as a horse drawn vehicle is built, except that to lessen the weight wheels were sometimes all metal with wire spokes and a narrow solid rubber tyre.



Invalids also made use of them and photographs dating from 1914-18 War show an injured soldier riding in a goat cart.

During the Second World War a pair of goats was used to draw a small trolley carrying food to the forward troops, and due to the scarcity of petrol, horses, donkeys, and goats became popular again drawing carts.

Many animals including goats have been used over the centuries to carry pack saddles or pull carts, transporting various goods. The goat has proved itself to be a very versatile working animal.