

SHAFTS – LET’S THINK WELL ABOUT THEM by Peter McIntyre

In the past two years there have been three cases of shaft failure, resulting in bad accidents in two cases. These caused much pain and suffering, either to the driver or groom or both.

Steel pipe shafts were the culprits.

- Pipe shafts must be made of *one piece of pipe*, definitely no ‘add ons’ with welding
- Do not shorten steel shafts by cutting and welding
- Pipe for shafts should be of a reasonable thickness preferably 3mm or larger
- Sulky shafts are most affected by fatigue after a few years of use, particularly where the shafts meet the sulky body.

It worries me a lot that people who have no contact with horse drawn vehicles are often being used to do this welding.

Wooden shafts have been around for one hundred years plus. Not many are used in CDEs any more, but there are a lot in use in the show ring and in pleasure driving. Spotted gum has been in use for a long time and far surpasses plantation grown timber for vehicle use. However it still has its faults if not cared for. Well oiled (linseed oil) and painted shafts which moisture cannot enter, will last for many years. Stress by way of horses kicking, bucking etc and neglect by being left out of cover cause splits which weaken the wood.

So, *look at them !*

Flex the points towards each other. You should not hear any creaking of wood. If they make a noise, investigate and find the weak spot. If you are not sure, seek other opinions.

Now that you have read about shafts, have a good look at yours, before *you* are the next accident. We *all* need to take the utmost care.