

THE INTERNATIONAL CARRIAGE DRIVERS' ASSOCIATION

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Launched at the FEI World Cup final in Bordeaux at the beginning of February 2023, the International Carriage Drivers' Association is a driver led organisation which will represent the views of its members to the FEI.

The ICDA has several key objectives, such as aiming to support the growth of the sport globally in conjunction with the FEI; upholding sportsmanship across the classes, and helping to promote the image of the sport to both the equestrian world and the wider public. In essence, the ICDA will give drivers and the sport a unified voice.

The ICDA also intends to raise the profile of driving as a discipline to equestrian National Federations (NF), and give it stronger representation alongside other equestrian sports. It is broadly felt that driving has not always had the same sort of profile or understanding in NFs as other areas such as dressage, jumping or eventing.

Another aim of the association is to increase the number of athletes competing internationally across all classes and give them a greater strategic role in the sport's development. In turn those athletes should feel that by having their own representative organisation, they have an effective forum to influence any changes that are made when dealing directly with the FEI. In practical terms, by inviting 2* and 3* drivers from across the categories to join, the ICDA will give equal representation across the classes for all drivers and combinations to the FEI. Manuel Bandeira de Mello, the FEI's driving director, has welcomed the ICDA and sees its formation as an opportunity for drivers to engage productively with the FEI.

Two of the biggest names in driving, Koos de Ronde and Boyd Exell are responsible for the ICDA and they have been supported by Koos' wife Marie and Hugh Scott-Barrett. Hugh said in Bordeaux just after the launch, *'Dressage and jumping already have similar athlete led associations so in fact this is a well-trodden path. The idea is that the ICDA does two things – provides a unifying voice for drivers across the different classes and enables drivers, as a stakeholder group, to have a direct line of communication to the FEI.'*

'The strategic direction of the ICDA is to ensure that all classes and hopefully those from all backgrounds will have the opportunity to shape the sport going forward. The committee is currently being ratified and there will be 14 or 15 members in total – it is a large group, but it's important that the committee is inclusive with all classes fairly represented. Those initially invited to join are individuals who are keen to play a role. As set out in the Statutes, elections will follow in the next couple of years.'

Other leading names from a range of nations who have been invited to join the committee include Glenn Geerts and René Poensgen for horse fours; Martin Hölle, Jacob Arnold and Franck Grimonprez for the horse pairs; Kelly Houtappels-Bruder for single horses, Rosanna Freer and Lea Schmidlin for ponies, and Jacques Poppen for para driving. Franz Schiltz, who is the FEI Athletes' Representative, is also on the committee and additional pony and single horse representatives are currently being invited.

As well as the drivers themselves, the ICDA welcomes as members supporters, media figures, officials, volunteers and grooms. At this early stage, membership is free and will remain so until 2025. Non-drivers will not have voting rights but will be encouraged to attend the General Assembly.

For those behind it, to have the ICDA up and running in time for a major rules review in 2025 is important. One of the reasons for the formation of the association was that many in the sport felt that due to Covid and certain logistical issues, some rule changes were brought in that were not given balanced consideration. Some, such as a change in the weight of the horse fours and pony marathon carriages, and the length of the horse fours dressage arena, proved to be unpopular amongst the drivers. After lobbying, a number of the rules were reversed, but there wasn't an obvious way to do this other than opportune conversations, so it was felt that the time had come to form an organisation whose views can be formally presented to and acknowledged by the FEI.

Hugh adds, *'Once a Memorandum of Understanding is signed with the FEI, the ICDA will have an opportunity directly to speak with the FEI about the issues that affect the future direction of our sport. ICDA will then receive information at the same time as the National Federations, which will give drivers the time to form a considered view ahead of the formal recommendations which are made through the National Federations. This should give driving a great opportunity to take control of its strategic destiny.'*

With all eyes on Bordeaux in February for the FEI Driving World Cup final, it was the perfect platform for the launch.

For further information or to become a member, please go to ICDA website – icda-driving.com