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Horse Leads Tourists on Wild Ride Through Downtown Salt Lake City

by Melinda Rogers

The Salt Lake Tribune - 08/30/2009

An Idaho Falls family visiting Salt Lake City entered an unexpected carriage racing derby Saturday night, when a planned leisurely ride through downtown turned into a case of a runaway horse.

The family of seven was westbound in a horse-drawn carriage on 300 South near Main Street around 10 p.m., said Salt Lake City Police Lt. Mark Scharman, when "Jim", the black 12-year-old horse pulling the carriage, became spooked.

Jim broke into a trot and then a full gallop about a half block from Main Street, but his owner, Jason Kirton was able to subdue the animal, Scharman said. When Kirton brought the carriage to a stop, he exited it to try to calm Jim before continuing the ride with his patrons.

The horse, however, became frightened again, dragging Kirton along the street and forcing him to let go of the reins, Scharman said. The family of seven was then left in the carriage with the horse running away and no driver to stop him, Scharman.

"It goes into a full run; this family is in there hanging on for dear life," he said.

A Salt Lake City police officer on a bike reported to the scene to help stop the runaway horse, Scharman said. But when the officer approached the horse, his bike became tangled with the carriage and he fell down trying to stop the animal, Scharman said.

The carriage came to a stop about two blocks later when it hit a parked car, Scharman said.

Scharman said Kirton and the police officer suffered

minor injuries. The carriage and police officer's bike were both totaled in the incident, he said.

The Idaho Falls family was "fine, but just a little shook up," Scharman said.

He said to his knowledge Kirton has the proper permits to operate a horse carriage downtown.

It's unknown what scared the horse and caused it to run, but there was loud traffic in the area that may have contributed to the animal's unease, Scharman said.

Kirton, who offers carriage rides to tourists in Salt Lake City, told police Jim's behavior on Saturday was unusual, Scharman said.

Jim recently participated in Salt Lake City's Days of '47 parade where he walked calmly along the route, Kirton told police, noting the horse is usually friendly with carriage patrons.