JOY RIDE

Thanks to Frolic Weymouth, the colorful sport of carriage driving keeps rumbling along.

BY GERALDINE FABRIKANT

Perhaps the most sought-after invitation in the rarefied world of carriage driving is to George “Frolic” Weymouth’s annual six-mile run, from his house in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, to Winterthur, the Delaware museum created by Weymouth’s late cousin Henry Francis du Pont in what had been one of the largest private residences in the United States. The occasion is the Winterthur Point-to-Point, the steeplechase event held on the museum’s expansive grounds every May, a focal point of the equestrian season.

Weymouth has been a carriage aficionado ever since he bought his 1755 stone farmhouse, in 1960. “I decided I did not want to see a car in front of it,” the dapper Weymouth recalled, as he donned a top hat for the ride, in which he would pilot his rare 1894 Brewster three-quarter-size park drag. “So I bought a carriage, and I loved driving, and then I got a pair and I kept buying more.” At one time Weymouth had 100 carriages.

On May 5 more than 200 guests came for a weekend of driving elaborate coaches and carriages. The opening event was a leisurely drive through Weymouth’s 250-acre farm to a luncheon at the adjacent property of his cousins Jeffrey and Anne Nielsen. Some drivers had been at it for decades, but Herbert Kohler Jr, president of the manufacturing company of the same name, brought the four English piebald coach horses and carriage he bought last year from the artist Jamie Wyeth and his wife Phyllis, a member of the du Pont family. (The horses got their black-and-white coloring from Oberon, a stallion owned by Queen Elizabeth II.) “Jamie did a painting of my wife, and Frolic did one of me,” Kohler said happily. He flies in from Kohler, Wisconsin, every few weeks to drive.

The highlight of the Point-to-Point weekend was the hearty ride along roads lined with well-wishers and gawkers, as 39 carriages made their way to Winterthur. There, a crowd that included Henry Belin du Pont, Harry Tower, Regis de Ramel, and Michael Mattson had gathered to watch and listen as the annual Parade of Carriages grandly entered the grounds, with each participant announced over a loudspeaker and grooms blowing coach horns. As the men removed their top hats, the champagne and wine flowed. Louis Pianacone’s grooms popped open the hind boot of his British road coach, Tantrix, to reveal a buffet of fresh shrimp, fruit, and cookies served on a three-tier tray.

After the tailgate lunches and a very full program of steeplechase racing (the main event here since 1978), the carriages left as they had arrived, in a stately line. It was back to Chadds Ford, where Weymouth was throwing his annual pig roast along Brandywine Creek for owners, friends, grooms, and coachmen, including Robert Longstaff, who has worked with Weymouth for more than 30 years. Among the humorous laurels the host bestowed was the Fickle Finger of Fate Award, which went to Dr. Andrew Fiel for driving his carriage into a fence. Thanks to Weymouth, Chadds Ford’s maze of paved and unpaved byways retains its pristine 18th-century charm; it also remains a sportsman’s challenge.