

Road to Aachen

The Top Stars Answer

Bram Chardon | The Netherlands

Only a few weeks remain until the **FEI Four-in-Hand World Championship 2026 in Aachen, Germany**. The world's best drivers have entered the most crucial phase of their preparations, where every training session, every competition, and every small detail can make the difference on the road to championship success.

You sent us your questions for one of the biggest stars of international driving sport – and **Bram Chardon** has the answers.

The first edition of our exclusive interview series features the reigning **FEI European Champion** from the Netherlands. Bram shares fascinating insights into long-term season planning, managing a team of elite horses, preparing for a major championship, and the qualities required to build a world-class four-in-hand team.

Enjoy exclusive answers, behind-the-scenes insights and valuable advice from one of the world's most successful drivers – **only on Hippoevent**.

Bram, thank you for taking the time to answer our readers' questions and for giving us an insight into your team's preparations for the FEI Four-in-Hand World Championship in Aachen.

How do you plan the 2026 season with your horses?

Bram Chardon:

"Preparing for a World Championship doesn't begin just a few months before the event—it starts two or even three years in advance. If you want to be successful at a championship like Aachen, you have to think long-term and develop your horses accordingly."

We are constantly looking for talented young horses to strengthen our team. Some we breed and train ourselves, while others we purchase after they have already received part of their education.

A young horse needs around two years of basic training after being broken to harness. After that, it usually takes another three to four years before it is truly ready for top-level sport. If a horse begins its education at the age of three, it may compete in smaller events at five, start international competitions at six, and will normally only be ready for a championship like Aachen at the age of seven or eight.

Once we have a group of horses with the right age and experience, we plan the entire 2026 season backwards, starting with our ultimate goal: Aachen.

Our basic principle is to compete approximately every four to five weeks. However, the schedule is constantly adapted to each horse's condition. If a horse needs more recovery time after a competition or isn't 100 percent fit, we simply give it a longer break.

Every horse follows its own individual training and competition programme. Some horses perform at their best with regular competitions, while others stay fresher with fewer starts. That's why I don't always drive the same four or five horses together. Team routine is important, but every horse has different physical and mental needs.

My father and I each have a squad of seven or eight top horses from which we select our teams. From time to time, we even swap horses between us. While we continue training young horses and working with clients, our A squad always has the highest priority.

During the final months before Aachen, we pay even closer attention to every detail. The horses' wellbeing always comes first. Regular blood tests, veterinary check-ups and constant monitoring help us ensure that nothing is overlooked.

We also prepare specifically for the conditions in Aachen. We know the dressage will be on grass, that the marathon course includes elevation changes, and we know who the course designer is. We study his previous courses and use those observations in our training.

At the same time, the regular competition schedule continues. Every event—such as CAIO Rastede—is also part of our preparation for Aachen. We test young horses, new combinations or small adjustments to the team. The objective isn't always to achieve the best result at that competition, but to gather information that will help us make the right decisions for the World Championship.

Recovery is equally important. After every competition the horses have a complete day off. They don't stay in their stables all day but spend time on the walker or in the paddock to keep their bodies moving.

The second day consists of very light work, such as lunging or easy single-horse driving. On the third day we usually return to pair driving, and after four or five days the horses normally complete their first four-in-hand training session again.

How quickly a horse recovers depends entirely on the individual. Workload, fitness, transport and temperament all play an important role. That's why it's essential to know every horse inside out."

How do you prepare your horses during the final weeks before the World Championship?

Bram Chardon:

"In the final weeks, success often comes down to the smallest details.

We reduce all other commitments and focus entirely on our most important horses. They are always the first to be worked each day, when our concentration is at its highest.

The intensive marathon, cones and dressage training sessions are carefully planned well in advance so they take place at exactly the right time.

Equipment is equally important. Throughout the season we regularly inspect our carriages, harnesses and every piece of equipment. During the final weeks before the championship, everything is checked once again. If we have the slightest doubt about any item, it is immediately repaired or replaced. Equipment problems simply cannot happen at a World Championship."

Which qualities does a horse need to become successful in a four-in-hand team?

Bram Chardon:

"When selecting horses, we first look at their size, movement and overall type to ensure they fit together as a team. They don't have to be the same breed, but they should move in harmony.

Even more important than appearance, however, is character.

A horse must be cooperative, intelligent and eager to learn. Personally, I would always choose a horse with slightly less spectacular movement but an outstanding mind and a great willingness to work together.

The best horses learn quickly. If I teach them something today, I want to see that they remember it tomorrow. Real progress comes from many small improvements.

Physically, we know every horse in great detail. Together with our veterinarians, we identify each horse's strengths and weaknesses. No horse is perfect, but the important thing is to understand its limitations and adapt the training accordingly. Injuries often occur when horses are pushed beyond what they are naturally capable of.

Mental qualities such as willingness to work, natural forwardness and calmness are equally essential. A four-in-hand can only function at the highest level if all four horses genuinely enjoy their work and naturally want to go forward.

Stress resistance is another key factor. Some horses become nervous in new environments or while travelling, eat less or lose weight. Such horses may be perfectly suited for regional competitions but are often not ideal for international championship sport.

Of course, confidence can be improved through training to some extent. However, certain character traits are simply natural. In a four-in-hand, one nervous horse can affect the entire team. That's why calmness, reliability and mental strength are among the most important qualities for success."

Thank You, Bram!

A heartfelt **thank you** to Bram Chardon for taking the time, despite his demanding preparations for the **FEI Four-in-Hand World Championship 2026 in Aachen**, to answer our readers' questions so openly and in such great detail.

Dear Bram, we wish you, your entire team and all your horses the very best of luck, good health and that little bit of fortune that often makes the difference at the highest level. Enjoy the unique atmosphere of Aachen and once again show the world why you are one of the very best four-in-hand drivers in international driving sport. The entire Hippoevent team will be cheering for you, and we look forward to bringing our readers comprehensive coverage from Aachen.

Now it's your turn!

Very soon, we'll introduce the next superstar of international four-in-hand driving. Take the opportunity to send us your questions—perhaps yours will be featured in the next exclusive Hippoevent interview.

Follow Hippoevent on our website and social media channels and join us for the exciting countdown to the FEI Four-in-Hand World Championship in Aachen. Many more exclusive interviews, behind-the-scenes insights and inspiring stories from the world's leading drivers are still to come!