



Photo/ John Miller

Joe Fales, drawn by his pair of 8-year-old mares, takes a test spin in his chariot. The fiberglass and aluminum carriage weighs less than 60 pounds.

ENVIED BY ANCIENT ROME

Joe Fales trains his horses for the races

By John Miller
Staff Writer

It's probably safe to say chariot racing has dropped off considerably since the days of the Roman Empire. In fact, it could be argued the sport never made it across the Atlantic Ocean.

But there are a select few modern-day gladiators in the Western states who still passionately partake in the sport. Torrington was the site of the chariot racing championships last year on Bailey Schaneman's farm.

One such throwback is Joe Fales, a former truck driver who raises horses, some for training to be part of his chariot teams.

Fales has been an enthusiast since his

father raced chariot teams when he was a child. He currently has three two-horse teams and spends most of his spare time training his horses to race.

He recently attended the first race of the season in Gillette and is looking forward to a mid-November event in Rock Springs. He qualified for the World Championships in Utah two years in a row. He believes he has a good team of mares to com-

pete, especially because competition has dwindled in the last few years due to the economy.

"A lot of people who ran out of Colorado can't afford to go anymore," Fales said.

Chariot racing began its new incarnation in Wyoming in the 1920s, when sleds were attached to horses to race across the frozen streets and lakes. The sport is most popular

Envied

From page A1

now in Idaho and Utah, while California and Nevada also sport several teams. There are three associations in Wyoming, and this year's world championships are tentatively scheduled for Ogden, Utah.

Fales has trained horses since he was 15 years old, and he finds training them for chariot racing to be a nice precursor to riding. He said a lot of colts can be started younger because there's no weight on their back, and since they learn how to run, it makes them easier to break for riding. It's also easier on the trainer.

"When you're behind 'em in the cart, you get to watch 'em buck instead of being on

quite as involved in the wreck."

Fales uses two quarter horses per chariot, with a top speed of 48 mph. Races are 440 yards on a straightaway, like a drag race. The horses tear out of the starting line like gangbusters, and Fales said if he's not buckled in correctly, the G-force can throw him right out of the cart.

At 48 years old, Fales has been asked why, as the horses' trainer, he doesn't have someone else ride the chariots. But he's fine the way it is.

"That would be like letting someone else kiss your girlfriend," Fales laughs. "I'm kind of heavy, and I handicap 'em, but it's just too much fun to let somebody else do it."