

WHEN A LLAMA IS SMARTER THAN ITS HANDLER

By Tim Kohloff, *Sunset Llama Farm*



ABOUT FIVE YEARS or so ago I was asked by the Buffalo Missouri Chamber of Commerce to bring my Llamas to the Celtic Festival held every September. Although Llamas do not quite fit in with the Celtic theme they thought that people would enjoy seeing them pull a cart. Since my main goal was and still is to promote Llama carting I was quick to say yes.

The first few years I took four Llamas, that way when I had one Llama hooked to the cart and one tethered behind that left two at the barn for people to see and ask questions. Anyone who has been in public with Llamas knows that people are “usually” happy if not surprised to see a Llama(s) at a public event, they are quick to take pictures and ask questions. If you have a Llama pulling a cart that adds to the fun.

This year I decided to take only two Llamas to the Celtic Festival, Milkyway and Rambo. Rambo is my ambassador for rescue, he goes on all rescues where Llamas are running wild and/or can't be caught, he has a 100% success rate, so far. Milkyway goes every year, he is the main carting Llama at Sunset Llama Farm. Rambo is a future carting Llama so he goes everywhere Milkyway pulls a cart. Ferdinand who usually goes along is number two carting (or relief) Llama stayed home for the first time. All three of them have been in numerous parades and other events since coming to us. However this year I decided it was too much for my wife to do spinning

demonstrations, take care of the Southeast Llama Rescue & Missouri Llama Association information table, answer questions and also watch the Llamas left behind when I was out with the other two. So I took Milkyway and Rambo, it was “old hat to both of them” and I expected no trouble, but I was smart enough to know that you always have to be on the look out for people who aren't paying attention and walk out in front of you or maybe just do something stupid such as just walk up to the Llama and grab a hold of him, you just never know.

So, in the morning we put the pack on Rambo, tethered him to the cart and hitched Mr. Milkyway up and went for a drive around the Dallas County Fairgrounds to show the people a little of what Llamas can do. We always get our share of “oh look at that” and “I didn't know a Llama could pull a cart.” Anyone who takes Llamas in public is used to that. There's always people who want to take pictures and ask questions, so the trip around usually takes awhile, but we enjoy it.

Mid afternoon I decided we would take one more trip around, but I got a little lazy so I left the pack off of Rambo, he did not seem to be disappointed not to be carrying the pack. As usual I harnessed up in the barn, for one reason it is the only flat area nearby that we are not in the way of the festivities. I know that it could be a little dangerous to harness up and hitch to the cart with people in the barn walking by and standing by our information table, however I know and trust my Llamas and I always keep a sharp eye out for people getting too close or who may spook the Llamas.

This time was no different, I hooked Rambo to the rear of the cart and he stood patiently while I prepared Milkyway for our last trip around the festival. My wife was talking to a lady at our information table and another lady stood against a corral panel in front of Milkyway and a little to the side watching us. She really wasn't in the way. I had thought about asking her to move but for some reason that I still do not understand, I didn't. So, all hooked up, one last check to make sure everything is



Harnessing Milkyway at the Celtic Festival in Buffalo, Missouri, Rambo tethered to the rear of the cart.

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hooked correctly, make sure Rambo is secured and were ready to go, RIGHT? I thought so.

I got in the cart and told Milkyway "ok let's go" and at the same time I lifted the driving lines a few inches and dropped them on his backside. He didn't move. Usually this is all it takes to get him moving. I did it again, nothing. I did it a little harder, no go. So I slap him pretty good but not too hard and say "forward Milkyway." NOTHING. Now I'm not happy, this isn't like him. I decided it must be the lady in front of him. So I started getting out of the cart to lead him a few feet and then get back into the cart. As I began exiting the cart the lady to our right moved to our left and had a small child with her. The child had been hidden by the Llama's neck and lower body. I hadn't seen it. As soon as the lady and the child had gotten out of the way Milkyway began moving on his own. I immediately was scared because of what could have happened, I had almost ran over a little child with a Llama. Thinking to myself, I got really mad at the lady for putting us all in that position. After a few minutes I began to thank Milkyway for being smarter

than me, I shouldn't have put any of us in that position in the first place, but since I did I should have checked to make sure the path in front of us was 100% clear. I couldn't see anything other than the lady standing to the side, so I thought it was clear.

Thank goodness the Llama was smarter than me. It's not the first time he has avoided an accident/collision with people walking out in front of us, but it is the first time he has performed his duty to this level. Not bad for a \$25 Llama I guess.

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**Milkyway, pulling the cart, and Rambo at the Celtic Festival.
Earlier Rambo was carrying a pack. The cart was custom made several years ago.**