

Where Carriage Driving History Was Made – Gödöllő Remembers

Gödöllő, Hungary – Autumn 2026 | 55 Years after the First FEI European Four-in-Hand Driving Championship, a Memorial Plaque to Prince Philip Was Unveiled

Sometimes there are places in carriage driving where history is not simply told – **you can feel it.**

Gödöllő in Hungary is one of those places.

On 18 September 2026, a memorial plaque was unveiled in the beautiful woodland park surrounding Gödöllő Palace – precisely where the finish of the **first FEI European Four-in-Hand Driving Championship in 1971** was located.

Under brilliant sunshine, people who have themselves become part of international carriage driving history gathered at this very special place: **Mayor Dr György Gémesi**, multiple Hungarian FEI World Champion **Vilmos Lázár**, long-standing Hungarian carriage driving press officer **Dr Károly Fehér**, and numerous friends, companions and legends of the sport, in the presence of **Miksa Mondok, President of the Hungarian Driving Committee**, as well as multiple FEI World Champion **Zoltán Lázár** and many other friends of carriage driving.

The memorial plaque was initiated by **Csaba Péterfi**. It creates a lasting symbol of remembrance of the great international carriage driving events held in Hungary and of a personality who was closely connected with the development of the sport worldwide: **His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.**

And there could hardly have been a more fitting location.

Beneath the old trees of the magnificent woodland park, surrounded by the unique atmosphere of Gödöllő Palace, history came alive once again.

Carriage driving legends stood together in conversation. Stories from decades past were shared.

Memories returned, anecdotes were told and names were mentioned that still hold a special place in the hearts of generations of carriage drivers.

It was a meeting of generations – and at the same time a reunion of people united by their shared passion for horses and carriage driving.

For a moment, time seemed to stand still.

1971 and 2026 suddenly felt remarkably close.

1971 – When History Was Made in Budapest

Fifty-five years ago, a story began that would leave a lasting mark on international carriage driving.

In 1971, Budapest hosted the **first FEI European Four-in-Hand Driving Championship**. Hungary thereby took a pioneering role in international carriage driving and became the stage for a historic sporting event.

The first European Champion was **Imre Abonyi**.

Together with **Sándor Fülöp and József Papp**, he formed the Hungarian team. The British team of Nicholson and Miller won bronze.

But the championship was about far more than sporting results. It symbolised the growing internationalisation of carriage driving and the development of a discipline capable of bringing people and nations together.

One of the most important personalities of this historic moment was Prince Philip.

Prince Philip – More Than a Guest of Honour

As President of the FEI, Prince Philip officially supported and opened the first European Championship.

But Prince Philip was not a man content simply to watch from the official stand.

At the 1971 European Championship, he decided to accompany the **28-kilometre marathon course on horseback**.

For his security personnel, this was understandably rather alarming – none of them knew how to ride.

The Prince, however, was an accomplished horseman. Riding his Kisbér half-bred, he accompanied the marathon from Mátyásföld to the finish.

Thousands of spectators lined the roads, tracks and villages. Everywhere, the carriages – and the Prince himself – were greeted enthusiastically.

At the finish in Gödöllő, another spectacular welcome awaited the competitors: parachutists paid tribute to the arriving teams.

Today, 55 years later, a memorial plaque marks this historic place.

Hungary – A Nation with an Extraordinary Carriage Driving Heritage

In his address, Dr Károly Fehér looked back on this remarkable tradition.

“In international carriage driving, Hungary has always played a pioneering role.”

The figures tell an impressive story:

17 World Championships and 6 European Championships have been hosted in Hungary across different age categories.

27 World and European Champions have come from Hungary.

Hungarian drivers have won a total of **109 FEI medals at World and European Championships**, including **52 FEI gold medals**.

But behind these figures are people, horses, friendships and stories.

And some of those stories are inseparably connected with Prince Philip.

Imre Abonyi and Prince Philip – A Friendship Beyond Sport

A special sporting and personal friendship developed between the first European Champion, **Imre Abonyi**, and Prince Philip.

The British Prince held Abonyi's experience and exceptional knowledge of carriage driving in such high regard that he even wanted to bring him to England as a coach.

In return, a leading British coach was to be sent to Hungary.

The political circumstances of the time ultimately prevented this exchange from becoming reality.

But the mutual respect remained.

It became an example of how carriage driving can bring people together – regardless of nationality, rank or background.

1978 – Prince Philip Himself on the Podium

At the 1978 World Four-in-Hand Driving Championship in **Kecskemét**, Prince Philip himself became part of sporting history.

Together with **Bowman and Brislow**, he won the bronze medal for Great Britain.

For Hungary, **György Bárdos** became Individual World Champion. Together with **Sándor Fülöp and Ferenc Muity**, he also won the team title.

Sporting rivalry and personal friendship went hand in hand.

It was a time when carriage driving was particularly shaped by personal encounters – and when competitors often became friends.

1984 – Szilvásvár

Another landmark Hungarian carriage driving event was the 1984 World Championship in **Szilvásvár**.

László Juhász, affectionately known at the time as “Lacika”, became Individual World Champion.

Together with **György Bárdos** and **Sándor Fülöp**, he also won the team title.

Prince Philip once again stood on the podium, winning bronze together with Flynn and Bowman.

For **Dr Károly Fehér**, this championship was also a deeply personal moment. He chaired the international press conference and was seated directly beside Prince Philip.

To this day, he keeps a photograph of that occasion.

A small personal memory of a great era in carriage driving.

Horses as a Common Language

What connected Prince Philip with Hungarian carriage driving went far beyond medals and championships.

He appreciated the organisation of Hungarian competitions, the horse-friendly environment, the knowledgeable spectators and the unique atmosphere.

Above all, he shared a love of horses with the people he met in Hungary.

He loved horses, understood them and respected them.

Perhaps that was the common language between him and the legends of Hungarian carriage driving.

A Meeting That Still Touches the Heart

In 1993, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip visited Hungary.

In Bugac, they met Imre Abonyi, who by then was in declining health.

It was a deeply moving reunion.

Together they travelled by carriage across the Puszta and recalled experiences they had shared over the years.

Respect, trust and warmth were evident in their meeting.

Another chapter in the extraordinary connection between the British Royal Family and Hungarian carriage driving.

Vilmos Lázár – A Bridge to the Present

Among those present in Gödöllő was **Vilmos Lázár**, one of the drivers who carried Hungary's great carriage driving tradition into the modern era.

The multiple FEI World Champion is one of the most influential figures in Hungarian carriage driving.

His presence alongside Dr Károly Fehér and so many other companions and witnesses of the sport's history demonstrated how carriage driving history is passed from one generation to the next.

The names change. The horses change. The sport evolves. But the passion remains.

18 September 2026 – A Plaque for Carriage Driving History and the Future

The unveiling of the memorial plaque in Gödöllő is therefore more than a look back into the past.

It is a sign of appreciation.

For the drivers who competed decades ago.

For the horses who carried them over the marathon courses.

For the organisers and countless helpers.

For the people who built international carriage driving.

And for Prince Philip, who was himself an active part of its development.

Gödöllő remembers.

1971.

The first FEI European Four-in-Hand Driving Championship.

Imre Abonyi.

Prince Philip.

And all those who helped write this history.

Above all, it remembers the unique power of carriage driving to bring people together across generations.

From 1971 to 2026

As the guests stood in front of the new memorial plaque on that sunny September day, one thing became particularly clear:

Carriage driving history does not live in books alone.

It lives in the people who remember.

In the stories that are passed on.

In photographs hanging on walls.

In old friends meeting again.

And in the young people who are now writing their own chapters in carriage driving.

From Budapest 1971 to Gödöllő 2026.

55 years of carriage driving history – and a passion that remains.

Because in the end, it is always about the same things:

Horses. People. Passion. And the joy of driving together.

Thank you for allowing me to witness and share these very special moments.

HIPPOEVENT | Jacqueline Zimmermann