

Coaching at the Races in Iffezheim 2018/2019

Driving the English mails from the 1780s until their decline around the 1840s was the job of the professional coachman. The mail coaches were supplied by contractors and driven by professional coachmen. The only person actually paid by the post office was the guard whose job it was to keep the coach on time and to protect the mailbags. Punctuality was a tremendous challenge to both horse and driver; the horses were not showy carriage breeds but merely working types. The mails had to keep to a strict timetable and be as reliable as the railways with which they competed after the 1830s (to their advantage, early steam engines were not very reliable; trains were fast but still often late).

The challenge of driving four horses fast over many miles without exhausting them, and covering the stages within a given period of time, was adopted next by a number of the aristocracy.



An early Royal Mail Coach

Having very little to do other than fox hunting or seducing the young local lasses, and since they were horsemen and constantly looking for some variety in their amusements, they thought it a good idea to try - as amateurs - the job of a professional coachman. Many a gentleman proved his ability as coachman on the box seat of a regular mail coach by 'shouldering' (the term given to the practice of slipping a tip over the coachman's shoulder), the gentleman then was permitted to change seats with said coachman and take up the reins, or 'ribbons' as they were colloquially known. Even the night mails were shouldered, an even more difficult challenge since these were often horsed by all manner of unsuitable animals (the origin of the word nightmare) that were cheap, unreliable, often downright lame, and difficult to drive. Many were blind and it would have been detrimental to the reputation of the contractor had these animals been seen in daylight. Recollections of amateur coachmen in

those days report many an adventure on the road when trying to keep up the pace to arrive on time.



Royal Mail Coach at night about 1840

When these amateur coachmen, some of whom were noblemen (for example, the Duke of Beaufort, Lord Chesterfield, Lord Willoughby de Broke and several others) became experts at driving a coach and four they found it to be an excellent toy for their society games. They turned out their privately owned coaches (also known as drags) and used them for picnic tours with friends - both male and female - at their country estates. Blood horses were needed for an elegant turnout and gentlemen now drove matched teams. The new sporting coachmen gathered for coaching events with the gentry of neighbouring estates and organized meets in the streets of London, e.g. at the Magazine in Hyde Park. The gentlemen secretaries of the various coaching clubs founded would organize meets: clubs such as the Bensington Driving Club, the Four-Horse Club and the Whip Club, to name a few.

As the mail coaches were no longer needed for the transportation of letters and parcels, the Queen's General Post Office decided to abolish most stages of this service but some of the club members were passionate enough about coaching to put vehicles on the road again, just for old times sake and to provide the chance to put their coach and four into regular service if they felt like doing so. They set up subscription coaches (all those involved sharing the costs) and these were often driven by professional coachmen as in the old days. The most prominent example of such a subscription coach was the coach called the 'Old Times' which ran from London to Brighton starting at Hatchett's Hotel - also known as The White Horse Cellar. Those road coaches were intended to take tourists to certain places of interest for sightseeing trips and day-outings at fashionable summer resorts.

This second age of coaching is known as the 'coaching revival'. This period of driving for fun and private purposes influenced the sport on the Continent too, partially in Paris, as well as in Berlin and Rome. In America, the fashionable magnates on the East Coast such as Colonel de Lancy Kane or Alfred Vanderbilt also drove road coaches.



The fashion of coaching in New York

There were even coaches horsed by the British Raj at Hyderabad. One of those Indian coaches made by Simpson in Madras, India, is still turned out for private driving events today. We know of Edwin Howlett, an English profession coachman, who made a living for himself, as did his sons, instructing society people how to drive a coach four-in-hand. He started up a business in Paris, then the pivotal point of entertainment during the *Belle Epoque* on the Continent.

Some of the most spectacular events of the coaching scene in England and on the Continent were the meets held at the racecourses: Ascot, in Epsom near London, Longchamp and Chantilly in France or Hoppegarten (Berlin) and Iffezheim (Baden-Baden) in Germany. Betting was the main attraction for the crowd, but the races were also a place that anyone who was anyone should be seen, an appearance more effectively staged when using a coach and four. At the end of the 19th century the course in Longchamp offered stabling for eighty harness horses from the coaches that were used as exclusive grandstands at the races.

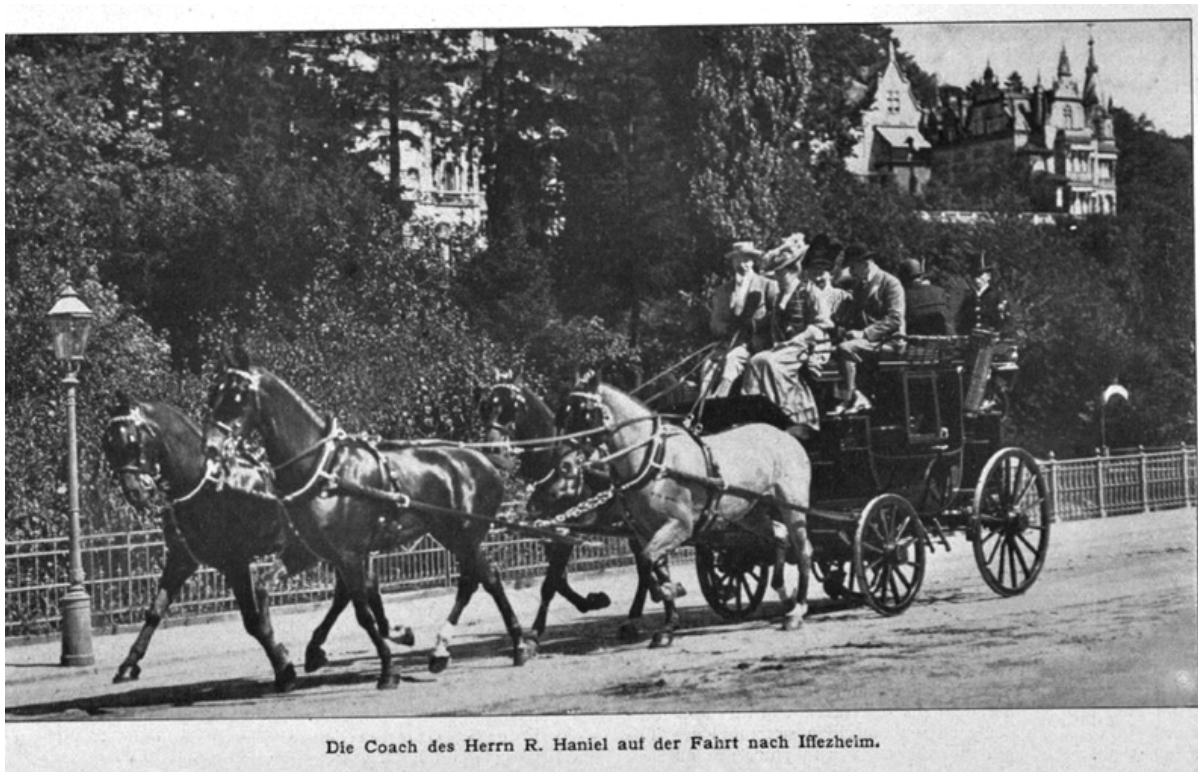
Fine formal attire was compulsory for the gentlemen and the guests who rode with them on their coaches.



Coaches at the racecourse at Iffezheim

The ladies were dressed according to the newest fashion, the grooms' liveries perfectly tailored in such places as Savile Row, London, made to the same high standard as their masters' morning coats. The picnics they ate next to the racecourse included the most delicious food and large amounts of champagne. The drags that the gentlemen used for such outings were well equipped with picnic hampers, ice boxes for the champagne and space for dishes and glasses. They carried picnic furniture for greater comfort and, last but not least, umbrellas and extra mackintoshes for all the guests to protect elegant clothing in case a thunderstorm threatened to spoil the refined afternoon amusement.

No doubt such performances impressed the public of the *Belle Epoque*, demonstrating the refined standard of living that the nobility and bourgeoisie of the time enjoyed. In Baden Baden, Germany, one of the most luxurious spas on the continent, a group of sporting noblemen founded the International Club in 1872, and took over the organization of horse racing at the racecourse in Iffezheim, which had been built in 1858. Among them were such illustrious personalities as Prince Menchikoff, Prince von Fürstenberg, the Duke of Hamilton, Count Henckel von Donnersmarck and Count Esterhazy. The club not only organized the races but also offered a framework of social events connected with the racing. The club ran its own road coach named the '*Bulgar*' to drive club members to the terraces or to be used as a grandstand.



Many members of the high society in the rich German Reich, such as the industrialist Haniel, August Count Bismarck who was an officer from the 1st Dragoon Guards, or some members of the princely houses in Germany, considered it the place to be whilst at the races: watching from their own coaches and enjoying the event in such a manner as the English did.

There is no question that this use of a private coach is both stylish and cultured. Today many people yearn to return to those days of refined elegance. They think little of modern day pop-culture. The desire for elegant cultured forms of sporting activities is apparent and this fact fuelled the organizers' need to offer a better and more attractive framework programme at the races. They found that the traditional use of a drag on the racecourse had not been continued after 1945, and yet there was still an unobtrusive coaching fraternity. The managing director of the Baden Racing Company, Jutta Hofmeister, managed to contact Heinz Scheidel of Mannheim, the doyen of carriage collectors and coaching experts, to ask him to organize such a historic coaching meet again at Iffezheim.



Heinz Scheidel's coach spinning along the Rhine River

The most suitable occasion for the re-introduction of such a nostalgic event was the weekend of September 1-2, 2018, since that was the 160th anniversary of the racecourse. If Heinz Scheidel agrees to run a project then it is sure to be a success. And so it was.

Heinz Scheidel and his coachman Hans-Werner Hamacher studied the location, decided on the best place for the temporary stabling and made a reconnaissance of the meadows and land between Iffezheim and the Rhine River. Calculating the limits of a coach's turning point concerning the narrow country lanes, they worked out two routes for the two days. When Heinz Scheidel issues an invitation, everybody is eager to attend and four friends were asked to bring a coach to a test run for this coaching at the races. So the lorries, arriving on Friday August 31, 2018, found a spacious area reserved for their horseboxes, with room to put to and temporary stabling at its centre. This area was situated close behind the central grandstand, a very practical arrangement as the horses could be led straight back to their stables once the coaches were in place - set up as grandstands before the first race - as they had been in the old days.

Once the horses had been unloaded and settled in their stables, the whips and their guests gathered at the entrance hall of the Baden Racing Headquarters where Mrs Jutta Hofmeister gave a most interesting and humorous welcoming speech, including a history of the races at Iffezheim. Afterwards a buffet was served which included several dishes of delicious snacks and wines from Baden. As the participants were well acquainted the conversation was intense and cheerful. Since everybody had to be up early the next morning, Heinz Scheidel rounded off the evening by issuing clear and precise instructions for the following day.

The experienced coachmen Hans-Werner Hamacher, Daniel Würigler, Paul de Meuter and Albrecht Mönch and their grooms had the coaches ready for the passengers within three quarters of an hour. The guests - the men dressed in morning coats and toppers, the ladies in long dresses and wide-brimmed hats - climbed up to their seats, and to the sound of the coach

horns off they went. The cleverly designed route took the coaches along the banks of the Rhine, (one narrow turn had to be taken immediately at the river) the coaches stopping several times for short breaks where the organizers had prepared tables with snacks and champagne. The main attraction, however, was the picnic itself. When the coaches turned left to enter through a large wrought iron gate they found themselves driving up a wide avenue leading to a beautiful stately home called 'Favorite'. The coaches stopped before the formal gardens in front of the house.



Preparing the picnic in front of Favorite Manor

Then the guests climbed off and the tables and chairs were unfolded and set out. The many delicacies were laid so that everyone could help themselves to the food. The clever design of imperials, picnic hampers and folding chairs etc, permitted a fast and elegant handling when these things were put up and later stashed away in the boots again. It may spoil the elegance of the affair were these items not smoothly and skilfully dealt with.



Favorite Manor

After returning to the stabling everyone helped to tend to the horses and to clean and polish the coaches again. Then everybody went to their hotels to change from their formal clothes into lounge suits for the dinner in the gardens of the Baden-Baden Spa.

The following day was a race day with thousands of visitors and an enormous amount of traffic. The horses were put to in the late morning and were driven a short way again to calm them down and give them a little exercise. Back from this drive the coaches were welcomed and introduced to the public by the racing speaker.



The last lap of the course

The public clapped while the four coaches made several laps of the course, driving the last lap side by side. Then the coaches were driven back to the given area, the coaches parked up and the horses stabled. Once again the picnics were set up next to the coaches; this time, however, under the eyes of thousands of spectators who were eager to watch so unusual a performance.



An excellent view of the course

The guests were lucky to be able to use the coaches as grandstands as they offered an excellent view of the course, and in particular of the finishing line. Unfortunately there is no reliable report of any betting sums placed or won by the coaching fraternity.



Champagne, thoroughbred horses, and risky betting

The enormous interest the public took in the coaches and the fact that the Baden Racing Company, as well as Heinz Scheidel and all the other participants, were thrilled by the drive, has encouraged the organizers to make coaching at the racing in Iffezheim an annual event within the September racing calendar.



Following these plans Heinz Scheidel reconnoitred new interesting routes for the coaches, and ordered more temporary stabling for the horses, as on August 30th, 2019 seven coaches were unloaded at the racecourse in Iffezheim. These included Heinz Scheidel's road coach built by Holland & Holland (London) driven by Hans Werner Hamacher, Heinz Scheidel's drag built by Dussmann (Mühlheim) and driven by Michael Mühlbauer, Fred Holländer's drag built by Holland & Holland and driven by its owner, Fred Holländer's road coach built by Holland & Holland and driven by Harvey Waller, Gerwin Knippenborg's drag built by Cesare Sala (Milano) and driven by its owner, Paul de Meuter's drag built by Cook & Holdway (London) and driven by its owner, and finally Franz Knüsel's road coach built by Kellner (Paris) and driven by Daniel Würgler. Albrecht Mönch was unfortunately unable to drive his road coach (by Brewster, New York) as he was still suffering from a bruised shoulder.



A cheerful party

All these coaches set out for the drive to the stately home 'Favorite' where the picnic was to take place again. The party was an international bunch, coming from Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands and last but not least from the USA. The drive through the bush landscape near the Rhine was entertaining and peppered with cheerful chats, and cheerful tunes from the coach horns, with the occasional roe deer watching the spectacle from a distance. The drive was pleasant as the shade from the trees made for a moderate temperature.



Fred Hollaender's turnout

The day heating up and the picnic being scheduled for noon, everybody acknowledged Heinz Scheidel's foresight in putting the turnouts in the shade beneath the trees of the formal garden in front of the castle. While the grooms rushed to the castle with their buckets to provide water for the horses, the gentlemen put up the folding chairs and tables and pulled the lunch boxes and picnic hampers out of the coaches' boots.



In the shade of the trees...

The ladies' skilled hands put the various dishes out on their serving tables and laid the tables – including vases with flowers, the colours matching those of their coaches!



Three cheers to Heinz Scheidel...

Heinz Scheidel soon gathered his friends around a very practical collapsible bar that he had ready in his coach containing an assortment of fine aperitifs. The lunch was refreshing and entertaining as everybody paid visits to the other coaches' parties. They chatted and proposed toasts to the drivers, and in particular to the outstanding merits of Heinz Scheidel.

The horses being rested and everybody in a cheerful mood, the coaches turned home to the racecourse. The parties went leisurely back to their hotels to change from morning coats to black tie, as one of Heinz Scheidel's guests, Gerd Overlack, happens to own Eberstein Castle near Baden Baden where he had invited the whole party back to a festive dinner that evening. The host welcomed everybody with warm words and then told them some of the history of Eberstein Castle.

Like the year before, the following morning, horses, harness and coaches received a last polish and the horses were put to for the drive to the racecourse. After a drive of approximately one hour (with a short stop for drinks and snacks served from a bar on a trade vehicle drawn by a Black Forest Cob) the seven coaches arrived.

They were welcomed and introduced to the public by the racing speaker and made a few laps around the course - this time on a track outside the course to spare the turf for the races. A picturesque performance for the public which they acknowledged with their applause.



Taking the horses back to the stables

Now the traditional ceremony was performed, the coaches were lined up next to the finishing line which offered a good view of the winning post. The well-practiced procedure of putting up the picnic furniture, producing the glasses, plates and cutlery from the boxes and laying the tables near the coaches (the snacks being provided by a caterer) was accomplished in no time. Then the passengers were able to sit back on the roof seats of the coaches to watch the race horses, or to get down to have a snack at one of the tables or stand in groups and chat to

friends, with glasses of champagne in their hands. The seven coaches together with their passengers, drivers and the well-trained grooms made a fine background for the participants and the public who watched the event with interest.



An entertaining afternoon at the race course

After the last race the coaches were taken back and loaded into the lorries and everybody assembled near the stable tent for a last meeting to talk about this fine event and to promise to come again next year, and in this way re-establish a cultured tradition that has come down to us from earlier generations, a pastime passed on by the English to their European counterparts.



Report: Hartmuth Huber

Photographs: Dieter Gaiser (1), Tradition Fahrkunst (2-5), Heinz Scheidel (6-19)