

# All About Pets

*The national pet care information service*



## SAFETY AROUND HORSES



THE BLUE CROSS

*Britain's pet charity*

*Being safe around horses takes a mixture of understanding, common sense and capability.*

Whether you're a beginner or an experienced owner you need to be 'horse aware' on the ground and in the saddle. For 'horse', also read 'pony' – even the smallest pony is stronger than a person is.



## Horse sense

Even the oldest and quietest horses are flight animals with a herd instinct. You need to be the herd leader and to be fair, positive and consistent in all you do.

- Be confident so your horse takes confidence from you
- Set fair ground rules – and stick to them. Don't laugh at your horse's behaviour one day and tell it off for doing the same thing the next.
- Don't take anything or any horse for granted. Be alert for what's going on around you – your horse certainly will be!
- Aim to think like a horse and think ahead in everything you do
- If you have any doubts about coping alone, get help
- Public liability insurance is essential whether you are dealing with your own horse or other people's horses

## On the ground

Handling horses safely takes technique, not strength.

- Wear sensible clothes – sturdy boots and gloves, even to bring in a horse from the field, and a hard hat in any risk situation such as clipping or loading
- Get in position: don't stand directly in front or behind a horse or get trapped against a wall. If you're holding a horse that is being clipped or shod, stand on the same side as the operator. Horses spook away from whatever frightens them.
- Speak before you touch – don't take your horse by surprise
- Keep your wits about you – complacency causes accidents
- To pick up a hindfoot, run your hand along your horse's body high up then down the outside of the leg to the fetlock, bringing the foot to you. Running your hand down the inside of the leg irritates the horse and makes you vulnerable to kicks.
- Never wrap leadropes or lunge lines round your hand
- Teach your horse to lead from both sides and to move back and away from you quietly and quickly

## In the saddle

- Before you get on any horse, anywhere, check its shoes are secure and in good condition
- Check all tack – Beware broken or weak stitching or worn leather. Make sure that the stirrup irons are the correct size for you; When your foot is placed centrally in the iron there should be a 13mm (half-inch) gap either side.
- If you prefer specially designed safety irons, choose the right type. Irons with rubber rings on one side are only suitable for smaller children – the metal can't take the stress of adult weights and may eventually break without warning. Adults should use 'bent leg' safety irons.
- If you know or think a horse is too much for you, say so. Don't over-horse yourself.
- If your horse is excitable or you find it difficult to ride, reassess its training and management and get advice if necessary. For instance, is your horse getting too much feed and too little exercise? Is it turned out enough to keep it relaxed and happy? Does your horse understand what you want or is it confused and under pressure?
- Never ride without a properly fitted hard hat that meets the latest safety standards and safe footwear. By law, children under 14 years must wear a hat complying with the Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Regulation 1992.
- If handling or riding a nervous or novice horse consider wearing a body protector, again to the latest safety standards. Accidents happen on the ground and in the safest surroundings, not just when jumping.
- Don't buy or wear secondhand hats or body protectors. Buy from a good retailer with up to date product knowledge and fitting skills.



## On the road

Riding on the roads demands road sense and common sense. By law, road users – whether with horses or in cars – owe a duty of care to other road users. Make sure you can be seen – fluorescent, reflective gear is advisable in all conditions and essential in poor weather. Don't ride in the dark, at either end of the day.

It's safer to ride in company as long as you keep the right, sensible company! Be observant, know and obey the Highway Code and nod or smile thanks to careful drivers to encourage them to keep up the courtesy. Keep both hands on the reins except when signalling changes of direction.

If your horse is inexperienced, hack out with a sensible rider on a sensible horse and position the novice horse so the experienced one is between it and the traffic.

A horse that is frightened of traffic – as opposed to being inexperienced – should not be taken on the roads until it has been through 'desensitising' training in safe surroundings with an expert rider and trainer. If this fails, don't ride on the roads.



## Key road rules

- Keep to the left of the road whether riding or leading. If you have to lead a horse on the road use a bridle – a headcollar gives insufficient control – and place yourself between the horse and the traffic. Use high visibility gear when leading as well as riding.
- Tell someone your planned route and expected return time. Carry a switched off mobile phone with yard, vet and other emergency numbers keyed in.
- Don't carry sharp objects that could cause injury if you fall. One person on the ride should carry a folding hoofpick.
- Some riders like to fasten a tag to their saddles, detailing names, home and yard numbers
- Don't overtake parked vehicles or potential hazards without signalling your intention and checking for traffic behind and in front before moving out. If in doubt, wait.

## Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit [www.allaboutpets.org.uk](http://www.allaboutpets.org.uk), the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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