

Hippoevent Para Spotlight

Voices of Para Driving



The interview series with inspiring personalities from Para Driving

In conversation with FEI Para Driving World Champion Heiner Lehrter, Germany

Heiner Lehrter is one of the defining personalities of Para Driving in Germany and on the international stage.

Over many years, he has actively shaped the sport, contributing to its development both athletically and structurally. Beyond his sporting achievements, Heiner is widely respected for his long-standing commitment to Para sport. He stands for the continuous development of Para Driving and the active promotion of the sport's international visibility.

His name represents consistency, experience, and sporting integrity. In conversation with Hippoevent, he shares personal insights into his journey, speaks about the importance of teamwork, and explains why Para Driving is about far more than competition.

The Beginning of a Journey

Hippoevent: How did you get into driving sport – and what fascinated you about it?

Heiner Lehrter: *As a child, I started vaulting together with my two brothers at the riding and driving club in Ibbenbüren. My specialty was the shoulder stand, which I had the opportunity to perform at many competitions.*

Later, I wanted to follow in my brothers' footsteps and began riding. However, I had a serious fall, and my grandmother said, "That's enough. Heiner is getting a pony and a carriage from me."

The carriage was a gig, and despite being completely inexperienced, I entered my very first driving competition with that gig and my pony Freddy at the age of 13. Back then – just as today – competing with a gig was not actually allowed, but the judges overlooked it. I finished fifth out of five competitors, and I was incredibly proud.

After that, I immediately got a four-wheeled carriage, and for the first time I felt fully accepted, just like the able-bodied athletes. More competitions followed – along with many wonderful successes.

Hippoevent: Was there a particular moment or person who shaped your journey?

Heiner Lehrter: *Absolutely. My parents fully supported me throughout this journey, especially my grandmother.*

Later, my wonderful wife, Sabine Lehrter, became an essential part of that path. She was originally a competitive rider herself, but for the sake of driving sport – or perhaps for me – she switched to carriage driving, and very successfully so.

To this day, we support each other in continuously improving our sport. Vera Neuhaus and Kerstin Reese have also been supporting us for around 20 years, and more recently, Meike and Marie Hackmann joined our team.

I would also especially like to mention our coach, Henryk Dubiky, who has accompanied and guided us with remarkable patience for more than 30 years.



More Than Sport

Hippoevent: What makes Para Driving so special to you personally?

Heiner Lehrter: *Being successful in mainstream sport as a person with a disability always means having to do a little more than able-bodied athletes. Simply compensating for physical limitations requires a tremendous amount of effort.*

One example from the past was the major CAI event at the State Stud in Dillenburg, Hesse – a true highlight for me.

There, I performed the one-handed dressage figures using both hands, naturally with the judges' approval. However, some fellow drivers and spectators commented that it must be much easier to drive with two hands than with one, suggesting that I had an unfair advantage.

That immediately made me think about how I could better compensate for my disability, and eventually, I found a solution. To this day, it still requires considerable physical effort, but as my father always used to say: "There is nothing Heiner cannot do."

I still use this technique successfully today.

In Para Driving, this type of issue generally does not arise, as the official sport medical classification clearly defines which compensatory aids are permitted.

At the same time, Para drivers support one another by sharing ideas and practical solutions that make participation in the sport possible in the first place. It is a small but truly special community where everyone – especially newcomers – feels welcome and can always find support.

That wasn't always the case. In the early days, I had to figure everything out on my own.

Hippoevent: *What has been your greatest sporting or most emotional moment so far?*

Heiner Lehrter: *There are quite a few moments I could mention.*

Referring to the example above, in Dillenburg I successfully performed the one-handed dressage figures. I not only won the dressage competition, but also earned the respect of the people around me. That was a feeling I had truly worked for and achieved myself.

From a sporting perspective, I am a multiple team world champion, a two-time individual world champion in FEI Grade 1, and a multiple German champion.

Para Driving has made all of this possible.

Success is Teamwork

Hippoevent: *Who stands behind you – who is part of your team?*

Heiner Lehrter: *My team includes my wife, Sabine Lehrter, Vera Neuhaus, Kerstin Reese, Meike Hackmann, Marie Hackmann, and of course our coach, Henryk Dubiky.*

Hippoevent: *What role does your environment play in your sporting success?*

Heiner Lehrter: *Without the people I just mentioned, my driving sport would not be possible.*

My team takes care of everything and supports me in every aspect, allowing me to focus solely on driving. Everyone knows their role, understands which compensatory aids I need, and makes sure everything is prepared accordingly.

Training, Focus & Competition

Hippoevent: *What does a typical training day look like for you?*

Heiner Lehrter: *I am fortunate to have my own driving facility in Mettingen-Schlickelde, which gives me the opportunity to train my ponies six days a week.*

They are ridden in the indoor arena, lunged by me, and driven – sometimes with a trainer, sometimes without.

Hippoevent: How do you prepare specifically for competitions?

Heiner Lehrter: *Our main focus is dressage. Only a well-trained, responsive pony can truly excel in all disciplines.*

That's why we work systematically according to the classical training scale, focusing on these principles in our dressage work.

Hippoevent: Which discipline suits you best – and why?

Heiner Lehrter: *Without question, dressage.*

When a pony begins to work with impulsion and willingness, it is always rewarding to see the progress you have worked so hard to achieve.

Challenges as Opportunities

Hippoevent: What motivates you to keep going?

Heiner Lehrter: *After more than 50 years of active competition, our federation approached me and asked whether I would be interested in becoming a driving judge.*

At the time, it was important to the federation to train judges who came directly from active competition and could bring practical experience into the role.

I chose to follow that path, and today I am also active as a driving judge up to advanced national level (Class M).

I truly enjoy it, but I also love still being able to compete as an active driver. It requires a great deal of time, but it keeps me mentally sharp and, above all, physically fit.

Beyond that, I simply enjoy being part of this supportive and collegial sporting community.

More Than Sport

Hippoevent: What would you like people to know about Para Driving?

Heiner Lehrter: *Para Driving is a wonderful way to work together with horses. The disability itself fades completely into the background.*

At competitions, there is a lot of joy, a strong sense of community, and the opportunity to meet wonderful people.

Hippoevent: Which prejudices would you most like to break down?

Heiner Lehrter: *We live in a lifestyle-driven and highly individualistic society, and unfortunately, people with disabilities do not always seem to fit into that image.*

As a result, our sport is sometimes looked down upon, and our achievements are underestimated or considered less valuable.

I would wish for more respect and recognition, because for us, this sport requires significantly greater physical effort than it does for able-bodied athletes.

Hippoevent: *Why does Para Driving deserve more attention?*

Heiner Lehrter: *One experience comes to mind immediately.*

At the German Para Driving Championships, everyone was highly motivated. The dressage started at 8:00 in the morning – with no spectators present.

The marathon phase began the following morning at 7:30 in foggy conditions, again without spectators. I could barely even see where the entrances to the obstacles were.

The cones competition took place on another day at 9:00 a.m., and once again, very few people were there.

But when the medal ceremony for the German champions began at 5:00 p.m., suddenly the venue filled with spectators – and, naturally, sponsors.

What does that tell me?

We want to be seen. We want to show people, with and without disabilities, what is possible with our equine partners and our teams.

That simply cannot happen when competitions are scheduled at times when nobody is there to watch.



Hippoevent: What development would you like to see for Para Driving?

Heiner Lehrter: *If the international Hippoevent Para Spotlight initiative truly bears fruit, it could create a platform that inspires other people with disabilities to become active in this sport.*

I also believe this would be a great benefit for driving sport as a whole, because this is inclusion in action.

Your Message

Hippoevent: What advice would you give to young drivers or newcomers?

Heiner Lehrter: *When I first started in driving sport, I had to figure everything out on my own.*

I had to determine which compensatory aids could help me, what options existed, and which permissions I needed from judges and from the German Equestrian Federation in order to use them.

Today, that is no longer necessary.

In Germany, people can turn to the IG Fahren für Menschen mit Behinderung e.V., an organisation I helped to found, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.

Young newcomers or anyone interested can simply speak with active drivers or the organisation's board members and receive all the information they need about Para Driving.

Questions about compensatory aids, medical classification, or the international grading system will always be answered.

There is comprehensive support available for our Para sport.

That is something truly special.

You are not alone.

Thank You

Thank you for the interview and for your time, Heiner.

Para Driving is a sport that demands trust, precision, and genuine partnership – and Heiner Lehrter embodies all of these qualities.

His story is a powerful reminder of what Para Driving is truly about: development, trust, resilience, and growing together.

