

Perspective Digest

Volume 7 | Number 1

Article 3

1-1-2002

Horse Sense (Work Station One)

Roland R. Hegstad

Adventist Theological Society

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

Recommended Citation

Hegstad, Roland R. (2002) "Horse Sense (Work Station One)," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 7 : No. 1 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol7/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.



Roland R. Hegstad

This issue is not for ninnies. Nor for dolts. Nor for those unwilling to look in a rearview mirror. That's where Lutherans and Adventists have looked for four years. They've asked, Where did we come from? Where are we going? Who or what determines our beliefs? Martin Luther? Ellen White? The Bible? Tradition? Why were Adventists talking with Lutheran theologians anyway? (See page 12.) The question has an answer, one demanding at least a modicum of horse sense, as you'll find. Just ask Gerry Wagoner.

Wagoner's mantle, as he describes it, was a black, broad-brimmed hat and pants that buttoned. Those familiar with the Amish won't have to read further to identify his heritage. He told his story at an ATS meeting in Nashville, and I knew you must hear it. His faith was rooted in the Reformation; today he is a Seventh-day Adventist. But, as he points out, there are a few things Adventists could learn from their country cousins (see page 24). Another author suggests that a Smith Sisters' Cough Drop and the

Horse Sense

Friendly Skies of Lufthansa have to be factored into the horse sense (see page 45).

Since we're back at the stables (near a railroad track, as you'll see), let me tell you about the *Equus caballus* connection. I was in Florida when a headline captured my interest: "Rutty Road From Rome to the Cape [Canaveral]." The copy that followed explored why railroad ties are only 4 feet, 8.5 inches apart. The author, Edwin A. Roberts, Jr., editorial page writer of the *Tampa Tribune*, called this measurement "a major flaw." Why the flaw is there, said Roberts, is "not without interest" (he was right) and also not without "repercussions" (right again). All he failed to see was the theological lesson in his observations.

Why *are* rails only 4 feet, 8.5 inches apart, a measurement Roberts calls "a curious and foolishly narrow measure when a wider one would have permitted greater passenger comfort and enormous additional efficiencies"? Having swayed along on trains to New York City a few times, I had no difficulty envisioning

the improved ride a six-foot or seven-foot or eight-foot wheelbase would offer. No more "rock-a-by-baby." No more slosed trousers. No more reading the same line three to four times.

Anyone who has asked why scores of Christian churches are rocking along with a first-day Sunday instead of a biblically stable Seventh-day Sabbath will approve of consulting history. In this case, Roberts has done the research for us.

It started with George Stephenson, the Briton who invented the steam locomotive early in the 19th century. Stephenson was looking for an economical way of moving coal from mine to customer. I'll spare you the technical details of why a flanged wheel running on a rail uses one-tenth the energy per ton of a truck on a highway. I'll not even append a footnote, which would add a note of scholarship to our discussion. Where did the 4 foot, 8.5 inch width come from? Stephenson adopted the measurement used on manure carts.

At this point, any theologian worth his weight in (ahem) coal, will ask where the manure carts got their measure. Well, English roads had ruts in them that distance apart. So where did the ruts and the roads come from? Says Roberts: "It was the ancient Romans who built the roads for their soldiers, and the ruts were originally created by war chariots, which used that wheel spacing because they were fashioned to fit neatly behind the

behinds of two horses."

Tush, tush! Or is it tish, tish?

So we rock along on modern rails because. . . .

But there's more.

Roberts quotes an angle hitherto unexplored as it was expounded in *National Review* by novelist Christopher Buckley:

"When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site.

"The railroad line from the factory had to run through the tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horse's behinds."

"Thus," as Buckley noted, "the major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined over 2,000 years ago by a horse's rump."

Imperial Rome is gone. But there was another Rome. Later. Enduring to this day. And, theologically speaking, on a 4 foot, 8.5 inch track. A rutty road from Rome that I don't want to shape my theology to fit. □