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## *"Safety on the trail"*

What better way to relieve the stress of our busy lives than a trail ride in the great outdoors. Let's talk about safety to ensure your perfect ride isn't spoiled by an accident.

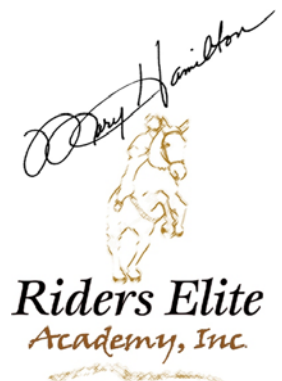
### **Suitable Horse Partner**

Start by selecting a suitable mount. If your horse is nervous in an enclosed arena he's not yet ready to face the adventures of a trail ride. A seasoned trail horse that has been exposed to rustling leaves, startled deer and the occasional rabbit is invaluable. Be aware of your horse's fitness level and don't over do it. Choose a trail length that is appropriate to his current conditioning.

### **Preplan Your Ride**

Check the weather and trail conditions ahead of time and prepare appropriately. Trails can be confusing or poorly marked. Bring a map, a compass or GPS unit so you'll know where you are and how to get back. Pack the equipment necessary to deal with an emergency. This should include a halter, lead rope, water, hoof pick, first aid kit, flashlight, cell phone, leatherman type tool or wire cutters.

Let someone reliable know where you are going and when you will return. Consider posting a "sign out" sheet for trail riders in your barn. Important items to post are names, location of the ride, time departed, time due back and a cell phone contact number. Leave an emergency contact number with your barn manager or on the sign out sheet. This makes it clear for barn manager or a friend to know when and where to summon help for you.





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### **Safety During the Ride**

One of the greatest safety concepts on the trail is courtesy to others. Start your ride safely by requiring your horse to stand quietly as you mount. Wait until everyone mounts up before riding down the trail. Horses instinctively desire the security of the group. The last horse mounted may hurry to catch up with the herd making mounting more difficult.

Don't crowd other horses on the trail. Maintain at least a horse length of space between horses. This can prevent kicks, bites and other misbehaviors. Tie a ribbon on the tail of a horse that kicks and inform all other riders of this tendency.

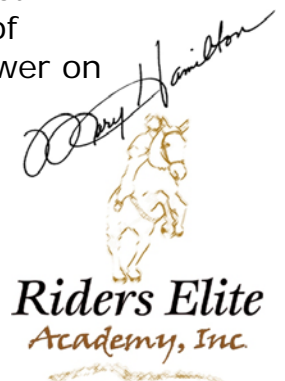
When you pass horses or change gaits always confer with the other riders in your group to ensure all are confident and ready for the change.

Immediately halt the group if a rider has difficulty with a spooking horse or falls off. Never, ever leave a rider having difficulty alone. Horses feel safer in a group. Being left alone may intensify the problem. The same goes for crossing a road. Wait for a large enough gap in traffic that all the horses can cross together.

### **Be Alert and Aware**

Pay attention to your surroundings. When the footing becomes treacherous find some solid ground or turn around and go back. Inattentive riders can be surprised by their horse's sudden reaction to a frightening rabbit scampering in the woods. Never be simply a passenger on your ride. Be an active rider. Look ahead for hazards and things that may frighten your horse.

Suspicious people can be dangerous too because you can't predict what they might do. When you see someone who appears "Out of Place", trust your instincts and leave quickly. You have horse power on





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your side. Canter away to a safe distance and call "911" to report the suspicious activity.

Planning ahead, staying alert for hazards and keeping courtesy and safety in mind will make your trail riding adventures safe as well as enjoyable.

### **Police Story**

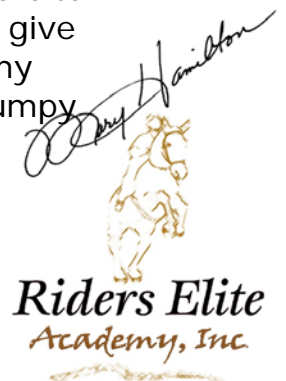
My squad car is actually a 4-wheel drive SUV which comes in handy for trail riding rescues. Some times just finding the victim is challenging in a 3,000 acre nature preserve. One fall afternoon I received just such a call. A trail rider had broken a leg in a vast park area. The 911 caller did not have a map nor did they know where they were located.

The search begins. I drive down the horse trails hoping they had at least stayed on the marked trail and not ventured off into the unknown. The terrain was treacherous as I locked into 4X4 low to search on. The ambulance waited at the trailhead with the MedEvac helicopter on standby.

Twenty minutes ticked by and finally I found the injured rider. He was still in the saddle. He had a broken femur which was bleeding profusely from an open compound fracture. His face was white with pain. He said he followed too closely behind another horse and was kicked in the upper thigh.

The first challenge was how to get him off his horse safely and without causing additional pain to his broken leg. It took three of us to carefully lift him off the saddle and onto the ground.

As I splinted his broken leg, he asked me for one of my bullets to bite down on. Now this was a cowboy! I replied, "Sorry, but we don't give out bullets for that sort of thing". We placed him in the back of my squad for the long drive back to the ambulance. It was a slow bumpy





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ride on the horse trail and he was in a lot of pain. He kept telling me over and over, "All I want is a shot of whiskey; I need a shot of whiskey!" Unfortunately, I don't carry whiskey in my first aid kit.

I saw him several months and a few surgeries later. He was back in the saddle enjoying a trail ride with friends.

