

Horse and Velo

We are not the only riders on the road

The
British
Horse
Society



As cyclists, things aren't getting easier for us on the roads. There is an increasing demand by more road users on the same amount of tarmac and while a lot of the focus in the specialist media is on the interaction of motor vehicles and cycles, one group of road users, around for much longer than the motor car or the bicycle, share many of the same issues as we do.

Horse riders are as exposed to the dangers of traffic as we are, added to which whilst a bicycle is merely an extension of you, a horse is a living, breathing, creature working together with its rider that, if put under pressure, is just as capable of fear and independent action as any cyclist.

Most sportivistes are also motorists, however most sportivistes do not ride a horse on a regular basis so being better informed about how and why a horse reacts in the way it does and what we as cyclists can do to help avoid an on-road issues is vital.

There are some key points that we all need to take into consideration:

- Take personal responsibility for our own actions
- Cycle safely and observe strict etiquette
- Take your litter home
- Take into account horses when riding an event

Both groups should have understanding and respect for the other. A horse is a friend and companion to the person who cares for it – to them it is priceless. However, while a cycle is an inanimate object, it has still cost the owner a great deal of time, effort and money to buy and maintain. Recognising the emotional investment made by both horse and cycle riders goes a long way to helping us all stay safe on the road.

The horse – a flight animal

It is important to know that horses can be easily frightened and this should always be taken into consideration when passing them on the road. The speed at which cyclists can pass, the number of cyclists that are passing, sudden reflection from something shiny like a gel wrapper or bike parts, even a plastic bag flapping in the hedge can all cause problems for some horses, especially those who are young or inexperienced.

Horse riders have access to only 22 percent of the off-road public rights of way network and often have no choice but to ride out on the road in order to reach their nearest bridleway.

Be visible

Wearing fluorescent and reflective clothing helps other users see you earlier and gives them more time to plan where best to position themselves. Use effective lights when riding at night or in poor daylight conditions.

Be aware

Hoof marks or fresh dung are good signs that there could be horses about.

Please don't forget to say 'thank you' when courtesy and consideration are shown to you – a smile, nod or brief wave is sufficient and means a great deal. Next time it may save a difficult situation when it could be you who needs consideration.

Be vocal

A horse is unlikely to see or hear you, especially if you are approaching quietly from behind. Calling out 'hello' is important in alerting horses and riders that you are there. Don't get too close before you call out or you will startle both horse and rider. Ask if it is safe to pass before attempting to go by and call again if they haven't heard you.

If the horse you meet has been frightened by your presence, give the rider a chance to calm the horse and move out of your way before you move off again. Don't be annoyed if a horse rider doesn't appear to acknowledge your kindness and consideration. They do appreciate your help but may be concentrating on controlling and calming their horse to avoid falling off.

Slow down

If you are taking part in a cycling event, your concern will be to get by as quickly as possible, but pass slowly. A speeding cyclist coming out of the blue may startle some horses and a group of speeding cyclists is even more likely to do so – take great care and if it is obvious you need to stop then do it. Don't ignore a horse rider or carriage driver's request to slow down or stop for the safety of all involved.

Equestrians may be attempting to get out of your way into a safe place in order to let you pass – help them to do so by adjusting your speed and keeping a safe distance from them.

Pass wide and on the right

Most horses are used to traffic passing them on the right so pass them as you would anyone else; don't cut inside, and allow plenty of room in case the horse is surprised or startled. Like cyclists, horse riders may ride two abreast for safety, particularly when escorting a young or inexperienced horse or rider – give them a chance to sort themselves out before you go by.

Pass in small groups

Large groups of cyclists are very scary for horses. Passing in small groups of no more than four or five will really help. If you are in a large group, make your presence known so that equestrians can try and find somewhere safe to stop, allowing you all to pass at the same time. Give them time to get to a safe spot.

Useful website addresses –

www.bhs.org.uk

www.horseaccidents.org.uk

www.britishcycling.org.uk

www.cyclingtimetrials.org.uk

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