

PART 2—LEARNING COMMANDS

PART 1- GETTING STARTED

It is quite the sight to see a goat in harness, driving with a youngster at a local fair - a shining cart, a goat proudly showing off his or her harness, and a happy owner in tow. Many times people have an extra wether hanging around the farm and would love to teach it to drive - but where do you begin?

First you need to select a goat that can fit the job:

I prefer to use a wether, but dry does can be used. Animals should have sufficient bone structure and good conformation. They don't need to be perfect, but a well-put-together animal will last longer. The goat should have a good attitude, and be well socialized. Try to select a wether from a larger breed, especially if you are an adult that wants to drive. Although a goat can easily drag you on a lead, you want him/her to be comfortable in harness, and not overwhelmed. Start Young!!!

In the beginning, I like to work with the kids at a few months of age, getting them used to a lead, and some voice commands. I like to get a simple dog or puppy harness to put on him/her to get the goat used to something around it's body. Depending on how you want to train your goat to steer, this would be the time to introduce a small halter (if you want to drive using a bridle). No reins yet, just wearing the halter, and getting them used to a lead attached will be work enough for the first few lessons.

Some commands that I use (you can pick what ever ones work for you as long as you are consistent) are:

"Haw" and "Gee" (like oxen - left, & right) this will be a vocal command to use with rein signals.

"Whoa" : stop "Walk on" : Move forward

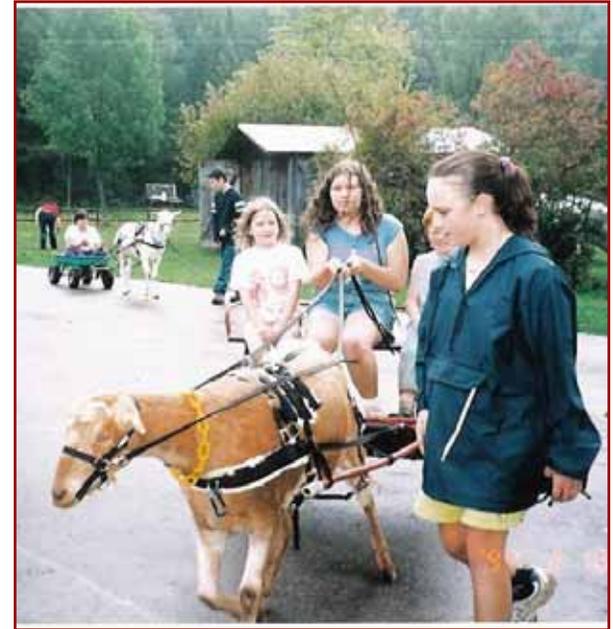
Clucking noises : Move faster

"Back" : for backing up

"Stand" : stand still for harnessing or getting off the cart

These commands can be introduced on a leash at a young age . When going on a walk, stop and say "whoa." After a while the kid learns that when you say whoa, you stop. Be patient, this takes some time especially with a young kid. You can start practicing the other commands as well. Kids are smart, and if you keep it fun, they learn fast. I try not to work with a young kid for more than 15 minutes at a time.

Once the kids are quite a few months old, and of good size (I'd give an age but each breed matures at a different rate), you can introduce a "ground driving harness." This is a training harness that has loops to attach a training cart to, or lines with a weight. Also, this is the time to get your driving bridle and reins. At this stage of the game you will be introducing the whole idea of "goats go first, people follow behind." After months of you dragging the little one behind you, trying to keep the goat in front is challenging, and frustrating at times. I would recommend a helper for the first few sessions in harness, ground driving.



Teaching Your Goat To Drive



PART 3- ACTUALLY LEARNING TO “DRIVE”

I begin the lesson by harnessing up the goat, complete with bridle and reins. A helper will attach a lead to a ring on the goat's halter, or else to its collar. The driver will take the reins and a small driving whip, and assume the driving position behind the goat while the assistant stays at the head. Give your forward command, and have your leader walk. Gently give the goat a small touch with the whip on the rump if he/she is a bit hesitant - this will be a command to also help your goat move forward if a voice command is ignored later on. At this point the leader can work with you on starting turns. I usually walk a square; making turns at the corners, and halting in-between them. Be sure to work both directions. Eventually after a few weeks of practicing with a helper, the goat will be ready to work on a longer lead and will let you do more controlling from behind. Finally, your leader can drift towards the rear of the goat, completing this stage of training.



PART 4 - INTRODUCING THE CART

Before even attempting to introduce a cart, or training poles, your goat should be -1- proficient at listening to commands, 2) turning well, and 3) no longer needing a helper by his/her head. On this lesson, you will need the help of your assistant once again. I like to lead the goat in harness to the training cart, or long poles. Let them smell it, and have your helper move it around to get the goat used to the noise it makes when behind it. When everyone seems okay with the cart (including humans – take a deep breath), slowly bring the goat to the cart, and have your helper roll the cart up to the goat's hindquarters. Quietly attach the traces, shafts, etc. If the goat panics, just calmly unhitch and try again. Most goats just stand there wondering why a funny thing is attached to them. Now the real test happens —

PART 4 — GETTING READY FOR PASSENGERS

Have your helper move to the goat's head, once again on a leash – very short, or hold its collar. Ask the goat to walk forward. He/she may balk, rear, back up or try to run. Many times they don't want to move – a small tap of the whip may be necessary. Your helper is there to stop the goat if it should panic, and to help walk the goat until the goat gets used to pulling the cart. This lesson is another milestone, and a difficult one to accomplish. Patience is the key lesson here, and keeping the training lesson short is another key point.

You can slowly increase the time your goat is hitched in harness. Remember that your goat needs time to develop muscles to pull the cart before you can expect the goat to pull the cart for a long time or to pull a person in the cart. You will need a helper at the goat's head for a few lessons, and then you should be on your own! You can slowly add weight to the cart (or a child if the goat is being well-mannered, and safe). Once the sessions are going well, and you have adequate control – slowly hop on board.

Congratulations! Now how about training a team?!

A great place to get a harness and/or cart is Hoeger Goat supply. You can look them up online. Or you can make a harness and homemade cart. I