

SAFETY RULES AND PRECAUTIONS

Safety for yourself and others, courtesy for others and kindness to horses are basically akin. They fit into the same "package" for discussion. Safety goes hand-in-hand with common "horse sense" and good animal husbandry practices. Horses have an instinct or awareness for reflecting the care, caution and concern of the rider. They are normally gentle and quiet animals, but can become highly excited or nervous if frightened or mistreated. A calm attitude, slow easy movements and a gentle flow of soft words will lessen fear and excitement in nervous horses. Disregarding simple safety rules in handling horses can result in serious injury, or even fatality.

Basic safety rules are a must and should be learned and practiced until they become everyday habit and custom. For purposes of clarity and convenience, we shall discuss horse and rider safety and courtesy under five appropriate classifications.

These are:

- 1) Safety in catching, handling & leading horses.
- 2) Safety in bridling, saddling & mounting horses.
- 3) Safety controlling and riding horses.
- 4) Showing the horse with safety and courtesy.
- 5) General safety rules.

I. SAFETY IN CATCHING, HANDLING & LEADING HORSES

1. CATCHING YOUR HORSE SAFELY

a) Approach a horse from his left and from the front. Never walk or stand behind a horse unannounced. The horse is always on the defensive. If he becomes aware of something behind him his immediate instinct - prompted by fear - is either to kick or run. If tied or confined in a stall, the animal cannot run, so he usually kicks. Even in single stalls it is possible to approach from an oblique angle at the rear.

b) When a rider is kicked, it is usually through his own carelessness. If it is necessary to approach a horse from the rear, speak to him to warn of your presence. As soon as the animal is aware of you, stroke him gently on the croup, then move calmly to the head, keeping always close into the horse's body. The closer you stand to a horse, the less likely you will be kicked; you may be shoved away, but not hurt.

2. SAFE HANDLING OF YOUR HORSE

a) Always let the horse know what you intend to do. For instance, when picking up the feet, do not reach for and seize the foot hurriedly, as this will startle the horse and is liable to cause him to kick. Learn the proper way to lift the feet.

b) Learn simple means of restraint, such as crosstying in the open and holding up a front foot.

c) Tie horses with right length of rope. Don't stake them out.

d) Pet a horse by first placing your hand on his shoulder and neck. Don't dab at the end of his nose.

e) Work about a horse from a position as near the shoulder as possible. In this way, you cannot be touched by either the front or hind feet of the horse. This is particularly true when passing around the horse's head, or in working about the haunches.

f) Always walk around your horse. Never walk under the tie rope nor step over it.

g) Tie your horse far enough away from strange horses so they cannot fight.

h) Always untie the lead shank before taking the halter off your horse. This may prevent him from pulling back and becoming a "halter-puller".

3. LEADING YOUR HORSE SAFELY

a) Walk beside the horse when leading, not ahead or behind him. Always turn the horse to the right and walk around him.

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

c) When leading a horse, grasp the reins 12 to 24 in. from the bit on the left side.

d) Your horse is stronger than you, so don't try to out-pull him. He will usually respond to a quick snap on the lead rope.

e) Never wrap lead strap, halter shank, or reins around your hand, wrist, or body. Always keep a secure hold on lead strap.

f) If the horse hangs back on the end of the rope, lead him a few steps forward before touching him with your hand.

g) Keep leads and long lines off the ground.

h) When leading into a box stall, turn the horse so that he faces the door before releasing the lead strap.

II. SAFETY IN BRIDLING, SADDLING & MOUNTING HORSES

1. BRIDLING SAFETY

a) Keep your head in the clear when bridling the horse. He may throw his head or strike to avoid the bridle. Avoid bridling a nervous animal in close quarters. After buckling the throat latch always place the loose end of the strap through the keeper on the buckle.

2. SADDLING SAFETY

a) In using a double rigged saddle - remember, saddle front cinch first, rear cinch last; but when unsaddling a horse, be sure to unbuckle the rear cinch first. Failing to do so can "spook" your horse and cause a bad accident.

b) When saddling be careful to keep cinch ring from striking the off knee.

c) Adjust the saddle carefully and the cinch tight enough so it will not turn when you mount. Lead the horse a few steps before mounting.

d) In addition to safely putting equipment on your horse it must be kept in good repair. Keep bridle reins, stirrup leathers, and cinch straps in the best possible condition, as your safety depends on these straps. Replace any strap when it begins to show signs of wear.

3. MOUNTING SAFETY

a) Stand with your feet well back in the clear and reach forward when saddling the mount.

b) Swing the saddle into position easily-not suddenly. Dropping the saddle down quickly or hard may scare the horse.

c) Soon after starting the ride, dismount and again tighten the saddle girth. Horses often swell up when first saddled, and failure to tighten girths later can result in serious accidents.

d) Never mount the horse in a small barn, near fences, trees, or over-hanging projections. Side-stepping mounts have injured riders who failed to take these precautions.

III. SAFELY CONTROLLING AND RIDING HORSES

1. CONTROL YOUR HORSE SAFELY

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

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

c) If your horse is frightened by an obstacle, steady him; give him time to overcome his fear. Then ride by the obstacle. Do not punish him.

d) When your horse is too full of steam, work him on a long line a few minutes before riding.

2. RIDING YOUR HORSE SAFELY

a) Ride with your weight at the balls of your feet so you can free your feet from the stirrups if your horse should happen to fall.

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

c) When riding in groups, keep a horse-length between animals, and be alert for overhead tree branches.

d) Reduce speed when riding rough ground or in sand mud, ice, or snow, where there is danger of the mount falling or slipping.

e) Avoid paved roads or streets. Slow your mount to a walk when crossing such roads. If he is a spirited young horse, dismount and lead him across.

f) Don't forget you are doing the driving. Keep away from obstacles where you or the horse may get hurt.

g) Travel single file and on the right side of the road.

h) On long rides, dismount and lead for five minutes each hour.

i) Walk the horse to and from the stable. This keeps him from running home and refusing to leave the stable.

IV. SHOWING THE HORSE WITH SAFETY AND COURTESY

- a) Don't try to show a green horse. Teach the horse at home, and not in the show ring.
- b) Avoid letting the horse kick when close to other horses. Space horses when possible.
- c) Keep calm, confident and collected. Remember that the nervous showman creates an unfavorable impression.
- d) Carefully and courteously follow the instructions of the judge and the ringmaster.
- e) Be cautious and respect the rights of other exhibitors.
- f) Be a good sport: win without bragging and lose without complaining.

SAFETY RULES FOR JUMPING

1. The rider should be able to go over Cavaletti (poles on the ground which are properly spaced) and do this adequately both with and without stirrups.
2. Before starting to jump the main objective is to instill confidence in the rider and therefore a safe, quiet, but willing horse is a necessity.
3. A great variety of low jumps should be used at first until skill has been sufficiently developed.
4. The rider should go over these low jumps at the trot to develop control and the ability to "stay with the horse."
5. Keep the rider at the low jumps until all errors have been corrected.
6. Riders should wear "hard hats" at all times when jumping.
7. Only riders with superior riding ability should be permitted to jump.
8. If a rider should fall from the horse in the process of jumping, he should not be moved until checked by a nurse or a physician.

V. GENERAL SAFETY RULES

1. SAFETY LESSENS DANGER

- a) Know your horse, his temperament and reactions. Control your temper at all times, but let him know that you are his firm and kind master.
- b) Know your horse's peculiarities. If someone else is riding him, tell them what to expect.
- c) Horses require kind, gentle, but firm, treatment. There are few vicious horses. Most of those become vicious through abuse. However, you must be firm and consistent. Decide what you want from your horse, and insist on getting it.
- d) Never tease your horse. He may develop bad and dangerous habits the rest of his life. If so, your safety is in serious jeopardy.
- e) Do not punish your horse, except at the instant of his disobedience. If you wait even a minute he will not understand why you are punishing him. Punish without anger, lest your punishment be too severe. Never strike or kick your horse about the head or legs.
- f) Riders and attendants should not be loud or rowdy. Noise makes a horse jumpy and nervous both on the ground and under saddle. Eventually, some horses will react by kicking. A sharp tone of voice may be used for checking an animal, but your voice should never be louder than is required to meet the situation.
- g) Ask permission when leading through a group of people.
- h) Manners and suitability to the experience of the owner are prime qualities in any horse. Above all, know your horse, and make sure your manners are at least equal to his.
- i) Never race. Horse play is only for the unmounted horse, not for the horse and rider.
- j) Always treat other people on horses and afoot in the same way you would like to be treated.
- k) Remember - "Kickin' never gets you nowhere, less'n you're a mule." - Cowboy Proverb