

Responsible Riding on the Roads

Anyone using a public highway should always do so responsibly and with consideration for other road users, whether walking, cycling, driving a car or riding a horse. In the latest edition of the Highway Code, published in September 2007, horse riders are listed amongst the most vulnerable road users and it is important to remember, not only that horses can be unpredictable animals, but also that other road users may not always be sufficiently knowledgeable or prepared to take evasive action if the need arises.

Just as motorists are warned of the need to concentrate every time they get behind the wheel, so riders should be aware of the potential dangers of riding on the road and make every effort to avoid accidents.

While some riders are lucky enough to have easy access to fields and bridle paths, most have to do the majority of their hacking on roads, some of which can be busy. Learning to ride safely on the roads is just as important for a rider as it is for a motorist to pass their driving test and although accidents inevitably happen, there are a number of steps that can be taken to minimise the risks.

Riders should not need reminding that a properly fitted hard hat should always be worn, along with appropriate footwear. Riders should check that their tack is safe and correctly fitted and their horse's feet are in good condition and shoes are not worn or loose, which can make them more liable to slip on the hard surface of the road.

Know your Highway Code

The Highway Code applies to all road users and it is important for horse riders to know and understand the Highway Code, from the traffic signs, road markings and rights of way at road junctions, traffic lights and roundabouts to the rules governing horses on footpaths and verges. Make sure you give clear hand signals to motorists, do not block the road unnecessarily and always thank motorists if they slow down as they approach and pass you.

In the new Highway Code, there are sections that refer to horses on the road or have particular significance to horse riders, including the concluding piece of advice, which reads: "It is as important as ever that all road users, including drivers, motorcyclists, cyclists, **horse riders** and pedestrians, should update their knowledge of the Highway Code."

Traffic can be frightening to horses, particularly large and noisy lorries, so make sure that if you have a young or 'spooky'



horse that you introduce them to roadwork gently. Try and find a friend with a well-behaved and experienced horse that can be ridden alongside or provide a lead until the young horse has become accustomed to traffic and can be confidently ridden alone on the road. Remember that a horse's vision is superior to a human's and they can see to the side which means they see vehicles approaching from behind long before the rider does.

'Be Seen, Be Safe'

Over half of all accidents involving horses occur on minor roads, which are often narrow and twisty. Road accidents involving horses are not always the result of a rider's or motorist's lack of concentration or a horse's unpredictable behaviour. Visibility can be a problem even in bright, sunny conditions and by wearing Hi-Viz gear, luminous and fluorescent, riders can give vehicle drivers a valuable extra three seconds 'reaction time' that can make all the difference in avoiding an accident.

There are numerous Hi-Viz products available for riders, carriages and horses to make them more visible to vehicle drivers. A Hi-Viz tabard should always be worn but other products include leg wraps, exercise sheets, martingale and bridle covers for horses, hat covers, mitts and flashing stirrup lights for riders, while carriage drivers can increase their visibility with a banner across the back of the carriage.

Carrying a switched off mobile phone in a pocket when riding on the roads can be a great asset if an incident occurs and help is required. Having the number of your vet and the emergency services on speed dial can save valuable time in the event of injury to horses or riders.

If you are unfortunate enough to be involved in an accident, it is important to collect as much information as possible as this can help in an insurance claim and also in any legal or criminal action that may arise from the accident. If there are any witnesses, take down their contact details and the vehicle registration numbers of any vehicles involved.

Third party liability cover is an aspect of accidents that riders sometimes forget and is as important for horse owners as for drivers. The costs associated with third party legal action can run into upwards of several hundred thousand pounds so it's important to make sure you have adequate third party liability cover in place before taking your horse on the road.

Take Cover in case of Accidents

Petplan Equine encourages the wearing of Hi-Viz gear as part of its 'responsible horse ownership' approach. However, having paid claims on several Road Traffic Accidents (RTA), the company knows that even those taking responsible measures can be involved in an accident and having the right insurance cover, can at least mitigate some of the financial pain.

In March 2006, Lorraine Jacques' horse Loftie and her friend Karen Baker were involved in a road traffic accident only yards away from the stables. The motorist driving in their direction suddenly swerved to avoid colliding with an approaching car, knocking Loftie's right hock and causing him to stumble.

Karen was wearing Hi-Viz clothing and Lorraine said: "Hi-Viz gear shows drivers that you want to be seen in the hope that they will be careful around you and your horse. I believe that Loftie is one of the safest horses you can get on the roads but accidents do happen so taking the necessary precautions is vital."

Thankfully Lorraine had insured Loftie with Petplan Equine for full vets' fee cover since purchasing him as a four year old in 1996 and did not have to worry about the potential costs of veterinary examination and treatment. Subsequent x-rays revealed a broken bone in the hock that required surgery from which Loftie has now fully recovered.

The physical and emotional injuries sustained in an RTA can be difficult enough without the burden of veterinary and medical expenses. If you have insurance cover for vets fees and personal injury, you will be able to concentrate on getting over the trauma rather than worrying about how you are going to be able to pay.

The British Horse Society's Riding and Road Safety Test

Although not compulsory, the British Horse Society's Riding and Road Safety Test is supported by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and taken by over 4,000 candidates a year. There are BHS Riding and Road Safety Trainers all over the UK and training is available to all riders from 12 years of age.

You do not have to own a horse to take the test as many riding schools and centres organise them for their pupils. Knowledge and understanding of the Highway Code is essential and the test also covers basic control of the animal, the need for safe and correctly fitting tack and equipment, and includes the appropriate procedures for dealing with injuries and accidents.

What does it involve?

The test is in three parts - as follows:

The Theory Test

This tests the candidate's knowledge of the Highway Code, BHS Riding and Roadcraft Manual and the generally accepted rules of riding on the roads. It will normally be a written test, but in certain circumstances it may be an oral test. In order to pass this section and move on to the next stage, eight out of 10 questions must be answered correctly, including identifying a road sign.

The Simulated Road Route

This takes place in off road conditions, in a totally enclosed area such as a field or indoor school. It is designed to test the rider's ability to ride appropriately on the road and includes observations, signalling, manoeuvring and negotiating a series of hazards that they may encounter on the roads. Candidates also undergo a tack and turnout inspection to ensure that all equipment and clothing, of both horse and rider, is in a safe and suitable state for riding. Candidates will be given the opportunity to walk the Simulated Road Route, without a horse, prior to the test. The candidate needs to achieve 26 compulsory elements and 12 supporting elements in order to pass this section.



The Road Route

Only candidates who have successfully passed the first two sections will move on to the road route. The candidate will follow a set risk assessed route along the roads, so that the examiners can assess their competence in dealing with vehicles and other hazards that they meet. They will be given the opportunity to walk the route, without a horse, prior to the test. In order to pass this section and complete the test, the candidate will need to achieve 11 compulsory elements and three supporting elements on the marking sheet. If the candidate is unsuccessful, the results sheet will show which elements of the test need improvement.

How do I take the Test?

If you would like to find out more about the BHS Riding and Road Safety Test, including the syllabus for the test, contact the BHS Riding and Road Safety Department on 01926 707782 or visit www.bhs.org.uk.

A combination of five Hi-Viz safety products is available from the BHS at a specially discounted rate to riders who have passed their Riding and Road Safety Certificate.

Top Tips for Road Safety

- Use the Highway Code.
- Always ride in the same direction as the traffic is flowing.
- Give clear hand signals.
- Always thank motorists if they slow down.
- On narrow roads, pull in as soon as possible to allow traffic to pass.
- Don't ride alone on the road if your horse is not used to traffic.
- Be aware of the traffic around you and always check behind you before changing direction.
- Make eye contact with drivers when changing direction, this way you can check they've seen you and will slow down.
- Invest in some good quality High-Viz equipment for you and your horse
- Avoid riding on roads at dusk and at night, as you will be almost invisible to drivers.
- Don't ride too close to any vehicle, even parked cars, in case a driver suddenly starts the engine or opens the door, startling your horse.
- When crossing a road always make sure there is a sufficient gap in the traffic to allow you to get safely across to the other side.
- Never canter on the roads - it not only jars your horse's legs but it can also be very slippery.
- Carry a mobile phone but keep it switched off unless you need to use it.
- Never hurry on the roads. Don't compromise safety for the sake of saving a few seconds.