

Palmetto Carriage Works

Media Kit: Frequently Asked Questions on Animal Care

Palmetto Carriage Works (PCW) Animal Care:

How many animals are currently under PCW care?

The Palmetto Carriage “herd” is made up of 35 mules, 20 horses, two goats, and six chickens. Our barn in downtown Charleston comfortably holds up to 28 animals in large box stalls.

How much hay and food is needed to properly provide for all of the animals?

Palmetto Carriage uses approximately 3,500 square bales, 225 round bales of hay, and 61 tons of feed each year.

What is used to keep the animals safe from things like insects and worms and to ensure comfortable living conditions?

Palmetto Carriage uses approximately 275 tubes of de-wormer each year and approximately 12,000 bags of shavings for stall bedding each year, which helps to provide the animals with comfortable living conditions.

Why is Palmetto Carriage Works’ animal welfare program seen as helpful to these animals, and has it met all of the qualifications for properly raising these animals?

Palmetto Carriage Works’ animal welfare program offers a second career to animals that would often end up as another “unwanted horse statistic.” Palmetto Carriage follows a comprehensive carriage animal welfare program. They have a 100 percent success rate with their heat related animal welfare program, as measured by city veterinarians and the City of Charleston.

Are visitors allowed to drop by and check on the animals outside of the carriage tours?

Palmetto Carriage’s barn is always open to the public, though we urge respect for the animals and follow strict safety guidelines to keep the animals and our guests safe.

Are visitors allowed to pet the animals?

In most cases, yes. Each animal is different, so always ask the driver or staff first before touching an animal.

How often are the animals checked out by a medical professional or individually assessed to make sure they are healthy and happy?

Palmetto Carriage animals see a veterinarian a minimum of three times a year. There is also a strict system in place to ensure that each animal's temperature is taken after every tour, all year long.

What kind of animals do you use to pull the carriages?

Palmetto Carriage uses mule teams or single draft horses on the larger carriages and single mules or horses on the smaller carriages.

What are mules?

A mule is a hybrid of a male donkey and a female horse. Palmetto Carriage uses mules because like draft horses, they are bred for "pulling" and also have a very calm temperament that enables them to work well in an urban setting. The mule has been the work animal of choice for centuries in the South.

How long do the animals work every day?

The Palmetto Carriage animal's average workday is five hours, but is limited to eight hours, six days a week.

Do the animals ever leave the city and go to the country?

Yes, Palmetto Carriage animals all spend time at a farm on Johns Island, which is about 20 miles away. The company has a truck and trailer that can hold up to 10 animals, and regularly rotates the stock. It is beneficial for the horses to get time and space in a green pasture, but they actually encounter less issues in the Red Barn than at the farm. The reason for this is the constant care and monitoring they receive in the controlled conditions of the barn, as opposed to the open fields where they have more time on their own.

How often do the animals go to the farm, and how much time do they spend there?

Palmetto Carriage animals on average spend 25 weeks out of the year at the Doyle's farm on John's Island, far beyond the city's minimum requirement of six weeks.

Questions about the quality of life and care of the animals:

Do the horses like this job?

Carriage horses are bred to work in harness, and the exercise keeps them healthy. Horses recognize, respond to, and develop an affection for their drivers.

Does the pavement hurt their hooves?

No, because they wear protective shoes that prevent any pain or injuries to their hooves. Palmetto Carriage uses almost 2000 shoes a year.

How much weight can a horse pull?

A horse can easily pull a wheeled vehicle that is six times his own weight. However, most carriage horses only pull 25 percent of that capacity on a regular basis.

What is the average age of the carriage horses?

The average age of a Palmetto Carriage animal is 15.

What is the average life expectancy of a horse?

Twenty-five to 30 years is the average life expectancy. However, many horses have been known to live well into their forties.

Is it normal and safe for a horse to sweat?

Yes, it's actually a good thing for horses to sweat. It is a natural cooling process, just as it is with humans. PCW also adds a vitamin E supplement to the animals' feed to promote sweating and electrolytes to the water they drink to replace necessary elements lost through sweating. Additionally, visitors will notice plenty of fans around the barn, including a fan that sprays a gentle mist over the animals to keep them cool.

How do horses rest?

Horses usually sleep while standing up to rest and often stand with one hind foot cocked. Sometimes horses will actually lie down during the day to rest their legs or nap.

How often are the horses fed?

A horse consumes two or three meals of hay/grain per day.

Does it ever get too hot for the animals to work?

Yes, when the temperature reaches 98 degrees or the combined temperature and humidity reaches 185, carriage tours are halted. Additionally, PCW rectally checks the temperature of each animal before and after every tour, year round to ensure that it stays within the normal range of 99 to 101 degrees. If the animal's temperature exceeds 103 degrees, it is pulled from service. Charleston is the only city in the world where the animals are monitored individually. There has never been a heat related incident in over 30 years of business.

If an animal looks skinny, does that mean he is not getting enough to eat?

PCW's mules and horses are real athletes and in top working condition. Showing a little rib is not an indication that they are underfed.

If a mule is bending his leg while standing, does that mean he is hurt?

No, when a mule bends his hind leg, he is just resting, not hurting. This is similar to what humans do when distributing weight from one hip to another while standing.

Do the carriage animals get breaks between tours?

Palmetto Carriage animals are given a minimum of 15 minutes to rest and to drink water between each tour.

How many years do you typically keep the animals working?

The number of years the animals work depends on the individual animal. Some animals we buy never pull a carriage, while others work for many years.

What happens to your animals when you retire them?

When an animal is retired, it is offered at a very low price or PCW will give it away. The reason is not because they aren't worth anything, but because PCW has built a strong bond with the animal and values its years of work. Finding a good home is the only criteria used when placing retired stock.

How many accidents in a year, on average, does the carriage industry in Charleston see?

Based on the number of carriage rides offered each year in downtown Charleston, the chance of an accident occurring during a ride is less than one in 12,000. This is based on statistics from The City of Charleston, who is “partnered” with and closely monitors the welfare of the animals, alongside PCW and other caring, concerned horse carriage companies and partners.

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