

Hints and Tips for a Safe(er) Rushcart

Saddleworth Rushcart is approaching its 40th year. From its humble beginnings in 1975 it has grown to the annual spectacle that it is today. With each year that passes the Rushcart gets bigger and better but with that it becomes more precious to us. It becomes more important to keep it going and we have to find ways of protecting it, to preserve it for years to come.

One avenue to explore is to try and make it safer for all involved. Whilst we have had no major incidents in recent times we have had a few close shaves. Had they turned out to be more serious, they could have caused questions to be asked about the future of the 'cart.

The Saddleworth Rushcart is built with moorland rushes, and is a solid construction. It stands approximately 14 feet high and weighs about two tons (we don't actually know how much it weighs but you wouldn't want it to roll over your foot!). The cart itself has a single axle and relies on the three brave lads on the shafts to balance it. It has no brakes, no suspension and when fully manned has the turning circle of a super tanker.

We have put together a few tips to try to anticipate and avoid problems.

Getting Started

Saddleworth Morris Men will manoeuvre the cart to its starting point. The ropes with stangs attached will be laid out fore and aft. You then load the stangs with your men. (Please note- the very front stang, the stang immediately in front of the cart and the stang directly behind will be manned by Saddleworth men only).

All stangs need to be manned before the cart can set off. Please ensure there is someone on each end of the stang on the outside of the rope. You will be asked to take out the slack in the rope. At this point the cart is still chocked and propped on its gate.

Once the ropes are tight the lads will lift the cart, fold away the gate and remove the chocks. A long, single blast on the whistle will be sounded to indicate the cart can set off.

On the move

There are a number of obstacles along the way including tight corners and narrow lanes.

Corners should be taken as wide and as smooth as possible. The lads at the front will take the line and the lads on the shafts will guide the cart. Last minute changes of direction can cause the cart to twitch at the apex of the bend.

The ropes should be kept as tight as possible between each stang. Any slack on the rope on the inside of a bend should be taken out as soon as possible once round it.

Running with cart is discouraged, however, on occasion both ropes may slacken when rounding a corner and it may be necessary to increase your pace to draw it out. You should return to a normal pace once you feel tension on the ropes.

Remember the lads at the front will be round the corner much sooner than the cart. If you start running at this point the cart will cut the corner!

When negotiating narrow lanes or parked cars it may be necessary to angle the stangs slightly to get through. Lifting one side of the stang over the roof of a parked car is common.

Stopping

A long, single blast of the whistle will indicate the cart to stop. We will try and get the cart to stop as close as possible to where we want it. If you are in front of the cart please keep pulling until you hear the whistle even if this means you have gone past the stopping point.

Keep the ropes tight until the signal to bring the stangs in is given. Once you have given up your stang please move away from the cart so it can be moved to its resting place. We will endeavour to do this as swiftly as possible in order to clear the road to allow traffic to flow.

Handy Hints

Be mindful of members of the public becoming caught up between the stangs whilst on the move particularly those with small children, prams or dogs.

Try and load the stangs evenly. This becomes more of an issue as the day wears on and we 'lose' people. Try and fill gaps where possible even if this means not being alongside your team mates.

Be aware of the time table and be ready for when the cart is due to leave each stop. Late set offs will mean a late finish and could cause problems with the police and traffic control.