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Michelle and Chris get romantic—in a horse and carriage, of course.

hitching a ride

Lost in transportation? Study up on the basics of wedding day wheels.

BY SIOBHAN ADCOCK

Like the song says, you're going to the chapel to do you-know-what. But how's Mom getting there? Or your bridesmaids, or for that matter, your fiancé? And just as important, how's everybody getting from the church to the reception...and then home? Unless you plan on apparating to your destination, it's time to work out some wedding transportation logistics. Get started with our expert guide. >>

Perfect for their Houston springtime celebration, Lisa and Scott left in a classic white convertible.



WHEN

Around the four-month mark, when you've long settled on your date, ceremony and reception site, and wedding party size, it's time to think transportation. If you're marrying in April, May, or June—prom and graduation season—high-class vehicles will be in demand, so you'll need to book your transportation even earlier.

WHO

Your first step is to take a head count. For many weddings, that means the bride and groom, attendants, both sets of parents, siblings not in the wedding party, and grandparents. Some couples also provide transportation for special relatives and out-of-towners. Where do you draw the line? The decision will probably come down to budget. Vintage Rolls-Royces aren't necessarily for everyone—it's all about a chauffeured ride, any ride. Know that you're not required to provide transportation for the entire wedding party for the entire night—you just need to make arrangements so no VIP gets stranded. If you're nervous about guests getting lost (or enjoying themselves too much to drive home safely), a party bus or shuttle can be a fun and practical people-mover.

WHERE

There are actually three routes to consider besides your beeline down the aisle: the trip to the ceremony, the trip between the ceremony and the reception (if they're not in the same place), and the getaway at the end of the night. You'll need to figure out who needs rides where.

The ride to the ceremony: Brides and grooms often travel separately to the ceremony with their respective attendants in tow, though you may opt for a quiet ride with your parents, or rent a trolley or shuttle for the wedding party to ride in together. The average stretch limo seats 8–10 people in wedding finery, the average limo seats 6, and the average Town Car holds 4, including the driver. (A full-size coach, on the other hand, has room for anywhere from 52–59 passengers—that's a wedding party plus a football team!) The same vehicles can be used for the second leg, which is...

The ride to the reception: After the ceremony, it's traditional to pull a red-carpet-in-reverse maneuver with your new spouse, ducking into a dream ride together for the jaunt to the reception, either à deux or with the honor attendants. Meanwhile, your parents, your wedding party, and anyone else who hitched a ride with you earlier will also need a lift. If your budget allows, parents and attendants can ride to the reception in the same vehicles that brought everyone to the ceremony, while the bride and groom take an additional, private car. The whole group (or select members) can also pile into a guest shuttle, if there is one. Otherwise, parents and attendants can ride to the reception with relatives or friends: Just make carpooling plans well in advance, and communicate with everyone involved.

At the end of the night: Your getaway can be dramatic or simple—we know of couples leaving on chartered boats or in hot-air balloons. >>

Many newlyweds, of course, remain at the party until the very end, which often eliminates the need for fancy (read: expensive) exit arrangements. However you choose to leave the scene, make sure everybody—your wedding party and guests included—has a ride home. If you aren't transporting guests as a group, have contact info at the ready for a taxi service.

HOW

Next, determine your travel times before you start calling transportation companies. Figure out your wedding day itinerary by taking a test spin of the three routes to approximate driving times. To estimate an ideal pickup time for the ride to the ceremony, for example, plan to arrive 15 minutes early, then work backward: ceremony time, minus 15 minutes, minus driving time, minus 10 minutes of “padding” (for traffic, unexpected delays, and getting excited people into multiple cars).

WHAT IT COSTS

Once you've established your needs in detail, start inquiring about rates and availability. Most livery companies charge by the hour and require a minimum time period: Three hours is typical. Calculate the duration from pickup time to end of the reception to determine if it's worth it for your wheels to wait. Depending on the number of people, the season, and the type of vehicle, expect to pay \$50–\$150 per hour, plus a 15-percent tip, usually included in the contract. (If it's not included, a \$20 tip for each driver is appropriate.) Here, some ways to save:

- **Shop around:** Call multiple car companies to compare quotes and packages.
- **Ask for freebies:** Livery companies often throw in fun extras as part of a “wedding package.” If champagne, balloons, and a sunroof aren't included, forgo the perks to lower costs.
- **Ask for pickup and drop-off service:** While you'll still have to pay for a minimum number of hours, your livery service may let you choose the hours. It's smart to have cars wait during the ceremony, then drop people off at the reception. The cars can return later in the evening for a pickup.

WATCH FOR

- **Overcrowding.** Billowing skirts and nervous excitement call for more space. Don't try to fill every car to capacity—allow an extra person's worth of breathing room.
- **Drivers without maps.** On the day of the wedding, you (or an attendant) should hand each driver a sheet with detailed directions, maps, and contact numbers.
- **Vague or verbal contracts.** Here's what to get in writing: date, time, and location of pickup and drop-off points, type and number of vehicles rented, exact hours each vehicle is hired for, amenities supplied in each vehicle, total cost including gas and mileage, overtime fees, gratuities, deposit amount, and cancellation and refund policies.



Find local transportation resources at TheKnot.com/texas

ALTERNATIVES TO THE AVERAGE WHITE LIMO

Scooter: Channel Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck tearing around Roma on a Vespa: This is a glamorous and witty way to roar off into the sunset.

Bicycle: Gather your skirts up and pedal away from the ceremony on a tandem bike (warning: may not be suitable for brides in ball gowns or grooms dizzy with happiness).

Boat: Cruise to your waterside reception on a boat decorated in your wedding colors, or float away from a lakefront ceremony in a rowboat built for two.

Trolley: Track-free trolleys are surprisingly easy to find—and they seat up to 30. Consider it a fun way to transport the wedding party around town for postceremony photo ops.

Vintage car or bus: They just don't make 'em like they used to. Try classic car rental companies for a vintage Rolls, an opulent Excalibur, or a mint-green 1950s convertible.

Tractor: Less hayride than “Hey!” ride, an old-fashioned tractor or pick-up truck is an adorable way to motor off (slowly) from a rustic outdoor wedding.

Horse and carriage: If your idea of romance is more Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet than Beyoncé and Jay-Z, climb into a carriage for the ride away.

Cannon shot: Just kidding. Unless you're both circus performers, in which case... still just kidding.