

FEI World Cup™ Driving – The ninth season of a thrilling competition



Following the success of the FEI World Cup™ Jumping (introduced in 1978) and of the FEI World Cup™ Dressage (introduced in 1985), the International Driving Community contemplated the creation of an FEI World Cup™ Driving.

The extensive work, in 2000, of a Driving Think Tank, which evaluated the future of the Driving Sport from communication, marketing and promotion aspects led to the creation of an Indoor World Cup for four-in-hand drivers, to start in November 2001.

The space limitations of the normal indoor events, either in the form of a sports arena or an exhibition arena, led to the establishment of special rules for the FEI World Cup™ Driving. There would be no dressage, while the marathon and obstacles (cones) driving phases were combined into the one.

The qualification takes place at especially selected summer events and the best ten drivers of the standings after the last qualifier get to compete at the FEI World Cup™ Driving competitions during the winter season.

In the initial years, the FEI World Cup™ Driving consisted of events in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Spain. In 2007, Hungary, one of the largest driving nations, successfully organised a try-out competition and was then officially added to the programme of events for the 2008/09 season.

This year, France is back on the FEI World Cup™ Driving calendar having not hosted an FEI World Cup™ Driving competition since 2003, with the well-known Jumping International de Bordeaux.

The first three years, Germany's Michael Freund, one of the founders of the FEI World Cup™ Driving, dominated the series. There is little doubt that his thrilling rides, charm and ability to make the spectators enormously enthusiastic greatly contributed to the success of the FEI World Cup™ Driving. This would not last, as the competition was getting ever so closer to Freund, and after three years, the 2004/2005 season Final delivered a thrilling clash between Michael Freund and his strongest opponent IJsbrand Chardon. The two drivers had to share the FEI World Cup™ title that season as the Final at that time was awarded with points rather than from start to scratch. That was changed the next season and that year, it was Chardon who ruled the Final and was crowned FEI World Cup™ Champion. Michael Freund ended his career as an active four-in-hand driver after the FEI World Equestrian Games in 2006. He was not qualified for the FEI World Cup™ Driving season 2006/2007 but he received several wild cards, won two competitions and qualified again for the Final in which he went on to beat IJsbrand Chardon once again. A new winner emerged on the scene in 2007/2008,



with Freund's compatriot Christoph Sandmann rewriting history as he won the Final in Leipzig having been invited on a wild card. The 2008/2009 season ended in a close battle between IJsbrand Chardon and Boyd Exell and was won by the latter for the first time in his career.

The 2009/2010 season will be hotly contested with the Final in Geneva to be held for the first time alongside the FEI World Cup™ Jumping Final where the best six drivers of the standings after the last competition in Bordeaux will battle it out for the prestigious FEI World Cup™ title.