

How To Stay Safe Horseback Riding



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Chapter 1 Introduction

It might surprise you to know that an estimated 30 million Americans ride horses each year and a further 3.5 million ride in the UK, so just imagine how many there are around the world! More than 2,300 American riders under the age of 25 years are hospitalized annually because of horseback-riding injuries. In fact there are more injuries to horse riders than there are to those that ride motorbikes!

So why might this be? Well, certain activities, such as jumping and cross-country, are inherently risky because horses are heavy (up to 1,500 pounds), can travel very fast (up to 30 mph or more) and can stand as tall as 3 meters high. While there are serious injuries from specific activities such as jumping and galloping, most injuries result from simply falling off the horse. Injuries from this though can be severe and sometimes fatal, so the fundamentals of safety are crucial if you are to take up this hobby.

Of the horse related injuries, about 80% occur whilst riding. The remaining 20% occur during horse handling activities (e.g. driving, grooming, feeding, shoeing, leading) and unrelated activities, such as playing in the vicinity of a horse.

The most common injuries occur in the upper body in areas such as the wrist, elbow, and shoulder and most often these are simple bruises or sprains. However, in certain types of event, such as equestrian events or rodeos, damage may occur to other parts of the body, such as the knee, ankle, and foot.

Some injuries are much more serious, such as injuries to the spine or head and these can lead to possible paralysis or seizures, but they are rare and are unlikely to occur if you take simple precautions and are aware at all times that a horse is a very powerful and often unpredictable animal. Fortunately deaths from horseback riding injuries are extremely rare and most often the cause of a serious head injury, so be warned, NEVER go horse riding without wearing your helmet securely fastened.

You would be forgiven to thinking that these injuries only occur when riding, but you would be wrong. It is just as easy to be injured on the ground whilst handling, grooming or feeding your horse, so the aspect of safety on the ground is also covered in this book.

It is easy after just a few lessons to think you are safe on your horse, but don't try anything stupid. If you are not experienced and been taught the right ways, NEVER attempt jumps or daredevil stunts. Although some horses are domesticated and safer than others, no horse is 100% safe. As I have said before, a horse is a powerful animal and that fact should never be forgotten.

So as you can see, it is important to take the issues of safety most seriously. Having stated the level of injuries, it is also worth saying that the majority of people ride without ever incurring injury, so this book specifically addresses the issues of safety to ensure that you enjoy your hobby to the full.

If you are riding a lot and in particular are riding on public roads or footpaths Third Party Legal Liability Insurance is a wise precaution.

Remember, respect your horse at all times. It is a powerful, sometimes unpredictable animal that has the strength, speed, weight and ability to cause serious injuries. So how to avoid them?

In looking at the issues of safety, there are eight main areas of consideration, these being:

- You, the rider
- Your horse
- Working with your horse
- Trailering
- Fire safety
- Safety from theft
- Safety when riding in an arena
- The riding environment and road safety

Chapter 2 The Rider



As the rider, the first and most obvious thing to say is that you need to be fit enough to ride. This means that you obviously should not be under the influence of drink or drugs. This is one hobby that requires you to remain alert at all times!

So given the obvious, what other factors should you as the rider consider?

The first aspect to consider is your dress. So let's look at all aspects of dress

Riding Equipment

Helmets



Hard shell helmets should be worn at all times when you are mounted on your horse. These should conform to the following standards - PAS 015 the BSEN 1384 or the ASTM F 1163 with a kite mark or SEI. To be effective the helmet must always be securely fastened and you should replace it after any significant impact.

You should never mount or ride your horse without the appropriate headgear as the majority of fatalities are due to head injuries.

Body Protecting Gear

You can get body protectors such as the KevlarT Body Protector which will help prevent soft tissue injuries and rib fractures.

Whilst it helps for these minor injuries it does not protect your spine from injury and cannot protect you against a massive crushing blow to the chest, should your horse fall on you.



Fluorescent/Reflective Tabard



I am sure you have seen some people out riding on the road and most not wearing a fluorescent or reflective tabard, but have you seen the difference with those that do? You may not have seen a horse rider wearing one, but you sure will have seen motorcyclists wearing them. They really do show up and it is a sensible option if you are out on the road. Wear a fluorescent one by day and a reflective one when it gets dark. Whilst you might feel these are unnecessary, you should certainly consider them if you are riding a young and inexperienced horse

Shoes

Make sure you wear properly fitted sturdy boots. Your boots should fit properly and have a proper heel (2,5cm high) and instep. Shoes and trainers can readily slip through the stirrup, which means you could easily be dragged behind your horse in the event of an accident.



Numerous injuries occur with riders being caught in the stirrup and then dragged along by their horse. So as you can see wearing the right foot attire is extremely important. If this concerns you, then don't worry as many saddles offer release catches to prevent dragging if your foot is caught in the stirrup.

Wearing the correct footwear is only part of the solution, you also need to ensure your feet are correctly positioned in the stirrup and the stirrup itself should be 2 – 3cm larger than your footwear. This may sound fussy, but I can assure you, that it is essential.

Also remember that your boots will protect you if your horse should accidentally step on your foot!

Gloves

Gloves should be the right size for you and non-slip. You need to use these when riding or leading your horse. In order to feel in control at all times, you need to be sure that your gloves give you a good grip on the reins.

Other Clothing

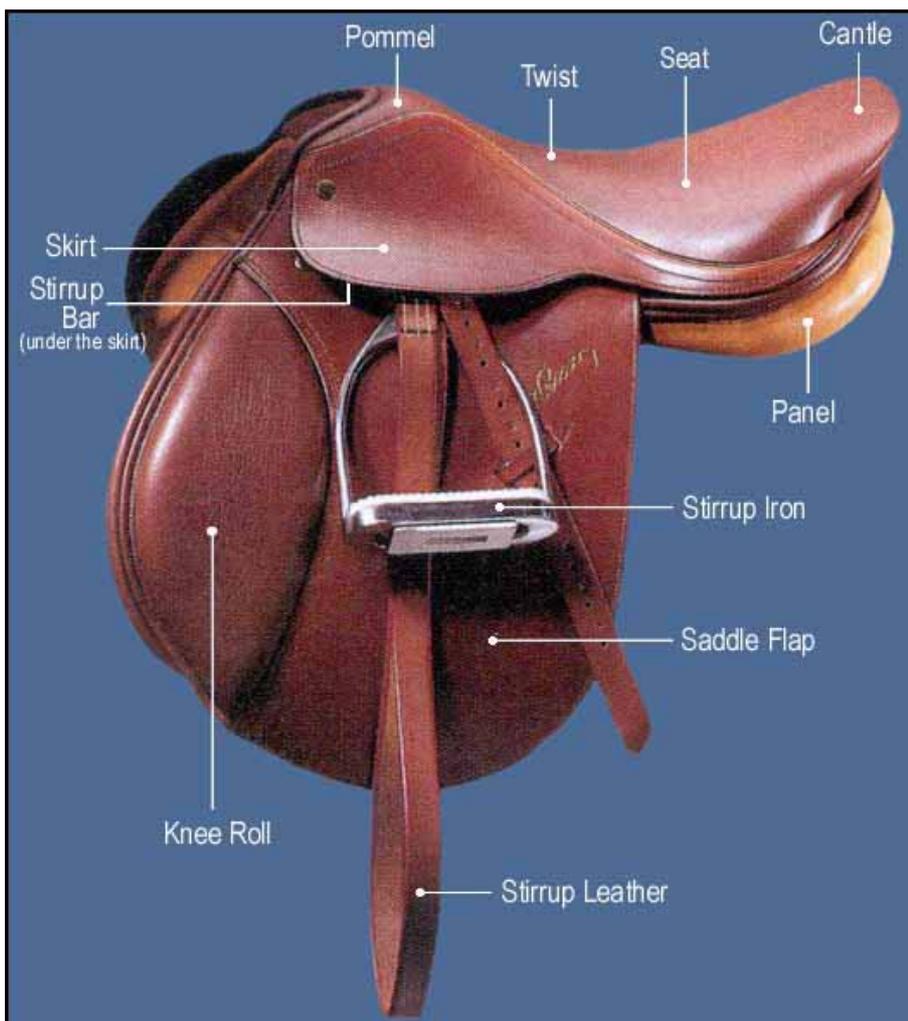
It is best to wear trousers that tuck into your boots when riding. If your trouser leg is too baggy it could very well get caught on something while riding that could cause you to get snagged or even pulled off your horse. You should also ride in clothes that are loose and comfortable and not tight or restricting.

Chapter 3 Horse

Apart from grooming and cleaning out, the most important aspect to consider about your horse is its safety as well as yours. This means not only ensuring you have the correct saddlery and tack but that it is in good condition. If in doubt or it fails any checks, then have it repaired or replaced before you ride again.

Saddle

Make sure your saddle fits securely. It should not slip forward or backward, nor roll excessively from side to side. Determine whether you need a breast collar or crupper instead, or whether your current girth or cinch is too big or too small.



Look at its overall appearance and this includes the stirrup leathers. It shouldn't have serious signs of weakness or wear and certainly should not have any cracks.

Next check the saddle is in good shape by squeezing the sides together. There really shouldn't be any movement. If there is it indicates damage which could seriously damage your horse's back

Check the bars holding the stirrup leathers to make sure they are secure and finally the girth straps under the saddle flap, just to check that the straps are secure and that the stitching hasn't come undone.

Western Saddling

Carefully check horse and tack before saddling. Make sure all stitching is secure and the blanket is clean. Be sure the horse's back and the girth area are clean.

Place the off-side cinches and the right stirrup over the seat. Stand with your feet well back in the clear, and reach forward when saddling.

Swing the Western saddle into position easily—not suddenly. If you drop the saddle down quickly or hard, it may scare the horse.

Go to the off side of the horse and gently let the stirrup and cinches down. Don't let them hit the horse on the belly or the leg.

When using a Western double-rigged saddle, remember to fasten the front cinch first.

Unfasten the rear cinch first when unsaddling. Pull the cinch up slowly when tightening. Don't cinch too tightly at first. Tighten just before mounting. Then, walk and turn the horse before mounting.

Fasten accessory straps (tie-downs, breast collars, martingales, etc.) after the saddle is cinched. Unfasten them first when unsaddling.

The back cinch should not be so loose that your horse can get a hind leg caught between the cinch and its belly, or so tight that it irritates the horse.

Check the cinch three times:

- After saddling.
- Just before mounting.
- After riding a short distance.

English

Carefully check the horse and tack before saddling. Make sure all stitching on the stirrup leather, billet straps, and girth buckles is secure.

Check the pad to be sure that it is clean.

The stirrup safety bar should be down. The stirrups should be run up before placing the saddle on the horse's back. The girth should be across the seat.

Stand with your feet well back from the horse and reach forward when saddling.

Place the pad high on the withers, then slide it backward onto the back. This smooths the horse's hair.

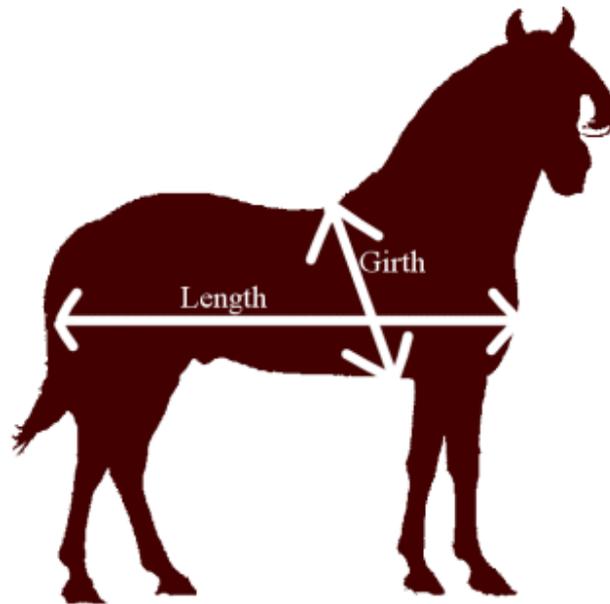
Check the girth three times:

- After saddling.
- Just before mounting.
- After riding a short distance.

Stirrups

Children and novice riders should consider using safety stirrups that break away if a rider falls off the horse.

Checking the Girth



Girths and cinches are vital to our horse's health and happiness so ensure you choose them correctly. Choose the girth, cinch or system that works with the make of your saddle. If necessary call the saddle manufacturer and find out what they suggest. Also consider your horse's needs. Does he have sensitive skin or any bumps or sores that might become irritated by a girth or cinch?

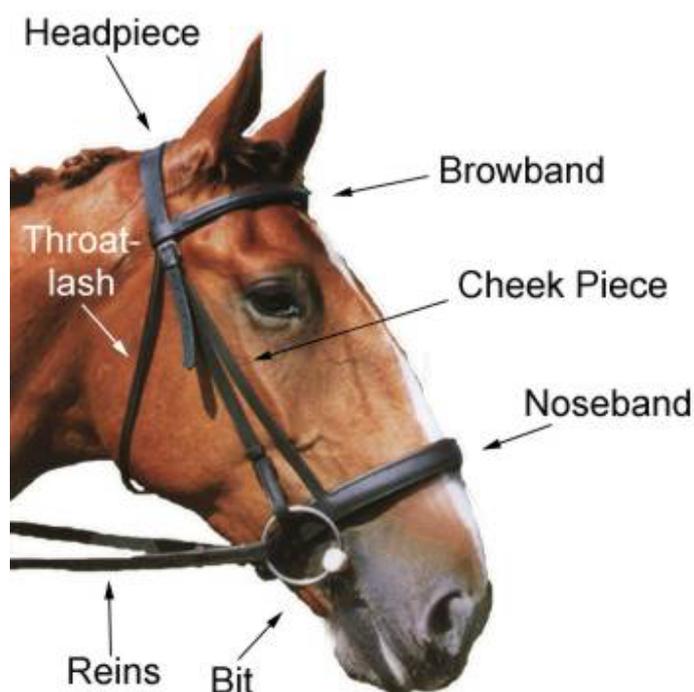


So how can you decide whether your existing girth or cinch is the right size? To measure your horse measure from the bottom of the cinch ring (Western) or middle of the billets (English) all the way under the belly to the bottom of the cinch ring or middle of the billets on the other side. To determine the length of your current one, lay it out on a flat surface and measure from end of the buckle on one side to end of buckle on the other side.

Check that the stitching on all parts of the girth buckles is fine and that the buckles

themselves are not damaged or bent and check the girth itself for signs of wear and tear. Always check the girth before and after you mount, and again, ten minutes into your ride.

Bridling



There are three main parts to any bridle. The browband, which stops the bridle from slipping down the horse's neck, the throatlash which stops the bridle from being pulled forward over the ears and the cheek pieces and the bit.

Always untie your horse before removing the halter. Stand in close just behind and to one side (preferably on the left side) of the horse's head. Handle the horse's ears carefully.

Keep control of the horse when bridling by re-fastening the halter around the neck.

Be careful not to bang the horse's teeth when bridling or unbridling. Ask your horse to open his mouth by putting one or two fingers in the corner of his mouth.

Be sure the bridle is properly adjusted to fit the horse before you ride:

- The browband must fit without pinching or causing discomfort.
- The throatlash should allow at least several fingers to pass between it and the horse. In particular make sure that the horse is able to flex without throttling itself and if in doubt, allow this to be a little loose.

- Check the bit—there should be one or two wrinkles at the corners of the mouth.
- The cavesson (if used) should be relatively tight. You should be able to insert only one finger between the cavesson and the nose.
- The curb chain (if used) should be flat and not twisted. You should be able to insert two fingers between the chain and the horse's chin groove.

Never let your horse eat when wearing a bridle. He may step on the reins or get his feet tangled in them. Also hay or grass may get caught in the bit and injure his mouth.

Examine the bridle regularly looking for loose stitching and obvious wear and tear. Check that all the buckles are secure and not bent. When examining the reins look for wear and cracking and make sure the bit does not have any rough edges that can damage your horse's mouth

Chapter 4 Working With Your Horse

Approaching Your Horse

The first thing to remember is that your horse has a personality and like you can be easily scared by sudden and unexpected movements or noise. So NEVER sneak up on your horse. Be calm around your horse and never make sudden moves which may cause him to jump sideways or kick out.

Always approach your horse from the front. If he's turned away from you, call to him or entice him with a treat to get him to come to you. Never approach your horse directly from the rear. Even in a tie stall, there is always a way to be able to approach him from an angle at the rear. If he is tied, get him to look at you first and always notice a horse's expression before advancing towards him. Pet your horse by first placing a hand on his shoulder or neck and make sure you do so with a rubbing action. Don't "dab" at the end of a horse's nose.

If you are giving the horse a treat, be sure to keep your hand open and your fingers extended and flat. Horses can inadvertently bite and break fingers that are enclosing the treat.

Working Around Your Horse

When working around your horse, make sure you are dressed appropriately and wearing boots or hard toed shoes. When grooming your horse never stand directly behind him, stand to one side. Always work close to your horse. If you are near his shoulder, you won't be struck with the full force of his feet. Nor will you receive the full force of a kick if you stay close to the body when you work about the haunches or pass behind your horse. The safest place to stand is beside your horse's shoulder. Do not drop grooming tools under foot while grooming. Place them where you will not trip on them and the horse will not step on them.

Know your horse and his temperament and reactions and control your temper at all times, but be firm. Punish a horse only at the instant it disobeys. If you wait, even for a minute, it will

not understand why it is being punished. Punish without anger, or your punishment may be too severe and never strike a horse about its head.

Always let a horse know what you intend to do. When picking up the feet, for example, do not grab the foot hurriedly. This will startle the horse and may cause it to kick. When lifting the foot, touch the shoulder or hindquarter, and then run your hand down the leg. When you get to the fetlock say “up,” and squeeze the joint. The horse should pick up his foot for you.

If you need to clean his hooves or do anything to his legs, never squat or kneel down. Bend over, so that if your horse makes a sudden move you are free to quickly get out of the way

If your horse is wearing blinkers keep talking to him quietly and calmly to ensure you don't startle him and never appear suddenly out of his blind spots and wherever possible avoid coming out of his blind spots altogether. If you think the horse has not seen you, announce your presence before making any approach

If your horse is tied (more or which later), always pass from behind. Move around the rear of your horse close to the animal's body to minimize the impact of the horse kicking out.

When grooming, saddling up, or cleaning your horse's stall, make sure you tie your horse first and don't leave him unattended. You can imagine what mayhem and destruction a frightened and loose horse makes in a stable.

There is a debate about whether to tie up a horse tightly or with a quick release knot. You need to decide what is best for your horse, but when in a constrained area, certainly a quick release knot is sensible. This means that if for whatever reason your horse gets scared and pulls on his tie, he can quickly free himself. If your horse feels constrained it can make him panic to the point of hurting himself or you.

Your horse can be tied with a lead rope, trailer ties or cross ties. No matter what is used, tying must be done in a manner that is safest for both you and your horse. Never tie to its' bridle, nor tie with the reins, or to the bit. If you do so and the horse struggles it could very severely injure its mouth.

Always tie to a post or somewhere that is firmly anchored and will not come loose if the horse pulls on it. The object is to have the tie rope break rather than the structure you are tying it to. And fairly obviously don't tie your horse to anything that moves!

Around the Stables

Put away equipment. Make sure pitchforks, rakes, etc. are stored properly and not left out where human or animal can trip over them.

Clean up. Always sweep after doing stalls, grooming, etc. Pay special attention after the farrier visits and make sure there are no nails left out where they could puncture someone's foot.

- Make sure your horse's stable has no dangerous fittings or sharp objects on which it could injure itself.
- Internal fittings such as feed mangers or water buckets should be fixed firmly and checked on a regular basis.
- If a feed bucket is used, remove the handle as your horse could get its foot trapped. Any feed containers should be removed immediately after use.
- Electric lights must be covered and located well out of reach of your horse. Switches should also be out of reach and both horse proof and water proof.
- Windows are essential for light and ventilation but make sure they are covered by bars or mesh and consider using toughened glass or plastic materials.
- Stable doors, locks and hinges should be kept in good repair.
- Make sure the top door of your horse's stable is held back securely with a hook. If it isn't, the door could swing loose and hit your horse's head.

- Move your horse out of the stable if it is to be shod or plaited, as nails and needles can easily be dropped and lost in your horse's bedding.
- The safest and most natural way to feed hay is from the floor, however if you use a haynet or hayrack make sure your horse cannot get his foot stuck in it if he rolls.

The safest way to lead a horse is with a halter and a lead rope, but whatever you do, don't hook your fingers through the halter straps, rings or the bit. Why? Well if your horse pulls away, your fingers could be caught severely injuring them or even worse catching your hand to the point that you are dragged along out of control.

Similarly never loop lead ropes or reins around your hands or any other body part and if you are going through a doorway make sure it is wide enough otherwise your horse will hit itself and may become startled to the point of endangering you.

Finally feed your horse treats from buckets or tubs as horses can very quickly become greedy and mistake fingers for carrots! If you do decide to feed the horse from your hand, make sure your palm is flat and open so your horse can take the food without also taking off your fingers

Leading

When leading your horse, always walk beside him—not ahead or behind. A position level with the horse's head or halfway its head and shoulder is considered the safest.

Use a long lead shank and both hands when leading. If the horse rears up, release the hand nearest to the halter so you can stay on the ground.

It is considered the norm to lead from the left (near side), using the right hand to hold the lead, near the halter. Any excess lead should be folded, figure-eight style. When leading, extend your right elbow slightly toward the horse, so that if the horse makes contact with you, its shoulder will hit your elbow first and move you away from it. Your elbow can also be used

in the horse's neck to keep the head and neck straight as well as to prevent the horse from crowding you

Never drape a lead shank or reins across your shoulders or neck nor wrap the lead shank or reins around your hand, wrist, or body in order to feel in control. It is much safer to tie a knot at the end which will definitely help to provide a secure grip.

You should not wear jewellery around horses, as sudden movements or accidents can have disastrous consequences. Anything that can possibly get caught up in reins or leads should definitely not be worn and rings in particular can cut deeply into your fingers.

Be extremely careful when leading a horse through a narrow opening, such as a door, as it is possible your horse will panic. So ensure you have firm control and be the one to pass through any narrow opening first. Step through quickly and once through move to one side to avoid being crowded.

If you are dismounted or leading the horse, the stirrup irons on an English saddle should be run up or "dressed". Take care also of the stirrups on a Western saddle, as they can easily catch on things you pass.

You should also take care when turning a horse loose. After having led him through the gate or other such opening, turn the horse round to face the direction from which you came before releasing your horse. Try to avoid letting him bolt away from you as asserting your authority here can help prevent accidents later on.

- Check your horse at least once or preferably twice a day for signs of illness or injury and make sure you have a first aid kit with you when you visit the field.
- Broken or badly maintained fencing poses a real risk to your horse's safety and could also allow it to escape onto the road and cause an accident. Make sure you check all fencing on a regular basis and repair it immediately.

- Familiarise yourself with plants which are poisonous to your horse and check your field on a weekly basis. Dig-up and burn small numbers of offending plants or remove your horse and treat larger areas with an approved weed killer, making sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully.
- If your field has a public footpath running through it, make sure you check for litter on a regular basis.
- Consider erecting a polite notice asking people not to feed the horses in your field.
- If contractors carry out work in the field in which your horse is grazed make sure they remove any debris when they leave and keep all gates closed.

Do not leave your horse in a pasture wearing a nylon halter. Nylon halters are actually too strong and if he gets caught on a branch, he could be trapped or worse. If you must have a halter on your horse, use a leather one.

Finally, avoid the use of excessively long lead ropes as it is easy to become entangled in them unless you are concentrating on what is going on.

Mounting and Dismounting

Never mount or dismount a horse in a barn or near fences, trees, or anywhere where objects are hanging overhead. It's all too easy to hurt yourself like that.

You need to train your horse to stand still and quiet for mounting and dismounting, which means you need to have light control of its head through the reins.

English riders should "run up" the stirrups on English saddles immediately upon dismounting, as dangling stirrup may startle or annoy your horse but it can also be caught on doorways and other objects that you pass while the horse is being led.

After running up the stirrups, English riders should immediately bring the reins over the horse's head. In this position, the reins can be used for leading.

Western riders should also bring the reins forward for leading immediately after dismounting.

When dismounting always remove both feet from the stirrups before swing your right leg over the horse's hindquarters. This is a simple way to avoid a possible broke tailbone should the horse take a step forward while you are dismounting.

Riding

When riding, wear boots with proper heels to prevent your feet from slipping through the stirrups. Always wear protective headgear, properly fitted and fastened.

Before every ride, evaluate the horse to determine if the animal is fit to ride. Bad weather, injuries, fatigue, and the overall health of the horse should be considered before a determination of fitness can be made. Pay special attention to the horse's feet. Are the shoes in good condition? Are the horse's hooves long and in need of a trim? It is always a good idea to check for material that has built up between the hoof and frog, and to remove it with a hoof pick before riding. Doing this will improve the horse's comfort and disposition.

Keep your horse under control and maintain a secure seat at all times. Horses are easily frightened by unusual objects and noises.

Until you know your horse, confine your riding to an arena or other enclosed area. Ride in open spaces or unconfined areas only after you are familiar with your horse. Once mounted, the risk of falling or being thrown can be greatly reduced through proper horsemanship.

Riding a horse is not a natural thing for the horse or the rider. Most falls happen because the rider was out of position in the saddle. The proper positioning of the rider's legs while astride a horse is critical to maintaining a center of gravity close to that of the horse. This allows the rider to keep his or her balance while riding. Always adjust stirrups so the rider can keep his or her legs in proper alignment. Proper alignment is achieved when the riders shoulder, hip, and heel are in a straight line, and their heel is slightly down, with the ball of the foot resting

in the stirrup. If both legs are in position then the proper saddle posture (back straight and lower back relaxed) is easy. An easy way to tell if a rider has a stiff lower back while riding is to watch the legs, if the legs move front to rear the rider needs to relax the lower back, so the legs move only side to side with the movement of the horse. Keeping your “seat” is the key to staying on the horse, and its importance can’t be over emphasized. Young riders especially should be taught to sit a horse properly, and be corrected if they develop poor saddle posture.

When your horse becomes frightened, remain calm, speak to it quietly, steady it, and give it time to overcome its fear.

Hold your mount to a walk when going up or down a steep hill.

Allow a horse to pick his way at a walk when riding on tough ground or in sand, mud, ice, or snow where there is danger of your horse slipping or falling.

Don’t fool around. Horseplay is dangerous to you and to your friends, as well as to others who may be nearby.

Never ride your horse with just a halter. Halters don’t give you enough control. Use a bridle.

Try to avoid paved or other hard-surfaced roads. Walk the horse when crossing paved roads.

If you must ride along the road, ride on the shoulder and follow the rules of the road. Get a Driver’s Manual from your Department of Motor Vehicles. These rules vary from state to state.

Never rush past riders who are proceeding at a slower gait, as it startles both horses and riders and frequently causes accidents. Instead, approach slowly, indicate a desire to pass, and proceed cautiously on the left side.

Ride abreast or stay a full horse’s length from the horse in front to avoid the possibility of being kicked. You can tell if the distance is safe by looking through your horse’s ears. You should be able to see the hind heels of the horse in front of you.

Don’t let a horse run to and from the stable. Walk the last distance home.

If you use spurs, be sure your legs are steady enough that you don't touch the horse with the spurs by mistake. If you're not sure, don't wear them.

When your horse is frightened and tries to run, turn him in a circle and tighten the circle until he stops.

A red ribbon tied into the tail indicates a kicker, so stay back.

Dogs and horses are not always good companions. Keep your dog under control at all times.

Riding at Night

Riding at night can be a pleasure, but it must be recognized as being more hazardous than daytime riding. Walk the horse; fast gaits are dangerous.

If it is necessary to ride at night on roads or highways, wear light-colored clothing, and carry a flashlight and reflectors. Check your state regulations for details.

Select riding locations with care. Choose controlled bridle paths or familiar, safe, open areas.

Chapter 5 Trailering

Trailering should be done with two people if at all possible, it's just so much easier with two. First make sure the ground area behind and around the truck or trailer affords safe footing before loading or unloading and ensure the trailer is level and steady and doesn't move as the horse tries to enter it. You should also place chocks behind the wheels to keep trailer steady as the horse enters it

Prepare the horse by removing the bridle, saddle, and other equipment before loading. Use your halter and a good sturdy lead shank (at least 5 feet) made of cotton rope to lead your horse into the trailer. Don't use nylon shanks as these can be dangerous if your horse pulls back.

Always wrap your horse's legs for protection ensuring the bandages extend over the coronary bands onto the hoof and that they cover the heel area.

If you have trouble loading or unloading, get experienced help, although after a while you should get the hang of it and find it easier, but some horses just don't want to go in the trailer and this is where some experience counts!

Always secure the butt chain or bar as soon as the horse is in the trailer before tying the horse.

Opinions vary on whether you should haul a horse tied or loose. If you tie him, allow a sufficient length of rope so the horse can move his head for balance and comfort but keep it tight enough that he cannot get in trouble or get to the horse next to him, if there is one of course and always tie with a quick-release knot, or use panic snaps on the ties.

When hauling only one horse in a two-horse trailer, load the horse on the driver's side, but when hauling two horses in a two-horse trailer, load the heavier horse on the driver's side. Use rubber mats for secure footing. By using 3 inches of bedding (shavings, straw, or sand), you can cushion bumps and reduce concussion on your horse's legs. You should always speak to a horse that is in a truck or trailer before attempting to handle it.

Check your trailer regularly for the following:

- Rotting or weakened floor boards.
- Rusted and weakened door hinges.
- Cracked hitch welds.

When having the trailer serviced, ask the mechanic to check the spring shackles and wheel bearings.

The trailer should be of sufficient height to give the horse ample neck and head room and any protruding objects should either be removed (preferable) or at least covered

Watch your feet and fingers when dropping the tailgate.

Never undo the butt chain or bar before you untie your horse at its head. The horse may try backing out as soon as the tailgate is down.

Use caution to back the horse out of the trailer straight and slightly toward the center ramps so that he doesn't catch a leg in the door springs.

If there are two horses in the trailer, have someone stand by the head of the second horse while the first one is backed off the trailer so that he doesn't think that he is free to back off also.

Walk the horse to restore circulation before putting him in a stall, especially after a long haul.

When the trailer is disconnected and parked, be sure to place chocks behind the wheels. Never load a horse in an unhitched trailer.

Travelling

Most horses take to trailering naturally, while for others it is often a traumatic experience. It is important that a horse be happy and secure when being trailered. One bad experience in trailering is all it takes to make a horse a bad hauler and a bad hauler is hard to cure.

Before traveling, check to see that the horse is comfortable, that ventilation is adequate, and that the hay bag or manger is securely fastened so that the horse cannot become tangled in it.

Test all doors to make sure they are secure, and check that the hitch is tight. Safety chains should be in place and all lights and brakes functioning in accordance with your state's Division of Motor Vehicle codes.

When driving, always observe the following:

- Double check all the connections (lights, brakes, hitch, and safety chains).
- Be sure all doors are secured.
- Drive carefully. Make turns slowly and start and stop slowly and steadily.
- Look far ahead to avoid emergencies. Drive defensively.

Do not exceed the speed limit. Remember to allow extra stopping distance when towing a trailer. Moving horses and the weight of the trailer will push against the towing vehicle.

Check the horse and trailer hitch at every stop before continuing.

Horses are like people—some get sick from motion. Adjust the feeding schedule to avoid traveling immediately after feeding. Feed smaller amounts more often if necessary and make sure there are plentiful supplies of water at all times

Do not allow anyone to throw lit cigarettes or matches from the window of the towing vehicle. Wind currents often suck the cigarettes or matches into the trailer, causing a fire.

Check on the horse(s) at every stop or every 100 miles. At this time also check the hitch, safety chains, lights and hay bags. Keep hay bags full and offer the horse(s) a drink of water.

Avoid backing up with the trailer if at all possible. If backing up is necessary it is advisable to have a person outside the vehicle to watch and guide you.

Chapter 6 Fire Safety

Protecting a Horse Stall

Protecting a horse stall is not the same as fire protection in a home. The horse is standing in dry bedding material that is very flammable. Straw reaches a burning temperature of 300oF in one to five minutes. It is a material that develops as much heat at the same rate as gasoline. All that is required to start this fire is a spark or match. It takes two to three minutes for a straw fire to burn an area 10-feet in diameter. Compare this to the size of a common horse box stall that is 10- to 12- feet square. After a fire starts in a stall and spreads to only 4-feet in diameter, most horses are injured. By 6-foot diameter the lungs are seared. With an 8-foot diameter circle of fire the horse will start to suffocate. By 10-feet in diameter, the horse is dead. All of this occurs in two to three minutes. If the horse is to survive unharmed, he must be removed from the stall within 30-seconds. So speed of rescue is of major importance, but more important is preventing the fire.

Hay Storage Recommendations

One strong recommendation to reduce fire hazard is to store hay and bedding in a building separate from where horses are housed. An added benefit will be decreased dust levels in the barn. There are plenty of theories about how to stack bales in a storage or mow. It is a good idea to stack bales on their sides with the stems of the cut hay running up-and-down. This allows convection ventilation of warm moist air up and out of the bale. The greener or moister the hay, the looser it should be packed to allow cooling and curing without danger of mildew formation or combustion. Realize though that loosely packed bales are more prone to tumbling out of their stacked formation. Using pallets, or at least a layer of dry straw, under the bottom row will reduce storage losses from ground moisture.

Stable yards, by their very nature, can present a serious fire risk if they are not regularly checked and maintained. Hay, straw, electrical equipment and even cobwebs can all pose a fire hazard if appropriate fire safety measures are not taken.

Fire Precautions

Fire is every horse owners' worst fear, however the risk of fire can be dramatically reduced by following a few sensible precautions:

- Make sure your yard is a no-smoking area by erecting notices and reminding visitors.
- Develop a fire drill for the yard and test it out. This will allow you to work out potential problems - such as evacuating the horses - and ensure you have a clear procedure in place.
- Have electrical wiring and appliances tested and inspected on an annual basis and check to ensure that items like clippers and heaters are unplugged before leaving the yard.
- Remove cobwebs and dust on a regular basis - particularly around the light fittings.
- Consider fitting fire and smoke alarms that can be easily heard - particularly if your yard is left unattended at night.
- If you are burning a muck heap or bonfire make sure you site it well away from the stables and damp it down completely before leaving it unattended.
- Check that you have the correct number and type of fire extinguishers located around the yard.
- Have your fire extinguishers tested or serviced on a regular basis so you can be sure they are in working order should a fire occur.
- If in doubt arrange for your local fire safety officer to visit the yard and advise you.

- Have the procedure for dealing with a fire clearly displayed on the yard, including a contact phone number for the yard manager in the event of an emergency.
- Put the phone number for the fire department by each phone.
- Be sure you have adequate and appropriate fire-fighting equipment for your barn and know how to use them. Ask your fire department for recommendations.
- Know where large quantities of water can be obtained (farm ponds or swimming pools) and have adequate water outlets with hoses in the barn.
- Install smoke detectors or heat detectors and connect them to a high-decibel resonant horn so that you can hear it. You should also clean the detector frequently because heavy dust and bugs can deactivate the alarm.
- Know the location of electrical master switches and fit circuit breakers.
- Keep a halter and lead rope by each stall and never lock the stall doors.
- Hold regular fire drills to practice getting the horses out of the barn and so everyone knows what to do.
- Have a supply of empty feed sacks available for blindfolds. Wet the sacks in the water bucket in each stall before using.
- Know where you will secure the horses if you have to evacuate the barn.

Fire Prevention Measures

- The first prevention measure is pretty obvious, make the barn or stable a no smoking area. Put up signs and enforce the rule without exception.
- Clean up all debris and properly dispose of it. Never leave loose hay or straw in aisles.

- Store feed, hay, straw, or shavings in a separate building away from the barn. If this is not possible, be sure your loft is well ventilated and that the hay is properly cured—don't store "heavy" bales.
- Check hay for warm spots. If hay temperature is noticeably warmer than when it was put in, watch it closely. If the temperature reaches 150°F, take the hay out and divide it into small, shallow stacks.
- Oily rags should be disposed of immediately after use. Don't store flammable materials (paint, gasoline, etc.) in the barn.
- Check all electrical wiring for frayed ends, double-up extension cords, etc. Get them fixed immediately. Never use lightweight extension cords—buy the heavy-duty cords. If a fuse blows, check for shorts and other faults. Always use the correct size fuse. All electrical wiring should be encased in metal conduit and electrical boxes.
- Inspect all motors, heaters, and electrical devices frequently.
- Establish ongoing and effective rodent control programs—rats do chew wires.
- Keep aisles clear of equipment, etc.
- Ideally, all barns should be constructed of noncombustible materials. If you are building a new barn, look for pressure-treated wood so it will burn more slowly.

Procedures To Be Followed in the Event of Fire

Firstly call the fire department. If you have followed the advice above their phone number should be posted next to every phone. In a calm, clear voice, give your name, farm name, and location. Do not hang up until you are sure the information has been fully understood.

Open one door of the stable only. As long as possible, keep the flow of fresh air and oxygen to a minimum so the fire will not explode. If the fire is spreading rapidly and there is heavy smoke, then stay out of the barn.

Evacuate Horses

Halters and lead ropes should be on each door. Lead each horse out of the barn to a predetermined area, you should have determined this previously and tested it in a practice fire drill. If you turn him loose, he will probably run right back to his stall, so you need to get him to an area where you know he will be safe.

If the horse won't lead, blind him using a towel, handkerchief, or gunny sack. Wet the sack in the water bucket in each stall before putting it on the horse's head.

Put the horses in a paddock a safe distance from the barn and out of the way of the fire-fighting equipment. Make sure horse(s) are contained so that if they panic they don't return to their blazing stall.

Open all access gates to the barn area for fire equipment and save the equipment only after all horses are out. You can then use all available fire-fighting equipment to contain the fire until help arrives.

Make sure that you have kept all roads clear to enable the fire service to get to you and once help arrives, immediately check your horses for injuries. Call a vet if horses are burned or have inhaled a lot of smoke. Check their eyes, and if you notice any burned areas, cover their eyes with a clean, moist cloth.

Check for burns around the nostrils, and if you find any, apply Vaseline or mineral ointment. Keep any burned areas on the body or legs moist with a cold, wet cloth. Do not medicate the burns unless necessary.

Chapter 7 Theft

Horse theft is not just a legend of the Wild West. Every day, horses are reported missing or stolen—an estimated 40,000 annually in the United States. Horses can also disappear following natural disasters such as hurricanes, fires, and floods. Once lost, horses are very difficult to recover; many are quickly sold at auctions to slaughterhouses. To keep your horse safe, follow these tips.

Keep proof-of-ownership documents in a secure place.

Photos, registration papers, and health records will help identify your horse and prove ownership in the event your horse is missing. The photographs should be clear and current and show your horse from all four sides to highlight his identifying marks.

Have your horse permanently identified.

You can have your horse permanently identified by microchip or freeze brand. If you have your horse microchipped, be sure to register the microchip with a national registry.

Don't leave a halter on your horse.

Halters make it easier for thieves to catch horses. This is a safety issue, too: A halter might get caught on something and cause your horse to be trapped. Also, do not leave halters hanging near gates where thieves might enter.

Lock gates and barn doors.

Locked gates and barn doors often will deter a thief, but be certain that they do not create a fire hazard.

Erect sturdy fencing around your property.

Wire fencing is easily cut by thieves.

Restrict access to your property.

To prevent easy access to your horse by unauthorized vehicles, block farm lanes and driveways that are in remote areas or far away from your residence.

When possible, move your horse to an area where she can be seen from your residence or the roadway.

This is particularly important at night, when theft is most likely to occur.

Install motion-activated lights to illuminate the areas where you keep your horse at night.

Mount the lights on barn buildings or fences so they will turn on if anyone approaches the barn or field.

Consider purchasing monitors or alarms.

Video monitors and alarm systems can be wired to your residence

Inform your local animal control agency and police department of any suspicious activities.

Be sure to write down a description of the people and vehicles involved, including the vehicle license plate number. Encourage your neighbors to watch for suspicious activity, too.

Immediately report a horse theft or disappearance to the appropriate law enforcement agency in your area.

Also, provide a written description and photographs of your horse to livestock auctions in your area and in surrounding states. Post flyers offering a reward for information leading to the safe return of your horse. Contact local media with your story. Finally, consider visiting horse slaughterhouses in your state and in neighboring states; there have been several cases of horses being recovered at these facilities when owners have acted quickly. The Humane Society of the United States can provide you with a list of horse slaughterhouses in the United States.

Chapter 8 Riding in Arenas

There will be times when riding in an arena may be your only option, so you need to know how to behave and how to remain safe as you will be riding with other riders whose experience will vary and with horses with which you may well not be familiar.

There are some rules of etiquette of which you should be aware. Whilst the arena may well have its own rules which will be clearly posted and should be followed implicitly, these are the key points to bear in mind, most of which are common sense and respect for others.

Prepare before your horse before entering ensuring he is fully tacked and that you are suitably dressed with all equipment to save having to enter and re-enter the arena for items such as helmets, whips etc.

Make sure you enter the arena with care and attention. Even if the door is open you should not enter the arena without first shouting "Door!" or "Door Free?"

You have to bear in mind that this is a shared facility so you need to make your intentions clear at all times. So make sure you tell the other riders what your intentions are by calling out such things as "leaving arena", "exiting", "passing on your left" "passing on the outside".etc.

However, make sure any commands you give to your horse are done quietly and out of earshot of other horses as accidental cueing of another person's horse as you ride alongside them could have serious consequences.

Needless to say, you should not make loud noises of any kind, like shouting at your horse. In the arena it is better to use the crop or whip. However, also be aware that there are other noises that can spook a horse, such as snow slides on the roof, thunder or creaking doors when opened. These are amplified by the acoustics of a large arena. So if you need to open any noisy doors, make sure you give advanced warning to the other riders.

Do not bring other animals or children to the arena unless they are under strict, and that really does mean strict, supervision. Apart from the obvious distraction and potential they bring of frightening the horses, other riders will be completely uncomfortable about having to watch for a child while they are riding.

If a mounting arena is provided you should use it, but if not mount in the centre of the arena. Similarly if you wish to dismount, do so in the centre of the arena. If you need to adjust your tack or clothing you must move to the center of the arena before doing so in order to be out of everybody's way,

You should always try to avoid scheduling your time in the arena whilst lessons are in progress. Not only are you likely to disrupting classes somewhat, you are bound to find the arena congested.

You will find that all riders are riding in the same direction with the slower riders using the inside track. In the event that it is not possible for all riders to be travelling in the same direction then the left shoulder to left shoulder rule applies, where you pass each other left shoulder to left shoulder (in some countries, the standard is "Right Shoulder to Right Shoulder."). This rule, whether left shoulder or right shoulder. avoids confusion and any possibility of horses colliding into one another. Make sure when you pass, that you pass long and wide.

Gates and doors should remain closed at all times, other than the times for which they are in use. If a horse bolts through an open door into a low ceilinged stable or down a laneway it can cause both pandemonium and injury.

Never get too close to another horse and aim to keep one horse length between you and the horse directly in front of you. Remember a horse can kick out the length of his body! The easiest way to judge this is to ensure that when you look between your horses ears you can see the heels of the horse in front. Crowding other riders is both rude and dangerous.

If you want to overtake, make sure it is agreed to do so and always check behind you before backing or spinning. Remember this is a shared facility and you must observe and respect the needs of others.

Riders need to make every effort to keep their horses under control, and any horse that is bucking, rearing, or breaking free automatically assumes right-of-way. Should a horse break loose call out loudly “heads up, loose horse”, so all riders are aware of the problem. Then, stay calm, stay still and obey the commands of the ringmaster. Some may ask you to dismount and stand by your horse to steady him.

If a rider falls off or is thrown, all other horses must stop until the fallen rider’s horse is retrieved and brought under control. Again you may well be asked to dismount and steady your horse, so be prepared to do so.

Ask permission of other riders before setting your jumps. Announce your intentions for each jump as you approach it. Call out to other riders before you fly through the course. Be sure to remove all standards, cups, flowerboxes, poles, and other jumping equipment from the arena when you are finished.

Only use jumps if it is safe to do so and never jump alone. If you plan to jump you must always have a spotter or at least another horse. It is both thoughtless and unsafe to begin to jump fences if it upsets other horses working around you, particularly if they do not wish to jump. If you are riding in the arena alone, it is always advisable to have someone on the ground in case of an accident.

You should not be lunging while riding and if you are permitted to lunge then this will generally be down one end of the arena, so make sure your horse is under control and that there is enough room outside your lunge circle for others to pass.

Never stop on the outer track and always look behind you before stopping, to avoid a collision.

Make sure you are aware of the emergency procedures, the emergency phone numbers, and the location of first aid equipment.

Riding alone is not recommended and is considered generally unsafe. Smoking is prohibited for obvious reasons and you should not leave food and drink around the edge of the arena.

Finally you must always leave the arena as you found it. And that means tidying up behind you, including taking away any of your horse's droppings.

Chapter 9 The Environment and Road Safety



Perhaps one of the most fun and enjoyable places to go horse riding is in the forest or countryside, but do make sure that you can control your horse in open countryside first.

It is important to respect the countryside and the laws of the land, so try to keep to the paths in order to prevent any damage to wildlife and plants.

Where they exist, follow advisory signs and routes signed specifically for horse riders and if you are crossing farmland keep to the bridleway.

When riding across open land be careful on boggy, slippery or uneven ground and obviously look out for low or sticking out branches. Remember the faster you ride the faster things can go wrong and the less time you have for corrective action!

There may be times when it is necessary to ride on roads and here safety is of paramount importance. You don't have just you and your horse to consider, but other pedestrians, car users and their passengers.

Never ride off until all riders in your group are mounted

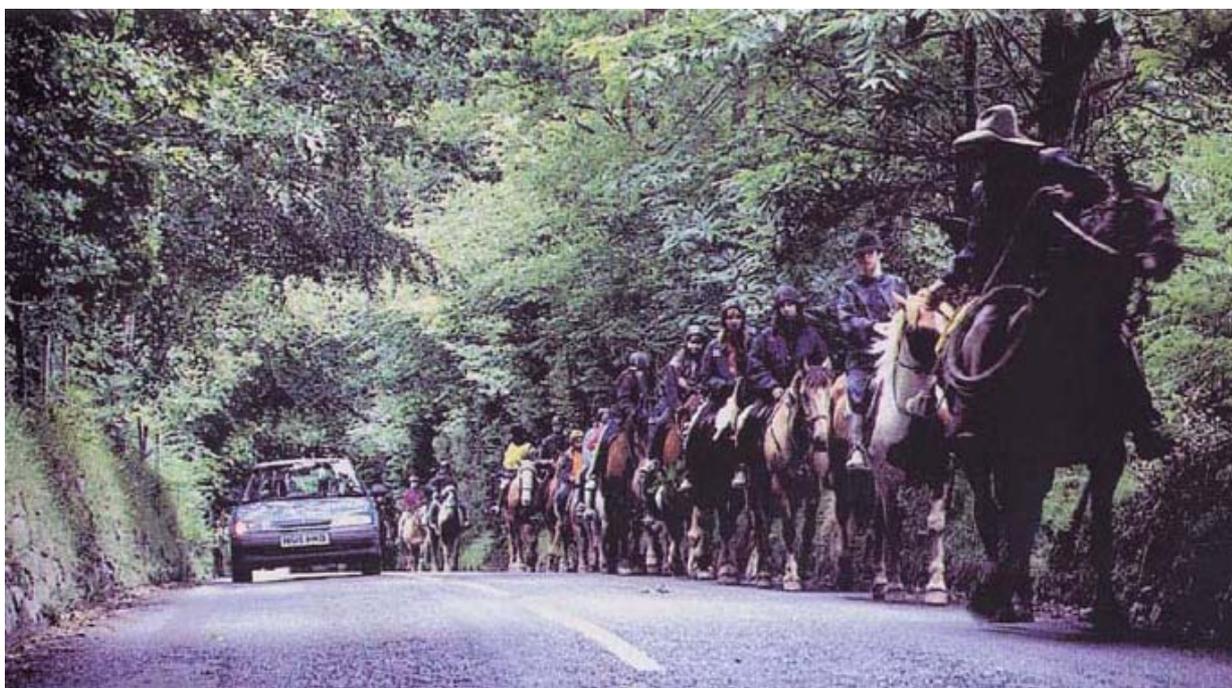
While riding, always pay attention to your surroundings. Inattentive riders are often surprised by a horse's reaction to an unnoticed stimulus such as a bounding rabbit on the trail. Horses see and hear more than their riders and often react to things unseen by even seasoned horsemen.

Remember horses are flight animals and will run away from sudden noises and movements. Stay alert for anything that might startle your horse and be prepared to respond quickly.

If you feel yourself falling from a horse, try to roll to the side (away from the horse) when you hit the ground.

In addition riders must practice good judgment. Factors such as slope, footing, and obstacles should be considered when making a safe decision on where and how to ride.

Make sure you are familiar with the Highway Code of your country and avoid main or busy roads where possible. You need to remain in control of your horse keeping rein contact at all times.



Ride in the direction of the traffic near the kerb, never riding more than two abreast and in single file if possible. Riding two abreast is normally only recommended where you are riding a young or inexperienced horse, in which case the more experienced horse should be nearest to the centre of the road. Do not attempt to accustom a green horse to the road without a steady and more experienced horse being present. Ride abreast or stay a full horse's length from the horse in front to avoid the possibility of your being kicked, or the horses being kicked.

However, when traffic approaches it may be necessary to ride single file with the experienced horse taking the lead. There should always be a gap of a horse's length between each horse being ridden one behind the other.

Riders should not ride on footpaths but generally can ride on grass verges if these are available and if local bye-laws allow, but you should ride with care and rise slowly. Riders should not canter on grass verges.

Always look behind regularly to be aware of traffic behind you and continually look and listen for hazards which may alarm the horse, avoiding these where possible.

Before making any change in direction, particularly at road junctions check for traffic and signal clearly, ensuring that your whip is in the hand that remains holding the reins. Always keep a watchful eye and ear open for traffic and be prepared to stop at a junction before turning if necessary. Remember, that not all car owners are careful like you and understand how horses react. They also might not have seen you, particularly if you are round a bend and in the country they could easily be traveling too fast.

Do acknowledge and thank courteous drivers, a smile and a nod will suffice if your hands are full, but drivers who have taken the care to slow down and pass you quietly and slowly will be grateful for your recognition.

If you need to move towards the centre of the road, when passing a parked car for example, always check ahead and behind for approaching traffic and be prepared to stop and wait if necessary before passing. Make sure you have signaled your intention clearly, so that road users have no doubt about your intentions.

If approaching a noisy or dangerous hazard always be reassuring to your horse and if he is still reluctant to pass the hazard and assuming you are not alone, try to get another horse to lead, but where this is still a problem avoid the hazard by taking a detour.

Should your horse fall, do not panic and take the time necessary for your horse to get back on its feet. Then make sure he is not injured before finding an even and solid piece of ground and then remount him

Walk your horse when approaching and going through under passes and over bridges

Some basic safety rules

Check your tack before you set off.

Check the weather forecast before you set off, you don't want to be caught in an unexpected storm. If in doubt stay at home, you will at least be in one piece and able to go out another day.

If you take your horse regularly on the roads, you must pay attention to your horse's shoes. Avoid taking your horse on the road if the shoes are shiny and/or thin. Loose shoes can cause a horse to fall.

Where possible ride with someone else and leave details of your intended route and estimated time of return with a responsible person. That way people can know where to look for you if you are overdue

A pen knife and baling twine can be very useful for emergency tack repairs and it is also well worth taking a hoof pick just in case your horse has something in their hoof that needs removing.

Always ride in complete control. As an extra precaution carry a mobile phone with you and if you are in a group, ride at the speed the least experienced rider is happy to ride at. Try to avoid having to ride in fog or darkness particularly across land with which you are unfamiliar, and always wear reflective clothing.

Do not ride on slippery surfaces or in ice and snow.

And if in doubt dismount and lead your horse

About the Author



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