

Competitive pulling

The sport was born when farmers were done with field work for the day, challenging others to see whose team was the strongest. The team that could pull the most weight was the winner.

This barnyard elimination competition led to gatherings on the town green to see who had the strongest team of draft animals, as well as who had the biggest produce, etc., giving rise to the birth of local fairs.

Today some teamsters still use their cattle and horses for field work, but many are used for the hobby and sport of pulling. Teamsters travel to as many as 50 pulls each year to compete.

Horse pulling was first seen at Eastern States Exposition in 1926, and remains a popular sport in the Midwest and southern states.

Ox pulling, a favorite New England sport, debuted at Eastern States Exposition in 1947 and continues to be a prominent event today.

Like livestock shows, draft animal pulling is among the most traditional agricultural competition still held at The Big E.

DRAFT TERMINOLOGY

Block: Concrete blocks used to provide weight. Small blocks weigh approx. 500 lbs., large blocks are 1,000 lbs.

Boat: The stone boat that is loaded with blocks weighs approx. 500 lbs.; this weight is not included in the weight pulled.

Goad: A stick or prod used to urge the animals.

Teamster: Person who drives a team of oxen or draft horses.



Hitching the horses

The pulling harness is equipped with a heavy duty leather collar for each horse, a bridle with a bit and blinders, and a work harness. The metal evener is used to attach the harnessed horses to the load. Weight classes are determined by the combined weight of the horses.

Most New England pulls are 12-foot elimination competitions where the team is given a total of 5 minutes or 3 hitches to pull the boat for a continuous distance.

Oxen under yoke

Traditional neck yokes are most popular in the United States. The yoke is made out of a wooden block and equipped with two wooden bows that go around the animals' necks. A chain is used to attach the team to the load.

Head yokes are popular among Canadian teamsters; the yoke rests on the back of the poll (head) of the oxen and fitted to the horns with leather straps.

Each team is given 5 minutes or 3 hitches to complete a continuous 6-foot movement in order to progress into the next round.

VOICE COMMANDS

Gee: Right

Haw: Left

Whoa: Stop

The Sport of Draft Animal Pulling



A DEMONSTRATION OF **skill**
power
teamwork

Brought to you by
Eastern States Exposition
West Springfield, MA 01089

- 2018 -

Draft power built an agricultural revolution

Historically, early farmers across Europe and Asia used oxen and later horses to help clear their land and raise crops. These animals provided the power to plant and harvest bountiful crops, log more lumber, and transport products to greater distances.

As humans expanded civilization around the world, they brought their livestock and improved equipment to make the most of a day's work.

Early American colonists were aided by oxen and horses as they built their homes, towns and roads. Pioneers hitched their teams to head West into the heartland of America, and moved on to the Pacific.

Some used horses, others used oxen, and many used both until the tractor was invented. While the 'iron horse' powered forward in most agricultural endeavors, draft animals continue to be utilized across the nation today.

New England teamsters use their teams to haul maple syrup in the winter months, and for logging in places that can't be reached by tractor.

Internationally, oxen continue to serve an important role in the cultivation of developing countries.

Draft horses

The Eastern Draft Horse Association is the largest in the nation, with members throughout the United States and Canada. This organization is responsible for protecting teamsters and insuring proper treatment of pulling horses.

Popular pulling breeds include the Belgian, Clydesdale, Percheron, Shire and Suffolk Punch. Like any athlete, they are trained and conditioned for their work. The competitive prime for most horses is between 8 and 12 years of age.

Oxen

Oxen can grow as tall as 7 feet high at the top of the shoulders, and weigh over 2,500 pounds.

Ox pulling originally employed the traditional dairy breeds of cattle: Holstein, Milking Shorthorn, Ayrshire, Brown Swiss and Devon. These breeds are docile and commonly used in Youth Working Steer competitions. Today most of the cattle used for ox pulling are Chianina, an ancient Italian breed introduced to the U.S. in 1971 and excelling in power and strength.

Training begins with halter lessons when the calves



are 1 to 2 months of age. This teaches the animals to walk and stop via voice command and pressure applied to the halter. Next, the pair are put into a calf yoke to learn how to walk together as a team. By a year of age, the team will be introduced to pulling. It is important to start them slow, allowing their muscles to form before weight is gradually added.

The New England Ox Teamsters Association oversees pulling activities in the region.

Youth Working Steers

Many youth participants in the New England region compete in Working Steer contests. These competitions allow junior teamsters the opportunity to pit their skills against their peers to show how well their calves are trained, and the maneuvers they are able to perform on command.

