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“Road riding and traffic safety”

Even in rural areas there is no question traffic levels are increasing. Worse yet, people are driving faster and often distracted by cell phones and a hectic lifestyle. Most motorists are not educated about horses. I have experienced driver's blow their horn, release their air brakes with a loud “pssstt” and even shoot my horse with a slingshot as they drove past. Clearly these drivers had no idea how dangerous this was for the horse and rider. How can you increase your safety while road riding? These three safety concepts, **“be seen”**, **“be safe”** and **“be aware”** help you prevent an accident.

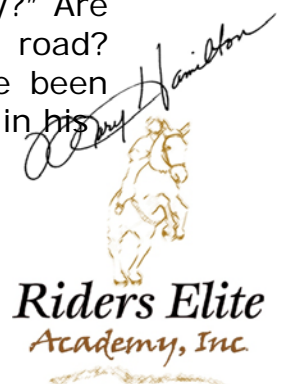


Be Seen

Bright reflective clothing for the rider is a must when road riding. Reflective leg wraps, brow bands, breast collars and stirrup bars make your horse visible from all four sides. I highly recommend attaching a LED safety light to your saddle or person. These inexpensive blinking red lights were designed for bicyclists and work well for the rider too. The intermittent flash of the light attracts a driver's attention. These items make you more visible to drivers.

Be Safe

Before venturing out onto a roadway, ask yourself, “Am I ready?” Are you a competent rider capable of handling a problem on the road? Evaluate your horse. “Is he reliable and road ready?” Has he been desensitized to the noise and movement of traffic? If not, invest in his





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education. Find the time, a trainer or a clinic to help prepare you both for road readiness.

When crossing a roadway select a safe spot to cross. View every bend in the road, intersection, crest of a hill or construction zone as a hazard. Choose an area to cross where approaching cars are easily seen and heard.

Stop... before crossing the road. Get your horse's focus and full attention before asking him to cross. Use all your senses. Be aware of everything going on around you. If you are riding in a group, wait until everyone is ready. Then cross as a unit, walking single file. Keep the "herd" intact for safety. Never try to stop traffic to cross.

Look... all ways. Check both directions for oncoming traffic. Check in front to what's ahead and behind for any potential hazards. Look at the road surface to assess its footing. Mailboxes, flags or garbage tossed in ditches could startle your horse. Evaluate what you see to determine whether this is a good location for you to cross.

Listen... for approaching cars. Engine sounds give you clues on what type of vehicle are approaching and the speeds they are traveling. Pay attention to where your horse is listening. They use their ears to focus on sounds and may hear something before you do.

Be Aware

Awareness begins by knowing the laws in your state regarding riding on the roadway. Check with your state motor vehicle office for rules regulating where you can ride and whether you ride with traffic or against it. When safe to do so, I prefer riding against the flow of traffic. This gives me a better picture of oncoming traffic. Your horse is less likely to startle if he can see the traffic next to him as opposed to cars zipping up directly behind him.

Rider tension and nervousness is transmitted to your horse. If you anticipate a problem and tense up every time a vehicle approaches, your horse will too. Relax and stay cool, calm and centered for your horse's benefit. He looks to you for confidence and leadership.





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Be aware of road surface dangers. Asphalt roads can be very slippery especially when wet. Gravel roads with large stones can cause "stone bruises", tender footedness or your horse to stumble. Riding on these road surfaces require special shoeing considerations.

When you choose to ride on a roadway, select one with minimum traffic levels, lower speed limits, good solid footing and a wide shoulder. This gives you maximum response time and room to maneuver when you need to. To make your ride as safe as possible, remember to "**be seen**", "**be safe**" and "**be aware**".

Police Story

There are over 234 million registered motor vehicles in the United States today. Sharing the road with them can be dangerous. While horse versus car accidents isn't common, they can have tragic results. Even when the rider does everything right, inattentive or impaired drivers can pose a danger to riders on the roadway. One of the most horrific accidents I've seen involved just that. The driver focused on the rider wearing reflective clothing and failed to see the second rider who was not. The vehicle hit the second rider from behind, causing both horse and rider serious injuries. The rider was thrown from the horse on impact. She sustained many bruises and broke her back in several places. Her recovery was long and painful. Her experience made her an advocate of wearing helmets and reflective clothing when riding.

